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Enunciation and Plurilingualism in the Francophone and Anglophone African Novel

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Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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Enunciation and Plurilingualism in the Francophone and Anglophone African Novel

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Ndeye Fatou Ba

Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract and Keywords:

My dissertation proposes to analyze the problematic of language and power in African literature written in French and English. Focusing on novels produced within the controversial contexts of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, this thesis investigates the tight relationship between language, power and identity. By going beyond normative approaches which focus on the variations of the authorial languages inherited from colonization and nativist readings that continuously seek to establish the primacy of orality, this project analyzes how Francophone and Anglophone African writers—typically authors who chose to write in a language other than their maternal ones—write resistance. It exposes how political, cultural and identity concerns are articulated in linguistic terms. Following a discussion on the genesis of Francophone and Anglophone literature in Africa and a review of the cultural spaces brought along by La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, and drawing on theories of enunciation and plurilingualism, this study undertakes to identify the other languages in the background of the authorial French and English to subsequently analyze the relevance of the various languages’ “mise-en-texte.” Four novels are chosen as practical examples in this analysis; they are Mariama Ba’s *Une si longue lettre*, Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë*.

Keywords: Francophonie, Commonwealth, Postcolonialism, Francophone literature, Anglophone literature, Commonwealth literature, Enunciation, Plurilingualism, Resistance Literature

Dedication:

To my mother, Marème Soda Diack (28 Dec.1953 – 07 Sept. 2012)

To my brother, Mohamed Cheikh Ba (23 Jan. 1984 – 14 Nov. 2011)

I miss you every minute of every day;

Vous nous manquez à tous infiniment.

May You Rest in Perfect Peace!

(Avec tous nos illustres disparu(e)s)

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Introduction

Questions of language are basically questions of power.
(Noam Chomsky 191)

Research Problematic

The language of writing and the interface between language and power are important topics in literature, especially in contemporary African literature where former colonizers' languages continue to be used by the majority of writers as their authorial means. Political freedom for many African countries however did not sever all ties with former colonizing metropolises; and nowhere was the "subordination" more acute than in the field of language as later attested by the institutions of The Commonwealth and La Francophonie.¹ Language is at the heart of both institutions, which, while officially striving to promote diversity, have respectively the English and French language as their unifying symbols. In the multilingual setting that the two organizations constitute, multiple languages are permanently in contact with one another. Not all of them, however, have the same weight, are used for the same functions or even point to the same ideologies.

Typically and historically, French and English have been in a diglossic relationship with local vernaculars. For the longest time, these two languages inherited

¹ In chapters 3 and 4, I'll discuss at length the two institutions of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth as well as the cultural spaces they generate. The discussion will also address the similarities, differences and

from colonization have been considered the high languages of power while local vernaculars were relegated to domestic spheres and for everyday unofficial conversation. This situation of ongoing language contact, not only in the multilingual environment, but also in the realm of literature, meets broader questions on genre and identity—among others. This present study undertakes to analyze the problematic of language and power in African literature written in French and English. Conscious of the large body of writings that already exists on the issue, this analysis will distinguish itself by adopting an egalitarian approach towards the diversity of languages and literary traditions present in the texts. By moving away from Eurocentric or nativist normative approaches that respectively decipher how Europhone African literatures are indebted to European tradition and what a “genuine” African novel should look like, this analysis will pay tribute to the uniqueness of each text as it avoids the essentializing mistake of fitting an eclectic body of texts under a predetermined canon. Applying the concept of plurilingualism, I will show that, for one thing, the African novel, like any novel for that matter,² can no longer afford to be in search of mystical authentic (oral) roots³ given the complex cultural, historical and even geographical components that inform its genesis.

Traditionally based on an obsessive search for difference, the study of the African Europhone novel, I argue, needs to depart from repetitive demonstrations of its originality. New research on literary plurilingualism, which informs the different

competing interests between the two organizations.

² See Mikhail Bakhtin in *Discourse in the Novel*.

³ For more information on this issue, see Mohamadou Kane’s “Sur la critique de la littérature moderne.”

modalities by which various languages are inscribed in a text in addition to providing a fertile ground for the discussion of their “mise-en texte,” makes for a unique approach for this thesis. In this study, plurilingualism is understood both as a hermeneutic and an object of study as it first provides the tools that help identify the many coexisting (and often competing) languages in my selected texts, but also interrogate the relationships between language, power and literature. In the multilingual, multicultural spaces of postcolonial Europhone literature that La Francophonie and The Commonwealth constitute, plurilingualism functions as a hermeneutic of resistance for the African writers. The analysis will look past the diglossic and normative prisms through which African literature has for a long time been filtered.

Rationale

In agreement with Josias Semujanga, I will contend that, “le roman africain [...] n’a rien d’original qui ne soit ce que l’art du roman prévoit: le phagocytage de tous les genres littéraires au delà des frontières nationales et internationales” (22-23).⁴ If African cultures and traditions are largely known to have been passed down, orally, from one generation to another,⁵ and if there is no arguing the place of choice that orality holds in modern African fictions, the originality of the African novel however lies in the intrinsic

⁴ The originality of the African novel lies within the confines of the genre itself; this means the incorporation of all literary genres: the ones from the continent and beyond (translation mine).

⁵ African culture is still largely oral today. However, prior to the introduction of codified languages and new technological media, communication was essentially oral and based on hearing. For more information, see Finnegan 1970; Julien 1992; Brown 1995.

nature of the genre itself. More often than not, traditional research has focused on deciphering and demonstrating how African texts are best understood as codified oral media instead of looking at the unique possibilities that the novel, as a genre, has of incorporating different sub genres and literary traditions. Indeed, from Jahneinz Jahn to Mohamadou Kane and more recently Eileen Julien, critics have repeatedly gone back to orality in an attempt to uncover specificities of the African texts. This approach, if anything, puts a large and eclectic body of writings into a box as orality has been predetermined to constitute their singular characteristic. This failure to pay attention, not only to each text as a unique production, but also to the enunciation context—the extra literary elements—that informs its genesis, calls for a more comprehensive approach that does not suffer from nativist longings.

In fact, still according to Semujunga:

Dès lors que les critiques établissent des critères africaines ou européennes du roman, aussi parfaits par leur originalité que par leur beauté mais sans tenir compte des œuvres, ils dénieient aux écrivains le droit d'écrire librement. Ce faisant, ils refusent l'héritage culturel complexe du romancier moderne alors que le thème de la différence—ici l'africanité et l'européanité—est par excellence un thème girouette. Celui-ci ne recèle, en effet, aucune vérité en lui-même en littérature puisqu'il tourne au gré des idéologies et témoigne de l'ambivalence de certaines valeurs susceptibles d'être invoquées à partir d'attitudes très opposées.

(22)⁶

⁶ Critics who lay out “African” or “European” characteristics by which the novel is to be assessed—no

In agreement with Semujunga, this thesis will acknowledge the particular historical and cultural conditions under which African Europhone literatures were born. Orality will be recognized a necessary component in this analysis but it will in no way constitute the only determining element in the dialogue of languages. The approach proposed here will be rooted in the intrinsic characteristics of each text as it takes into account the different languages and literary traditions regardless of prestige.⁷

My claim is that never is a work of fiction ever written in one single language⁸ and novels written in French and English in sub-Saharan Africa are no exceptions. These other languages, I argue, deserve as much attention as the authorial ones in the sense that they point to cultural spaces and ideologies that are not associated with the colonial ones and can help uncover attributes about the text that critics and readers would otherwise miss. In this thesis, I undertake to first identify, by means of new research on plurilingualism, those other languages in the background of the main ones—French and

matter how original or aesthetic the criteria might be—without paying attention to the texts in question, fail to recognize authors' abilities to create freely. In so doing, they demonstrate a lack of understanding of the complex culture the modern writer inherited; the issue of difference—what is African or European—is an ever shifting theme. In literature, what constitutes difference holds no intrinsic true values. It changes according to ideologies and speaks to the ambivalence of values authors want to convey (translation mine).

⁷ As much as possible, all the languages will be accounted for in this study. Not just the High languages as theorized in the concept of diglossia.

⁸ Much like Lise Gauvin in *Les langues du roman: du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*, I understand by language “aussi bien les langues étrangères que les niveaux de langues” “both foreign and registers of language” (translation mine).

English—and second, by studying the enunciation contexts that have given rise to the novels, analyze the relevance of the various languages’ “mise-en-texte,” which in this particular case, I contend, is about African writers’ resistance to some supposed or real ongoing linguistic, cultural and patriarchal domination.⁹ For that, I have selected fictions representative of the “postcolonial” era, a time period that witnessed—and is still doing so—the flourishing of Francophone and Anglophone literature. This present study will analyze the problematic of enunciation and language in texts produced within the hegemonic context of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth.

This project to study the other languages in the background of French and English will help fill a critical vacuum as the topic has yet to be squarely dealt with by current scholarships. It is true that the question of language is central in African literature and has been the object of exhaustive studies;¹⁰ however, as argued above, existing research

⁹ We will see in the next chapters that this whole concept of “writing resistance” is carried out differently among my selected authors. They do not address the same issues and consequently do not denounce the same ideologies. While male writers—Achebe and Kane—address the influence of colonization, female writers additionally take on gender questions as they deal with the plights of women not just in a (post)colonial setting, but also in societies deeply ruled by patriarchy.

¹⁰ From which language to use when writing African literature to what qualifies a given text as “African,” the study of the African text is almost always inseparable from the question of language. From Radical critics like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o who promote a return to writing in African languages and performative mode of expression to lyricists like Leopold Sedar Senghor through everybody else in between who claims a more hybrid nature of authorial expression, language, in its many connotations (oral/written; standard/vernaculars...), has exhaustively been studied, at least from a normative point of view.

essentially takes a normative approach. If it does not focus on the variations of the authorial French and English, it engages in a demonstration of traditional oral roots for authenticating purposes. Current research on plurilingualism and its paradigms—heterolingualism and transpolingualism—will cast a new light on the different ways in which various languages are inscribed in a literary text, particularly in postcolonial ones. Logically then, these paradigms will be applied in this thesis to uncover African writers’ resistance within Francophone and Commonwealth spheres, the backdrop against which these “postcolonial” productions take place. The analysis will attempt to move beyond normative readings of the question of language; it will move past the high languages that French and English constitute.

Moreover, by anchoring this study on new research on enunciation and plurilingualism, two notions that have mainly been conceptualized and theorized in French, this project will contribute to bridging the linguistic barrier between French and English by reinforcing the validity of Francophone literary criticism within the larger realm of postcolonial studies where English constitutes the dominant language. In other words, this project will help alleviate what is commonly referred to as the Anglophone “bias” of postcolonial studies by creating a dialogue between the two linguistic areas; an enterprise, I hope, that will not only shine more light on Francophone literature but will contribute to dispelling Harish Trivedi’s fear that “the post-colonial has ears only for the English” (qtd in Forsdick and Murphy 7).

Corpus

Studying the problematic of language in the African novel, both Francophone and

Anglophone, is a very ambitious and daunting undertaking. For the sake of time and space, but mostly for the sake of accuracy, this study will concern itself primarily with productions from sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, if it is commonplace and safe to define Francophone and Anglophone literature as literature written respectively in French and English, what it means to be African Literature has for a long time been an object of controversy¹¹ and a satisfactory answer to the majority of writers and critics still remains to be formulated. Across the continent, from the Maghreb to the Cape, from Senegal to the Horn of Africa, literature, as long as it is written in French or English, could fit the definition of Francophone and Anglophone. But because of differences in culture and colonial histories mainly, one single study—such as the one proposed here—cannot afford to be encompassing enough to address all Francophone and Anglophone literature if it wants to be accurate. Consequently, this project will focus on texts from sub-Saharan Africa precisely because of a shared colonial history and similar cultural heritage.

All four countries in which the selected texts are based found in the colonizers' languages their first written media for communication purposes.¹² If Zimbabwe became

¹¹ The Conference of African Writers of English Expression held at Makerere in 1962 attempted to find an answer to this specific question. If, by Achebe's admission, the result of the conference was a failure, a commonly agreed to answer to the question still remains to be formulated. Attendees could not agree on whether or not it was the media (African languages) or the subject matter (still about Africa) that were to inform the definition of African literature. For further information on the topic, see Ngũgĩ's *Decolonizing the mind*, or Rand Bishop's introduction to *African Literature, African Critics: The Forming of Critical Standards, 1947-1966*.

¹² In Senegal and Nigeria, Arabic was introduced as early as the middle ages. However, the language was

independent only some twenty years after Nigeria did in 1960, both countries shared the same British colonial domination and both newly independent countries pledged allegiance to the English language and Crown by joining The Commonwealth.¹³ Senegal on the other hand, though ruled by a different colonial power, shares a fairly similar historical experience with the two other countries¹⁴ especially in its relationship with the ex-colonizer's language. Generally, writers in all three countries continue to use the language of their colonizing powers as their authorial means. In light of these specificities, any Europhone African¹⁵ novel could have been chosen for analysis of how plurilingualism functions as a hermeneutic of resistance. In the end, I decided on Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre* (1979), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) for an in-depth study. I have chosen four novels because of the specificity of the genre itself, but more specifically the novel's ability to showcase social

not intelligible to the communities as a whole. Often, it remained a hermetic language and was rarely used for the purpose of writing literature. We will discuss this issue further, especially with *L'Aventure ambiguë*.

¹³ Zimbabwe withdrew from The Commonwealth in 2003 but member states have expressed their wish to see the country rejoin the organization pending meaningful political reforms.

¹⁴ In the next chapter dealing with the contexts of La Francophonie and the Commonwealth, we will address the differences in the French and British colonial rules. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that regardless of assimilation versus indirect rule, most sub-Saharan African countries have comparable colonial experiences.

¹⁵ Again, by "African," I here understand sub-Saharan African.

and political satire.¹⁶ If *L'Aventure ambiguë* and *Things Fall Apart* are not just written by men, but are also published in the early days of the periods after independence, *Une si longue lettre* and *Nervous Conditions*, on the other hand, are published more recently and deal with such issues as feminism in a way that the two male authors do not in their respective fictions. All these differences in gender, colonial histories and dates of publication, aim at avoiding the simplification of the analysis and actually allow the results that will come out from it to be more tested and more encompassing. These four novels then will make up the corpus of this thesis as they constitute eclectic, yet manageable samples; they all bear the stamps of both colonial and postcolonial markers that characterize African Francophone and Anglophone literature. More importantly, all four fictions, though written in French and English, are marked by a linguistic heterogeneity an informed critic could use to uncover the many layers of meanings in the Europhone text. Additionally, since ideologies are articulated through languages, this study will look at the (ideological) subtext often concealed by a seemingly homogenous French or English with a keen eye on how the different authors articulate their concerns in their fictions, especially in linguistic terms.

Review of Plurilingualism in African Literature

The study of plurilingualism in the African novel is not a new undertaking. In an

¹⁶ Indeed the novel has not always been the major genre of African literature. Before decolonization, mainly with the Negritude movement, poetry was more at the forefront. But with the chaos coming from independences and even the postcolonial era, writers resorted to the novel as a major outlet, a more appropriate genre to voice their concerns and criticisms.

attempt to correct Eurocentric prejudices against African literature, writers and critics have taken a deeper look at Europhone literature from the continent for authenticating characteristics; more often than not, the enterprise would take a scrutinizing look at the issue of language. Indeed, with the turn of the twentieth century and allegations about Africa as the locus of primitivity, or a plain mimicry of Western canon at best in the realm of literature, critics have turned back to oral culture and tradition in hopes to uncover and establish the primacy of African literature.

Traditionally, such an endeavour focused on the cohabitation between the (African) oral and the (Western) written modes of communication thereby challenging one seemingly single and homogenous literary tradition. In that regard, the works of Mohamadou Kane (1982), Makhily Gassama (1995), Emmanuel Obiechina (1975, 1990), Ngũgi wa Thiong'o (1986, 1993, 1997), and Eileen Julien (1992, 2003), to cite a few, constitute landmarks in the domain. More recently however, the question has moved to which language African writers should adopt as their authorial means. While the answers to this question very much polarize writers and critics, the debate that emanates from it informs the other major avenue that the study of language diversity in African literature was to take. Literary critics such as Ahmadou Kourouma (1970, 1998), Sony Labou Tansy (1979), Chinua Achebe (1975), Chantal Zabus (1991), and Simon Gikandi (1991, 1996) among others, have extensively written on the various strategies by which African writers have attempted to make English or French distinctively their own.

Indeed, regardless of the often oversimplified nature of the approach consisting of putting into opposition a unified Western canon to traditionally oral roots, the search for

orature in African literary productions, as stated earlier, has been a subject of predilection among critics. In charge of conducting research on the relationship between oral art and African literature in 1984, Harold Scheub asserts, in *A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature*, that:

There is an unbroken continuity in African verbal art forms, from interacting oral genres to such literary productions as the novel and poetry. [...] The early literary traditions were beneficiaries of the oral genres, and there is no doubt that the epic and its hero are the predecessors of the African and its central characters. (1)

Such a belief in what constitutes the basis of African literature has informed, long before Scheub, the direction literary criticism and analysis has taken. In fact, as early as his first collection of poems, *Chants d'ombre* (1945), Léopold Sédar Senghor, acknowledging a certain lack of musicality in the French language, evoked the influence of his Sereer oral roots to make up for the shortcomings of his vehicular French. In 1974, Mohamadou Kane published *Sur les formes traditionnelles du roman africain*, a work in which he claims that “L’originalité du roman africain doit être cherchée plus particulièrement dans ses rapports avec les formes de la littérature orale” (the originality of the African novel must be found more specifically in its relationships to forms of oral literature) (537). This quest for authentic oral roots was very indiscriminating and affected almost all literatures written in the ex-colonizers’ language.¹⁷ In the Anglophone world, in 1990, Emmanuel

¹⁷ The scope of this analysis, as I have already mentioned, limits my study to Francophone and Anglophone literature. However, one must bear in mind that the same issue on language and the ensuing criticisms that seek to establish the primacy and worth of African literature also affected literatures written in other

Obiechina, in a collection of essays entitled *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*, worked along the same lines as Kane in his study of the growth of written literature in Africa thus linking oral tradition to Europhone literature from the continent, especially literature written in English.

Lately, Eileen Julien has devoted her academic research interest partly to studying the influence of orality in African fiction. In 1992, she published *African Novels and the Question of Orality*, a work in which she confirms both Kane and Obiechina's assumptions regarding the primacy of orature in African fiction. In 2003, she wrote "Reading 'orality' in French-language novels from sub-Saharan Africa," an article in which she assesses the general input of orality in literature written in the ex-colonizers' languages. Julien rightly identifies orature as an "original" feature and a strong argument for dispelling accusations of mimesis in regards to African literature. More importantly, she sounds a warning with regards to "succumb[ing] to the hunt for authenticating orality" (130). While Julien obviously displays an acute awareness of the necessity to avoid what she terms an "African exceptionalism" by exclusively equating African literature with orality, she however does not offer alternate avenues that will help establish the "singularity" of productions by authors who do not necessarily subscribe to oral tradition. In this respect, the study I undertake here will come as a complement to the issue she has already raised. Orality indeed will be acknowledged as one aspect of literary plurilingualism, but other avenues will be explored as well.

On the question of oral tradition to the specific title of this thesis, a myriad of

books and articles have been published. In B. Eugene McCarthy's "Rhythm and Narrative Method in Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'" (1985), Abiola Irele's *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (2001), Tim Weiss's "Orality and the Reader: Cultural and Transcultural Elements in Achebe's *Girls at War*" (2006), Emmanuel E Egar's *The Rhetoric Implications of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (2000), and Agbonkhianmegh Orobator's *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (2008), among other productions, the interface between orature and *Things Fall Apart* have extensively been studied. And so is the case with Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* with Obioma Nnaemeka's "From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re)Inscription of Womanhood" (1994), Charles O'Keefe's "Sinking One's Teeth into Mariama Ba's 'So Long a Letter' Lessons of Gadmus" (2009), Akua Sarr's "'Talkin' on Paper' and 'Prise d'écriture: Writing the Black Female Self Mariama Ba's Une Si Longue Lettre and Sapphire's Push'" (2003), Jaspal Singh's "Maddening Inscriptions and Contradictory Subjectivities in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*" (2008), Christopher Okonkwo's "Space Matters: Form and Narrative in Tsitsi Damgarembga's 'Nervous Conditions'" (2003) and Mandi Chikombero's "Dysfunctional Literacies of Exclusion: an Exploration of the Burdens of Literacy in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'Nervous Conditions'" (2005), among other works.

The contributions of orality to *L'Aventure ambiguë* however, have been less documented compared to the other selected texts in this corpus. This is partly accounted for by the high standard of the French language that Kane uses. More often than not, critics in their relentless pursuit of African authentication (which they usually anchored

in orality), fail to recognize the linguistic diversity of Kane's novel. Nonetheless, a few authors managed to look past the seamless high French and recognize a fair degree of linguistic heterogeneity in the fiction. As a case in point, Marc Caplan, quoting Obiechina, argues in "Nos Ancêtres, Les Diallobés: Cheikh Hamidou Kane's Ambiguous Adventure and the Paradoxes of Islamic Négritude," that "more than a passive receptacle for a static, reified ideology," *L'Aventure ambiguë* is a "storehouse of Négritude in prose" (1).

In identifying orality as a valid and strong characteristic of Europhone African literature, as these aforementioned works do, critics have uncovered an aspect of linguistic heterogeneity that is often concealed by a seemingly homogeneous French or English. The imprint of orality alone, however, does not account for all the linguistic complexities that make plurilingualism a trademark of African fiction. Indigenization or "relexification," as Chantal Zabus calls it, has also been used to explain away the particular form of African literature.

In fact, faced with fierce criticisms when they adopted the language of their former colonizers as their authorial means,¹⁸ some African writers claimed their pride in not just using these languages inherited from colonization, but an even greater pride in making them their own, in producing an indigenized French and English mainly. Not surprisingly then, this other aspect of language study, next to uncovering "oral voices," constitutes the other avenue the study of plurilingualism in the African novel has

¹⁸ This is in reference to the debate among African writers and critics as to which language to adopt to write literature. I will cover this issue at length in the next chapters.

traditionally taken.

Indeed, while orality in the African novel primarily consists of translating traditional modes of communication with the use of proverbs, addition, repetition, and metaphors among other devices,¹⁹ the process of “indigenization” goes beyond documenting stylistic changes that the move from oral to written brought about. As Chantal Zabus puts it in the *African Palimpsest*, “the writer no longer imitates what is happening as a result of social change but uses language variance as an alibi to convey ideological variance” (xvi). In that vein, African writers have devised strategies to decolonize these foreign languages in order to give them more local undertones. The following definition of indigenization sums up what the process is all about; it “refers to the writer’s attempt at textualizing linguistic differentiation and at conveying African concepts, thought-patterns, and linguistic features through the ex-colonizer’s language” (Zabus 3). The process aims at redefining and even subverting the foreign element in French and English to make them fit an African context. This wish to openly subvert the ex-colonizers’ languages often results in writers resorting to translation as they attempt to render African realities and sensibility in European languages. This latter strategy of detour makes “translation” another common avenue the study of language change has traditionally taken.²⁰

¹⁹ For an exhaustive list of the characteristics of orality, see Walter J Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*.

²⁰ For further details on how translation actually functions as a paradigm of plurilingualism, see Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman’s latest publication on *Fictional representations of multilingualism and*

This search for equivalence of African realities into the written text often leads to more complex strategies of detour and re-appropriation. By seeing European languages as the “Other” in need of normalization and re-codification, African writers break the myth of linguistic homogeneity. In his analysis of how Christianity came to be “Africanized” in the Eastern part of the continent, Jesse Ndwiga Kanyua Mugambi studied, in *Critiques of Christianity in African literature: with particular reference to East Africa*, the different ways in which East African writers have challenged, through their linguistic media, assumptions of European theological superiority in their works. Mugambi does not just address the mechanisms by which Christianity has been “indigenized” by East African populations to make the religion fit their deeper feelings and their everyday lives; he also analyzes various methods such authors as Ngūgi use to write back in response to colonial religious hegemony. The conclusions of Mugambi’s study however are merely “illustrative” by the author’s own admission. Indeed, the book “is intended to be neither exhaustive, nor comprehensive but illustrative” (Preface). Our current analysis then will offer a more encompassing perspective as the common denominator in my selection of works will transcend geographical barriers to take into account the very language inherited from colonization that the majority of African literatures have in common.

Finally, in the myriad of works that target the issue of language study and more specifically language change and plurilingualism in the African novel, Chantal Zabus has undertaken the closest study yet to what this present thesis aims to do. Indeed, in 2007, Zabus published the Second Enlarged edition of the *African Palimpsest: Indegenization*

of Language in the West African Europhone Novel. In it, she asks important questions that speak to my present study, “How can a europhone text incorporate in its linguistic and referential texture the languages autochthonous to West Africa” and to what end (4)? By using the metaphoric trope of a palimpsest, Zabus “exhumes” a subtext written in African languages underneath the seemingly homogenous ex-colonizer’s languages. In the book, Zabus not only discusses the concepts of pidginizing and relexification as the two main methods by which writers strive to reclaim Western languages, she more importantly brings to the forefront the political dimensions of languages by questioning the driving forces behind the erasure of the vernaculars in the first place.

While the relevance of Zabus’ analysis is obvious to my study in that it offers a fairly detailed analysis of not only how the process of indigenization is carried out, but also a glance at the historical and linguistic background that has given rise to such language treatment, the results of her undertaking are nonetheless restrictive as they not only cover one specific area of the continent, but the purpose of the book, to some extent, still remains within a normative perspective. Moreover, by Zabus’ own admission, her “discussion is limited to West African novel of French and English expressions” (4). Unlike with Zabus who exclusively focused on the “West African novel,” this present study aims to be more comprehensive by not restricting itself to any particular geographic area. Rather, the scope of the analysis will be the newer productive sites born from La Francophonie and The Commonwealth constituted in the wake of decolonization and where various languages meet and cross over in the midst of competing linguistic, political and economical interests. Thus, I offer a more inclusive and more up to date

analysis that not only does away with “artificial boundaries” inherited from colonization, but a reading that takes into account the modalities by which the “expanded circles”²¹ manage their linguistic diversity in the literary texts.

All in all, the purpose of this present study then, it goes without saying, is not to duplicate what has already been done on this particular area of language study; rather, it offers a more comprehensive account of the diversity of voices already established through orature, a more detailed and complex analysis of the heterogeneous factors that often characterize African fictions. I offer a study of plurilingualism that equally focuses not just on polyphony, but on the many “languages” as Live Gauvin broadly understands the term in *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*. The analysis will look past the Manichean opposition between oral and written and will consider the question of the plurality of languages in all its diversities. Additionally, such concepts as class, gender, historical or social pressures will be invoked to unveil the many cultural layers and often competing worlds that are associated with the plurality of languages and literary traditions which are concealed under seemingly homogeneous English and French media.

Approach

Theories of Enunciation: Text and Context

Indebted to Emile Benveniste for laying the groundwork on enunciation theory²²

²¹ Braj Kachri used the term “expanded circles” in *The Alchemy of English* to refer to people whose first language is not English (“inner circle”).

²² For more information see Benveniste’s *Problems in General Linguistics*.

and also to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, I will take a deep look at how a text can be said to signify and generate meaning by focusing on varied markers of discourse. I will look at the dynamic process involved in the act of signification. In fact, drawing on theories of enunciation, we understand that the creation of meaning depends on a collaborative effort both from the speaker and the listener to whom a message is destined. Meaning, we then concede, does not exist in the absolute; it is neither an unequivocal production nor a unilateral signification, but rather, a dynamic process between two parties—speaker and listener—and one whose signification doesn't just rest on the thing uttered, the "énoncé," but on various extra-linguistic elements contained in the conditions of enunciation. In *Les genres du discours*, Tzvetan Todorov, discussing narrative analysis, revisits Bakhtin's dialogism and reiterates the necessity to go beyond the "énoncé" and take into account all the other aspects of the enunciation itself. Consequently then, in this analysis, I will strip down the texts of the corpus to their basic codes of signification often concealed by seemingly uniform stories. Language then will be treated as a process and not an end product. I will look at the relationships between the different characters, consider who is speaking, in what context and from which position, as the discourse, unlike the story, always contains markers of its conditions of enunciation—that made it be—as well as the subjectivity of the speaker. Enunciation then encompasses everything that partakes in the production of the énoncé, in the production of meaning. Having in mind Saussure's distinction between "parole" and "langue" and quoting Sophie Marnette, we will agree that "to study enunciation is, thus, to study a set of specific mechanisms that govern the conversion by the locutor of the abstract system of langue into discourse" (20). The goal

is to be well equipped to accurately see how literature functions as a cultural phenomenon.

Theories of Literary Plurilingualism

Unlike orality, relexification or even indigenization, plurilingualism presents itself as a more neutral concept which does not suffer from stereotypical fixity (oral/written) much less nativist underpinnings. It offers a way out of binarisms that have been exhausted by literary criticism. Furthermore, regardless of how strongly the Europhone novel is indigenized, what is local about these African productions still remains at the level of a subtext; or to paraphrase Zabus, we are still talking about an “African palimpsest.” There is a need then for a hermeneutic that equally accounts for the diversity of languages in the multilingual diglossic situations where sub-Saharan African literatures are produced.

Traditionally, multilingualism and diglossia have been used as methodological approaches to study language diversity in texts; however, both methods suffer from distinct shortcomings; the former is more relevant when dealing with the context while the latter specifically addresses the issue of language use. Neither term, though informative in understanding the overall linguistic makeup of sub-Saharan African context, is quite fitting when it comes to discussing a literary work.²³ For that matter,

²³ From Rainier Grutman to Lise Gauvin and more recently Laté Lawson-Hellu, critics have pointed at the shortcomings of existing literary concepts such as diglossia and multilingualism and make a case for literary plurilingualism. For further information, see Grutman’s *Hétérolinguisme au XIXe siècle Québécois*, *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*, and Lawson-Hellu’s *Hétérolinguisme*

plurilingualism, or more exactly literary plurilingualism, with its two paradigms of heterolingualism and transpologualism, will be retained as a preferred method.

If Rainier Grutman is often credited with the present day understanding of literary plurilingualism, especially with his theorization of heterolingualism, it should be noted however that critics before him have addressed this issue of linguistic diversity in fictions. In *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (1978), Bakhtin coined the term heteroglossia, a combination of the Latin hetero (different) and Greek glōssa (tongue, language) to refer to the multitude of layers within a single language. By uncovering a diversity of voices/speeches, Bakhtin thus made an important contribution to plurilingualism, a contribution that would later be revisited and questioned by critics. Indeed, as early as 1981, in *Bakhtin, le principe dialogique*, Tzvetan Todorov attempted to provide a more comprehensive definition of heteroglossia that goes beyond a multiplicity of voices. He offered an interpretation that incorporates not just a plurality of voices, but also a plurality of languages and a plurality of styles. Bakhtin's plurilingualism then, as Lise Gauvin commented in *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*, was a rather limited concept because of his rather narrow understanding of the concept of "language."

It was not until 1994 that Rainier Grutman coined yet another neologism²⁴ to

et roman d'Afrique francophone subsaharienne. We shall develop this aspect in more details in the chapters to come.

²⁴ In 1994, to say the least, there was no shortage of terms to refer to linguistic plurality. Such terms as multilingualism, bilingualism, diglossia, heteroglossia...already were popular concepts in literary analysis.

account for, not only the diversity of languages in a literary text, but also the different mechanisms by which languages are inscribed in a work of fiction. Heterolingualism then, contends Grutman in his doctoral dissertation entitled *Formes et fonctions de l'hétérolinguisme dans la littérature québécoise entre 1837 et 1899*, emerges as a paradigm of literary plurilinguality that actually addresses the linguistic dialogue inherent in a work of fiction at the same time it provides the tools necessary to decipher the mechanisms through which those languages are incorporated in the text in the first place.

In *Des langues qui résonnent: l'hétérolinguisme au XIX siècle québécois*, the published version of Grutman's thesis, he further addresses the specificity of his new concept. Indeed, dealing with the particular context of Quebec literature where multiple languages are in a diglossic relationship with one another,²⁵ there was still a need for a more egalitarian concept that would do away with hegemonic rivalries and more specifically the negative overtones of bilingualism in Quebec.

In the years after Grutman theorized the concept, other writers and critics revisited heterolingualism in attempts to further develop the notion. If Lise Gauvin shows an understanding of the concept much along the same lines as Grutman in *Les langues du roman*, critics like Jean-Marc Moura expand the definition of heterolingualism beyond its initial confines of Quebec literature. Moura actually argues that heterolingualism defined as “cette présence de divers idioms, cette pluralité langagière” (Grutman 74) could widely be applied to Francophone literature and, better yet, to postcolonial productions in

²⁵ Here we have in mind English, French and Joual, but the list is not exhaustive.

general. Heterolingualism then emerges as a paradigm of plurilingualism that will help decipher the modalities of inscription of the hybrid language texture in literature, especially in postcolonial Francophone and Anglophone productions. For this reason, this concept constitutes one of the main theoretical and practical grounds upon which this thesis will be based. From its origins in Quebec literature to its latest application to study the dynamics of language in theatres, heterolingualism proves to be a critical tool in shaping and mapping the other languages in the background of the main ones—French and English—in postcolonial African literatures.

The concept of heterolingualism by itself, however, is not enough to account for all the modalities of inscription of hybridity in the literary text. In fact, in the light of new studies carried by Laté Lawson-Hellu, a new paradigm of linguistic transposition has been elaborated as a complement to heterolingualism. In “Norme, éthique sociale et hétérolinguisme dans les écritures africaines,” Lawson-Hellu, inspired by how the concept of transposition works, especially in the domains of mathematics and translation studies,²⁶ theorized the notion as a hermeneutic device in African Europhone literature. In translation for example, transposition—unlike transcription—is about expressing something from a source language into a target language all the while maintaining the specificities and richness of each language. According to Lawson-Hellu, heterolingualism then, though commonly agreed upon as “la présence dans le texte d’idiomes étrangers sous quelque forme que ce soit, aussi bien de variétés (sociales, régionales, ou

²⁶ Indeed, translation constitutes the latest paradigm of plurilingualism. For more details, see Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman’s “Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation.”

chronologiques) de la langue principale” does not necessarily account for the silent linguistic variations—usually from author to characters—done without any warning.²⁷ Linguistic transposition—or transpolingualism—then emerges as a complementary paradigm to heterolingualism to particularly account for the different languages of the characters; languages that are not to be necessarily equated with that of the author and which deserve critics’ attention as well. In “Textualité et transposition hétérolinguistique dans le roman francophone. Pour une théorie générale du plurilinguisme,” Laté Lawson-Hellu argues:

Le fait hétérolinguistique est essentiellement “visible,” alors que le fonctionnement plurilinguistique du texte réside autant dans la présence “visible” de l’hétérogénéité linguistique dans le texte que de sa présence “non-visible.”²⁸

Lawson-Hellu then, in what he considers a continuation of Grutman’s work, proposed the notion of transpolingualism as the missing link to heterolingualism toward a more general theory of plurilingualism to better address the different forms of language hybridity in a literary text. Transpolingualism, argues Lawson-Hellu, gives a mirror reflection in the main authorial language of the indigenous ones. Plurilingualism then, with its two

²⁷ Xenisms and peregrinisms are the two main (visible) processes by which heterolingualism is carried out. For further information, see Amadou Ly’s article entitled “Le Pérégrinisme comme stratégie textuelle d’appropriation de la langue d’écriture.” We will discuss these notions more deeply in the chapter on Enunciation and Plurilingualism.

²⁸ Heterolingualism is essentially “visible” while literary plurilingualism encompasses both «visible» and «non-visible» mechanisms (translation mine).

complementary paradigms, namely heterolingualism and transpolingualism, will constitute one of the main theoretical and practical frameworks in this study.

The reality of literary plurilingualism in Africa is a direct consequence of the continent's colonial heritage, a heritage that all four selected authors seem to accept as part of the cultural hybridity that has come with colonization, a hybrid heritage they choose to carry into the future and in their fictions.

African literature, as well as the growing body of criticism that accompanies it, both show an acute awareness of the issue of colonization to which they more often than not attribute the partial loss of their identity. After a long period of assimilating the colonial experience with a sense of alienation, more recent critics cast a less pessimistic eye, a look that undermines earlier readings of assimilation and alienation. Postcolonialism then—whether taken literally (post-colonialism) to chronologically mean the period after the colonial era or a timeless concept that concerns itself with power relations and the production and control of knowledge in countries that once were colonies of other countries—offers a valid critical approach from which to study the problematic of language in the Francophone and Anglophone African spheres. Postcolonialism engages the text in historical situations as it challenges and reassesses the legacy of colonialism in formerly colonized cultures.²⁹ By uncovering multiple voices,

²⁹ This definition of post-colonialism that puts in stark opposition the colonizers to the colonized has been challenged by critics with the concept of hybridity. I shall come back to the issue in the discussion of the Francophone and Anglophone novel from Africa. For more information on “hybridity” see Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), Gayatri Spivak’s “Translation as Culture” (2000) or Stuart Hall’s “Cultural

especially those silenced by Western dominant ideologies, postcolonial theory helps bring to the forefront the heterogeneous nature of subaltern literatures. It provides a framework that questions dominant discourses in the West.

Indeed, plurilingualism, I contend, challenges the dominant French and English authorial media along with the ideologies associated with them. By making the fictions share the literary spaces in the text with “minority” languages, plurilingualism in the postcolonial African novel reinforces the validity of indigenous culture. As Paul Bandia remarks in his review of *Fictionalising Translation and Multiculturalism*, “each language contains within itself the culture that originally or eventually created it.” So plurilingualism, if anything, reinforces the validity of atavic languages and cultures thereby challenging the dominant discourses from the West

Organization

This thesis will be divided into two main parts dealing respectively with the enunciation context and plurilingualism and resistance. In the opening section, I will talk about the authors and their texts first before discussing La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, not just as institutions but also as social and political spheres where colonial ideologies were (or still are?) articulated. The second part of the project will address how linguistic heterogeneity can and does point to some fair degree of resistance to both postcolonial and traditional (religious) structures. I will, in this second part, make a linguistic cartography of each of the four novels under study before analyzing the

discursive symbolism of the various languages' "mise-en-texte."

Chapter One: On Francophone and Anglophone Literature

A- Francophone Literature: (Hi)Story of a Discipline

From its origins in colonization to its present day understanding as a linguistic community, what it means to be Francophone has for the longest time, especially in France, carried some hegemonic undertones. In literature, African Francophone authors have, traditionally, written with a sense of commitment in their works. With René Maran's *Batouala*³⁰—considered the first Francophone novel—and later the Négritude movement, the first generation of African authors trained at the French school essentially wrote to showcase a certain cultural richness and correct exotic Eurocentric views often channelled through colonial narratives. Later, with the first wave of local governments that took over responsibilities from the former colonizers, Francophone literature moved from a critique of colonization to denouncing national dictatorial regimes. More recently, with female writers joining in the literary scene, gender considerations have been brought forth to challenge the way black subjectivity has primarily been articulated as a male concern. Francophone literature then, as can be inferred from this general overview, is and has been since “birth” a literature of protest.

1) Definition of a Francophone and of Francophone Literature

³⁰This book, winner of the Goncourt Prize in 1921, is often considered as the pioneer novel of Francophone literature. René Maran, it should be emphasized, was not from Africa. He was originally from Martinique but he wrote and published *Batouala* while working for the colonial service in French Equatorial Africa.

The adjective Francophone comes from the word Francophonie,³¹ a term first coined in 1880 by Onésime Reclus to refer to places, around the world, where French was used as a vehicular language. Beside natives of France, of a few European countries³² and a part of Canada, the majority of people deemed Francophone do not claim French as their first language. However, rarely—if at all—are French people from the Hexagon referred to as Francophone; more often than not, the term applies to French-speaking people outside of the natives of France. As a consequence, what it means to be Francophone involves complex interfacing between various languages. The term, by definition, refers to someone who speaks, usually, another language besides French. The qualifier Francophone then is a terminology used on the basis of linguistic diversity and geographical home; “it designates both a socio-linguistic and geographical phenomenon: to describe French-speaking population and to describe a French-speaking bloc” (Jack, 17).

The adjective “Francophone” to refer to the body of literature written in French—and distinct from metropolitan French literature itself—is a denomination that has greatly evolved over time. Simply referred to, in its early stages, as “literature written in French,” “literature of French expression,” or “Negro-African literature,” the denomination Francophone literature passed into popular usage only in the late 1970’s. This lack of consistent denomination to refer to the body of writings originating from the ex-colonies

³¹ In the next chapter, we will deal at length with the institution of La Francophonie.

³² More specifically, French is the first language for people living in part of Belgium and part of Switzerland.

mirrors a more insidious lack of early recognition of Francophone literature as an independent and worthy literary field with a legitimacy of its own. Indeed, France, which has for the longest time been considered the cultural capital of all writings in French, showed a deep seated mistrust³³ for this new protest literature that was, in many regards, critical of the French empire (or what was left from it); a literature that called for a “contemporary assessment of the culture and history of empire from the moment of conquest” (Forsdick and Murphy 5). This mistrust however was not limited to social settings only. In academia as well, mainstream French literature shunned this new discipline born from France’s ex colonies. In his article entitled “l’université a-t-elle peur de la littérature négro-africaine d’expression française,” Bernard Mouralis wrote back in 1982, over two decades after the Négritude pioneers, “[L]a littérature négro-africaine d’expression française demeure dans l’ensemble du tissu universitaire français, une discipline fragile et pas encore vraiment reconnue” (2) “In the fabric of the French university, Black African literature in French remains in a precarious position, still falling short of true recognition.”

In fact, when the adjective Francophone is applied to literature, specifically to the African novel, cultural, historical, political and even ideological paradigms come into play. Francophone literature refers to the body of writings, outside of the French

³³Case in point, Michel Le Bris, reacting to *Orientalism*, one of the foundational works of Postcolonial studies, qualifies the concept as “l’hystérisation de toute pensée, le refus de toute complexité, de toute nuance” [the hystericization of all thoughts, the refusal of any complexity or nuance] (qtd in Forsdick and Murphy, 8).

metropolis, that usually originate from countries that have previously been colonized by France and where authors have retained the French language as their vehicular means. This latter issue of language choice constitutes one of the major points of controversy in the discussion of the Francophone African novel. Even if the debate over the authorial language of Africans is less heated in Francophone studies than it is with the Anglophone novel, it remains nonetheless that critics have debated the pertinence of the choice of the French language to write a literature often aimed at denouncing the very ideologies that are embedded in that language. More often than not, the Francophone views on the French language fall squarely within the teachings of the French direct colonial project.

In 1880, the same year the word Francophone was coined, the French language was promulgated by the then French Minister of Education, Jules Ferry, as the mandatory and sole medium of instruction throughout the French Empire. By this decree, the French outlawed all local languages—at least in schools—and placed the French language at the forefront of their colonizing mission in Africa which they came to equate with their “mission éducatrice et civilisatrice” (educational and civilizing mission).³⁴ For the French, unlike the British, colonization was not just about territorial growth: “both territories and minds were objects of conquest, and language was identified as a key tool [in the] conquest” (Parker 92). The “indigenes” in French-ruled colonies had to be

³⁴ In Senegal for example, the specific decree outlawing local languages in school was signed in May 1924. It clearly stated that “Le Français est seul en usage dans les écoles. Il est interdit aux maitres de se servir avec leurs élèves des idiomes du pays” (French only is to be used in schools. It is forbidden for teachers to speak to pupils in the local languages) (Moumouni 55).

assimilated and taught “the values of the French Republic, both for their own humanity and for the survival of the empire itself” (92). This assimilation policy,³⁵ carried through a most direct colonial rule, accounts (at least partially and for what it is worth) for the Francophone writer’s accepting attitude towards the French language. Indeed, from the poets of the Négritude movement to women writers such as Mariama Ba through Cheikh Hamidou Kane or even much harder liners such as Ahmadou Kourouma or Sony Labou Tansi,³⁶ the debate over the authorial medium of African writers has not been pushed to the extremes of calling for an abandonment of the French language in favour of the vernaculars despite some loud critiques in regards to the use of French.

By definition, when discussing the African Francophone novel, the question no longer is which language to develop as the writers’ authorial means; rather, it becomes how they—authors—take charge of these new languages inherited from colonization to

³⁵ Jean Jaures’ famous 1884 declaration about the status of the French language is very eloquent, and is, to this date, still very much quoted in most discussion of France’s assimilation policy. Jaures said: “Our colonies will only be French in their understanding and their heart when they understand French... For France above all, language is the necessary instrument of colonization... More new French schools, to which we shall invite the natives, must come to help the French settlers, in their difficult task of moral conquest and assimilation... when we take possession of a country, we should take with us the glory of France, and be sure that we will be well received, for she is pure as well as great, imbued with justice and goodness” (quoted in Ager 1999: 238).

³⁶ Both Kourouma and Labou Tansi are known to have taken the indigenization of the French language to a superior level. In literary criticism today, people commonly talk about Kourouma’s “Malinkismes” and Labou Tansi’s “Tropicalités.”

forcefully convey their purpose and subject matters. The literary tradition in Africa being in majority oral and in keeping with the direct policy and the French's belief in the "superiority" of their language, local languages in French ruled-colonies were rarely—if they were at all—codified; and as a consequence, they could not be used for literary purposes. Furthermore, given the large plurality of languages in use in Africa³⁷ and the lack of intelligibility among different ethnic groups, the colonizers' languages imposed themselves as lingua franca across the continent. Not to mention that for merely practical reasons related to publications and readership, it was indicated and expected that the language of writing be French or English. However, these "foreign" languages would have to be crafted to become new languages able to capture new subject matters and serve a greater goal of self-affirmation.

In Francophone literature, one general tendency was to try and deconstruct skewed French colonial narratives from within by using the very language which was once used for civilizing purposes.³⁸ As Jean-Paul Sartre famously contended in *Orphée Noir* "Puisque l'opresseur est présent jusque dans la langue qu'ils parlent, ils parleront

³⁷According to *The Ethnologue*, an average of 36 languages, next to the official French, are spoken in Senegal alone; 505 languages in Nigeria and some 19 languages in Zimbabwe.

³⁸ Senghor's strong statement in defence of his use of French as his authorial means is memorable. He contends: "Parce que nous sommes des métis culturels, parce que, si nous sentons en nègres, nous nous exprimons en français, parce que le français est une langue a vocation universelle, que notre métissage s'adresse aussi aux français de France et aux autres hommes, parce que le français est une langue de 'gentillesse et d'honnêteté'" (Éthiopiennes, afterword).

cette langue pour la “détruire” (247); a statement that most writers and critics seemed to agree with as they proudly claim the French language as their own even if the latter, they contend, would, at times, have to be “défrancisé” and crafted to suit their narratives. This philosophy and attitude toward the French language was to inform, for generations to come, the fairly non-dramatic acceptance of the language for literary purposes.

This total hegemony of the French language, however, along with the diglossic situations it brought about would not fail, as one can easily imagine, to create some tensions within the colonial subject. From Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Négritude et Humanisme*, Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* to Micheal Syrotinski’s *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory*, through Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Écrire en pays dominé*, the interface between European languages—French particularly—and the psyche of the indigene have often been studied. While Fanon is famous in his description of the “almost pathological response of educated West Indians vis-à-vis the French language” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, with “anything less than pure Parisian [relegating] the speaker to a less human category” (qtd in Michelman 220), Paulin Hountondji addresses the same relationship with the French language as Fanon, but this time, vis-à-vis the African subject specifically. In *Présence Africaine*, Hountondji claims that: “The linguistic behaviour of the African, when expressing himself in French, has all the characteristics of a neurosis” (16). Hountondji’s description is echoed by Oludare Idowu who provides a detailed account of a perfectly “Westernized” autochthon. In “Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal,” the assimilated native is described as follows:

He was like a typical French citizen, governed not by native law and custom but

by the French codes. He was not a polygamist. Literate in French, he was expected to have imbibed as much of the French way of life as possible, and to have contributed in his own way to the success of the *mission civilisatrice* in the colony. Thinking French, living French, more at home in French society than elsewhere, he was expected to be in everything except in the colour of his skin, a Frenchman. (205)

As can be inferred from this quote, a good knowledge of the French language was often associated with a more insidious abandonment of traditional ways of life in favour of an adoption of “French codes.” Indeed, the connections Idowu drew back in 1969 between “litera[cy] in French,” “thinking French” and ultimately “living French” very much resonate with Fanon’s observations. And even today, with newer research on the intrinsic relationships between language and culture such as Ngũgi wa Thiong’o’s, J R Gladstone’s and Claire Kramsch’s among others, the use of language for purposes other than mere communication has been established. Indeed, Gladstone argues in “Language and Culture” that “language is at once an outcome or a result of the culture as a whole and also a vehicle by which the other facets of the culture are shaped and communicated” (212). So applying these critics to the context of African Francophone natives who choose to write in French instead of their native language could and does signal a big stride towards a loss of their original culture and worldview in favour of a Western one carried through the French language.

This being said, however, one cannot help but noticing that from Idowu, Gladstone to Ngũgi, mistrust towards the use of foreign languages in African literature

emanates mostly from critics originating from the English-speaking world.³⁹ Francophones, as argued earlier, because of the role of the French language in the “mission civilisatrice” and the subsequent particular “close” relationships natives had with the colonizers’ language, more readily accepted the French language as their authorial means. Unlike in the Anglophone world, the use of French in African literature has been subjected to less heated and controversial debates. However, past the differences in the relationships with the colonizers’ languages, Francophone and Anglophone literatures share similar thematic concerns and can both be qualified as literature of protest. And for this reason, a reassessment of normative readings of the Francophone novel that does not always display obvious signs of linguistic difference is long overdue. The heterogeneity of the Francophone novel, I contend, cannot simply be measured by the level of indigenization of the French language only. Both in its content and its form, the Francophone novel is and has been a literature of protest.

Traditionally, in sub-Saharan Africa, Francophone literature, like its English counterpart, seeks to re-inscribe indigenous natives as worthy subjects of study with rich and complex cultures of their own. It provides alternative narratives from that of colonial literatures as it aims to deconstruct Orientalist representations of Africa and Africans. In that regard, Francophone and Anglophone literatures share similar objectives, which are to challenge representations where Africans hardly ever spoke for themselves. At the heart of both literatures is the will to expose an African perspective on history. In application of Amadou Hampathé Ba’s teaching who famously declared that, “Quand une

³⁹ Idowu is Nigerian and Ngũgĩ is Kenyan.

chèvre est présente, on ne doit pas bêler à sa place” (qtd in Merand 9), Francophone and Anglophone literatures then provide variances to stories where the African is spoken for as they challenge “an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (Said 6). Up until the birth of the African novel, English and French-ruled sub-Saharan Africa were knowable on the international scene mostly through “a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental [African] world emerged” (Said 8).

The evocation of Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* to address the problematic of both Francophone and Anglophone literatures implies a close relationship between the two disciplines and postcolonial criticism. I shall come back to this issue in the last section of this chapter; but for now, just as we did for the qualifier Francophone, a brief overview of the history of Anglophone literature is in order.

B- Genesis of African Anglophone Literature

In its most literal sense, “Anglophone literature” simply refers to literatures written in English; however, in literary studies the term has many inflections because of historical, political, and ideological considerations that inform the genesis of the discipline. As a consequence, a working definition of the qualifier Anglophone seems appropriate.

In social settings, the adjective Anglophone refers to someone who speaks English in countries where other languages—next to English—are spoken. In academia, Anglophone literature refers to productions written in English—outside of Great Britain and The United States of America—from formerly colonized countries. At the heart of the discipline is the project to reclaim and disseminate an African voice, an African side of

history long stifled by colonial narratives. Anglophone literature and the ensuing area of literary criticism it generated—namely postcolonialism—ambition to unveil and deal with titles and authors who are (or were) not normally included in the regular English curriculum. Unlike the qualifier Francophone however, which often designates things related to French but which are not of proper French origins, there is no over-determined will to separate an Anglophone from a native of British origins.

Though it shares similar ontological goals with Francophone literature, the advent of Anglophone literature can be traced further back than its French counterpart. Indeed as early as Commonwealth Literature⁴⁰ around the 1950's, before most African countries became independent, pieces were already being written by Africans in the English language.⁴¹ However, it was not until Amos Tutuola, in 1952, with the *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town* that the first major English novel by an African was published. Tutuola's novel, written in a predominantly awkward English is often considered to be the starting point of Anglophone African literature.

The form of Tutuola's novel, specifically the integration of local vernaculars and

⁴⁰ For more information on Commonwealth Literature, see Ken Goodwin's article entitled "Studying Commonwealth Literature" published in 1992.

⁴¹ If we include narratives written in English from former slaves who originated from the continent, then we could trace the birth of African Anglophone literature much further back. Indeed Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley, two former slaves, respectively from Britain and the United States of America both published their works in English

unconventional English grammatical rules, would later set the “paradigms” by which the “authenticity” of the Anglophone African novel was commonly to be measured. In fact, unlike their Francophone counterparts, African writers who chose English as their authorial means, showed far less “deference” towards their language; in Anglophone literature from Africa, the English language is often experimented with and local vernaculars as well as literary traditions typical of an African oral art readily stand out. This early presence of different languages and literary traditions in Anglophone narratives finds its roots in the indirect British colonial language policies in the continent.

Where the French took pride in their assimilation policy and their “mission civilisatrice,” the British showed less protectiveness towards their language and kept at a distance in their interactions with the indigenes. In “Linguistic Apartheid: English Language Policy in Africa,” Augustin Simo Bobda, discussing the language situation in his native Cameroon, denounces the more general segregationist attitude of the British in regard to the implantation of their language in Africa. In 1922, Lord Frederick Lugard, a former British Governor General in Nigeria, wrote extensively about what was later to be more commonly referred to as the “dual mandate,” a policy that outlined British quasi racist attitudes towards colonized people.

Lugard developed the ideological basis as well as the practical application of the “indirect rule” policy which was to govern the expansion of the British Empire in its (African) colonies. Convinced that the Black Africans were inherently different from their White European counterparts, Lugard theorized a segregationist policy whereby a “dual mandate” of reciprocal benefits for both parties—indigenes and colonizers—would be put

into place. In *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Lugard argues for a state sponsored colonization in which, contrary to the assimilationist French policy, local populations would take an active role in the management of their localities. In fact, out of a concern to avoid potential rebellion and claim for more independence from the natives, Lugard argues for an intermediary class of educated elite directly selected from among the natives. In focusing on educating only a small percentage of the local population for practical supervisory purposes, the British made their language available only to a selected few. Contrary to the promulgation of the French language as mandatory and sole language of education throughout the French Empire, early education in the British colonies was carried out in the local vernaculars, and wherever the English language was used as a medium of education, it existed alongside various other languages and in varied registers.⁴² To better understand the high degree of malleability of the English language, a quick analysis of its role in the expansion of the British Empire is necessary.

Indeed the English language was introduced in Black Africa around the mid 19th century by Christian missionaries whose aim was to convert African “pagans” and spread the word of the Bible. To that end, they established schools throughout the country, but unlike the French, the British promoted local vernaculars and an English-based pidgin to ensure that they effectively succeed in communicating with the masses. Schools in British-ruled colonies then did not assume the classical mission of education they are

⁴² For more information on what registers of English were taught to who and on what basis (in Nigeria specifically), see Ayorinde Dada’s “The New Language Policy in Nigeria: Its Problems and Its Chances of Success.”

known to have today; rather, they were synonymous with Christian evangelism and were essentially used as an incidental means to converting indigenes. Language—in this case the English language—was a mere accessory to the greater goal of the British civilizing mission in Africa. To that effect, and to gain access to as wide an audience as possible, the language of education was usually the mother tongue of the natives in which the British also made the Bible available.⁴³

This interest in local vernaculars and the civility of Africans hides a deeper concern about the relationship between the indigenes and the colonizers. Indeed, in British-ruled colonies, the majority of indigenes did not have access to the English language as education—religious mainly—was also carried out in local languages. And at times when the autochthons were actually introduced to English, they were usually taught a lower register different from the high standard that the colonizers themselves spoke; and as a result of this discrepancy, a pidgin-based English developed throughout most Black African countries, especially in Nigeria and Zimbabwe where *Things Fall Apart* and *Nervous Conditions* respectively take place. This reticence to widely disseminate a higher register of English was justified by deeper concerns of cultural domination. In fact, the wish of the British to keep their “space” different from that of the colonized in social settings transpired even into the realm of language. In *Second Language Learning: Myth and Reality*, Paul Christophersen hints at some of the reasons that account for the

⁴³ To make the translation of the Bible effective into local vernaculars, the British went to great lengths and developed systems of writing for the languages in question, which prior to colonization did not have a written form as the majority of them belonged to essentially oral cultures.

colonizers' lack of real effort to promote a high Standard English among the natives. Christophersen claims that some British people felt threatened and "violated" by a non-native speaker who had a good command of their language hence their protectiveness towards their language; he writes, "it is as if an uninvited guest started making free of the host's possession" (83). A thought echoed by Braj Kachru, who, in *The Alchemy of English*, contends that "English language deficiencies made the colonized an object of ridicule [while] the acquisition of native-like proficiency made them suspect" (75). The British then were at ease and even promoted different mechanisms of relexification of the English language; an attitude at the antipodes of the French who had faith in the beauty and humanizing quality of their language to the point that people like René Étiemble considered the language sacred. In *Parlez-vous français*, addressing the growing influence of English in the French language, Étiemble contends, "The French language is a treasure. To violate it is a crime. Persons were shot during the war for reason of treason. They should be punished for degrading the language" (87).

As his brief overview shows, the British colonial language policy in Africa made room not only for local vernaculars, but for other "deviant" forms of English as well as it encouraged the flourishing of English-based pidgins throughout its empire. On balance however, regardless of the British racist attitude towards their language, most newly independent colonies—among which Nigeria and Zimbabwe—still retained English as their sole official language after the departure of the British. Throughout former British colonized countries, writers also adopted the English language as their authorial means. In fact, because of the multitude of languages spoken in Africa where a language is often

equated with the tribe who speaks it, the English language “naturally” imposes itself as a federating and more effective medium of communication across diverse linguistic communities. In “Language Policy in Africa,” Bernd Heine reflects on the quasi general tendency in sub-Saharan Africa to adopt the languages of their former colonizers as their official ones. He writes:

Most African states have adopted the general framework of language policy inherited from the respective colonial power. [...] The motivation for such a policy was obvious: In a situation where dozens or even hundreds of ethnic groups coexisted within the confines of a given nation competing for economic and political power, the European language constituted a convenient tool for bridging sociolinguistic, cultural, and political antagonisms which endangered the national unity of the young nation states. Furthermore, the political leadership of the first generation after independence were trained in Europe or North America and usually those leaders took for granted that a modern state should be run in a European language. (173)

While Heine is right in his observation of how naturally foreign-trained African leaders used their ex-colonizers’ languages for political matters, what he overlooked was criticisms in regard to the use of these Western languages for the purpose of writing African literature. Indeed, regardless of the existence of codified local vernaculars at the time of independence, authors in former British colonies, just like their French counterparts, retained the English language as their authorial medium. And this very choice of language would create one of the biggest topics of controversy in any

discussion of the African novel—particularly the Anglophone one. Contrary to the African Francophone for whom French seemed like the natural language to use for writing literature, Anglophone African writers struggled more forcefully and debated more loudly their choice of English for authorial means. Indeed, critics like Ngũgi wa Thiong’o, Chinweizu and Obiajunwa Wali, among others, have called for an abandonment of the English language in African literature in favour of local vernaculars and more typical African ways of communication.

C- The Language Debate in African Anglophone Literature

In his book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgi wa Thiong’o argues that not only are foreign languages unable to carry a true African experience, but they also participate in perpetrating Western political hegemony on the African continent. For Ngũgi and other critics such as Wali and Chinweizu, language and culture are interchangeable; the loss of the former will result in the loss of the latter. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgi affirms:

Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next. (15)

From Ngũgi’s description, one understands that language carries the weight of experience people accumulate throughout their history to the point that language and the culture it defines become a blend: one cannot go without the other.

More forcefully in this debate regarding African writers and their language of

expression, Obi Wali from Nigeria asserts in “The Dead End of African Literature,” that “until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be pursuing a dead end” (282). Wali’s pessimism is great. To him and his like-minded critics, “indigenized” French or English are no less Western languages and they still carry all the weight of cultural hegemony brought about by colonization. This position is echoed by Chinweizu Ibekwe who, in addition to his fight for the promotion of local languages, also argues for a replacement, in the university curricula, of British subject matters by African ones.⁴⁴ As early as 1983, in *Toward the Decolonization of African literature* (1983), Chinweizu and fellow critics called for a cleansing of imperialism in all spheres of the African life. Here is how they articulated their project:

The cultural task in hand is to end all foreign domination of African culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality, to clear the bushes and stake out new foundations for a liberated African modernity. This is a process that must take place in all spheres of African life—in government, industry, family and social life, education, city planning, architecture, art, entertainment, etc. This book is intended as a contribution to this process in the realm of African letters. (1)

Indeed, according to Chinweizu and his allies, English was more than a simple language

⁴⁴ Chinweizu is not alone in arguing for a change in African curricula. The now famous Makerere conference on African writers of English expression touched on the issue as well. We remember that Ngũgĩ for example vigorously called for a suppression of English departments in Africa.

for communication purposes, it was also a subject that was taught to the indigenes and through which cultural dependence to a colonial reference was maintained. In Francophone and Anglophone Africa then, it was not just the language policy which was marked by continuity after independence, the colonizers' cultural and imperial domination over the colonized was sustained as well. The colonizers' history, literature, and culture—in one word their worldview--was still being presented to the indigenes as the models to emulate. Reclaiming the African languages in literature then, according to Ngũgi and his like-minded critics, constitutes the necessary first step toward reclaiming a more global African sense of worth and validity.

For these critics of English, there is an urgent need to supplant Western literature by African literature. And for a piece of writing to be appropriately labelled African, the latter would have to be written in local languages and in a style that reconnects to the continent's traditions and past. For Ngũgi, any failure to return to local vernaculars would merely produce "Afro-European literature" by "intellectuals from the petty bourgeoisie" that "is likely to last for as long as Africa is under this rule of European capital in a neo colonial set-up" (27). The connection Ngũgi makes between language and identity is echoed by Fanon who declares, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other...The negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (*Black Skin White Mask* 17). For Fanon as well, as can be inferred from this quote, the use of former colonizers' language could—and to a degree does—participate in an attempt by the colonized to imitate Western cultural code. While Fanon's study was by no means

specific to Africans—he specifically mentioned “the negro of the Antilles”—the conclusions he arrived at can effortlessly be applied to all former colonized people who make the choice to express themselves in the languages of their former colonizers. A psychiatrist and philosopher, Fanon is very much in tune with Ngũgĩ in denouncing a rampant black subjects’ loss of personal identity in favour of a split self at best and a cultural “bastardization” at worst. But views regarding this issue of language are far from homogenous and not all critics across the spectrum agree with Ngũgĩ and allies.⁴⁵

This socio-cultural and political project to debunk hegemonic Western models and faulty representations of Africa as a locus of primitivism and alienation leads to the creation of Commonwealth literature first and later Anglophone or postcolonial studies. The central place Chinweizu, Wali and Ngũgĩ attempted to give to local languages, Anglophone postcolonial literatures sought to accomplish at the level of education. These newer “disciplines” intended to end the domination of British literature in universities’ curricula in Africa. Faculties of Arts, more specifically English departments in most African countries, almost always exclusively taught authors from British origins along with the worldview that came with their narratives. The most radical critics found this an aberration and they called for changes that would actually allow authors from the

⁴⁵ In the next chapter dealing with the authors of the corpus and their works, we will discuss more this issue of the authorial language of Anglophone African writers. We will see how Achebe particularly, among other authors, forcefully proclaimed his wish to use the English language despite some critics’ reservation. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, he reaffirms that for him there is no other choice; that he is given the language and he intends to use it (62).

continent to take a central place in their own home countries. This is precisely what Francophone, Anglophone and Postcolonial studies seek to do, namely position African authors and their works as central and worthy subjects of study.

D- Relationships between Postcolonialism, Francophone and Anglophone

Literature

Because of the central place colonization holds in their problematic, Francophone and Anglophone literatures are concerned with “the interplay between the colonial past and the post-colonial present” as they “reflect on unfinished processes of representation and remembrance” (Forsdick and Murphy 3). In fact, because of ongoing political links, a shared history and a common use of the French and English language, both France and Britain are engaged in a postcolonial relationship with their former sub-Saharan colonies even though the colonial ties that used to unite them are severed.

Indeed, a study of the Francophone and Anglophone novel without a discussion of postcolonialism shows a lack of understanding of the overarching themes among the three fields and would consequently yield only a partial understanding. If the parallels between postcolonialism and Anglophone literature are more obvious and more documented, it remains nonetheless that there also exists an intrinsic relationship between the objectives of postcolonial criticism and the ideological paratext of Francophone studies; and this, despite some critics’ reluctance to view the two disciplines as connected in any way,⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The relationships between postcolonialism and Francophone studies have more been the object of controversy and debate. While it is common knowledge that Postcolonialism largely grew from

Indeed, the same irony that excludes French hexagonal literature from the definition of Francophone literature also informs this “literary protectiveness” from a theory that has mainly been developed in Anglophone studies.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the productions within La Francophonie, the present-day network that gathers countries which use the French language (whether exclusively or partially), still continue to reflect on questions of representation that arose from the imperial meeting between France and its former colonies.

What the Francophone and Anglophone novels seek to accomplish in the area of literature, postcolonialism attempts to realize in the domain of literary criticism. Postcolonialism was born from students in Western academia who felt a sense of inaccuracy with regards to how literature was being taught to them.⁴⁸ These students, who usually originated from formerly colonized countries, felt that their own history and culture were left out when it came to literary criticism. Consequently, the evocation of

Anglophone expatriates from ex-colonies established in Western universities who felt their history and culture were not acknowledged enough in literary criticism, the intrinsic link between Francophone literatures and the newer paradigm of literary criticism (post colonialism) has aroused a lot of skepticism mostly from French scholars. For further information on how post colonialism is diversely appreciated within Francophone studies, see Alec G Hargreaves and Jean-Marc Moura’s article entitled “Editorial introduction: Extending the Boundaries of francophone postcolonial studies”.

⁴⁷ For more information, see Richard Serrano’s *Against the Postcolonial: Francophone Writers at the End of the French Empire*, or the interview with Jean-Marc Moura entitled “Postcolonial criticism, a study of specificities.”

⁴⁸ For more detailed information, see Stephen Slemon’s “Post-colonial critical theories.”

Edward Said's foundational *Orientalism* (1978), earlier in this chapter, to address the objectives of both Francophone and Anglophone African literature is no coincidence. The two productions are intimately tied to canonical Western models both in their problematics and linguistic referents. But just as the qualifiers do in social settings, Francophone and Anglophone, when applied to literature, often refer to works that are written in French and English but which do not originate from their respective metropolises.⁴⁹ As a result, to describe a text as Francophone or Anglophone is “to distinguish it from a “French” [or English] text and therefore to emphasize a certain difference” (Jack 17).

E- Current Trends in Francophone and Anglophone Literature:

The recent trends, both in postcolonial⁵⁰ and in Francophone studies, consist of a move away from the question of empire and imperialism into the newer paradigm of globalization which is now critics' topic of predilection. With new growth areas such as migrations, transnationalism, and diaspora (among others), the immutable center of the Western colonial empire is actually starting to shift. The discourse that has for too long opposed a hegemonic West to a subdued East is now giving way to a more ambivalent narrative as spaces, cultures and identities are in a constant process of becoming.

In “Towards a World Literature in French,” signatories simply proclaim the death of

⁴⁹ Here it should be noted that this particular definition of Francophone is most widely shared by the French. And a fairly interesting debate centers around the basis upon which the French are excluded from the definition of the term.

⁵⁰ Here I am using postcolonial interchangeably with Anglophone.

Francophone literature because of this very disappearance of the center which makes this discourse “from the margins” an oxymoron. But when we, as critics, ask who exactly the signatories in question are, from which position they are speaking, and for what ultimate motives, we realize that questions of power cannot so easily be done away with, and that globalization often hides a darker imperialist side than some critics are willing to acknowledge.

In the Anglophone world, theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall increasingly argue, and this long before their French counterparts, against the large place given to the referential colonial past. Indeed, with the concept of hybridity, Bhabha and Hall propose a much less historical reading of postcolonialism as they shift the focal point from a colonial experience to more current situation of permanent contact wherein a most relevant encounter—according to them—takes place. And finally, one thing that is common to all three disciplines (Francophone, Anglophone and postcolonial) is the growing space that female narratives are claiming; and the notion of female narratives bring up gender questions which also constitute a newer trend that this study is concerned with.

This issue of the newer spaces that linguistic communities make up will be the focus of chapter 3 where I will discuss the cultural and ideological spaces brought about by La Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Regardless through which theoretical lenses Francophone and Anglophone literatures are studied, it remains nonetheless that African authors, due to the fact that they write in English or French, languages that do not carry their cultures, are often faced with the need to filter their “africanity” through the

languages of their former oppressors, thereby producing a new medium more able to support their fictions and ideologies.

Chapter Two: Writers and their Works

A- Mariama Ba and *Une si longue lettre*

Deemed “the most deeply felt representation of the female condition in African fiction” by Abiola Irele, *Une si longue lettre* is Mariama Ba’s first novel. Ba’s fame is not measured by the number of her publications, however. Her work is not extensive. She is the author of just two novels: *Une si longue lettre* which appeared in 1979 and *Un chant écarlate* (*Scarlet Song*) which was published after her death in 1981. Both works were warmly received by the public and the publishers.

Mariama Ba was born in Dakar during colonization in 1929. She was raised by her grandparents in a traditional Muslim environment after the untimely death of her mother in Ba’s early childhood. Despite a traditional upbringing that more often than not would keep young girls away from Western schools,⁵¹ Ba was among the first of her generation to ever attend the French school. Soon, she discovered a true love and passion for language and letters and thanks to the influence of her father, a cabinet minister at the time, Ba’s passion was kept alive as she was showered with books growing up. She later went on to earn a diploma in education and, for twelve years, worked as a school teacher before she was assigned to administrative duties following a long illness.⁵² Recognized by

⁵¹Ba’s grandparents who partly helped raised her, after the death of her mother, were against her attending the French school. She started out going to a Koranic school and very much owes her Western schooling to the tenacity of her father.

⁵² What exactly Ba suffered from has not been documented. Only her overall poor health has been evoked by critics. In an interview with Alioune Touré Dia published in *Amina* magazine in 1979, Ba simply evoked

her mentors and peers as specially gifted when it comes to the mastery of the French language, Ba, throughout her life, maintained a keen relationship with literature and languages. In 1979, in a context where writing was essentially between the hands of men, Mariama Ba published *Une si longue lettre*, an epistolary novel which, in many regards, parallels Ba's own life.

Just like her protagonist in *Une si longue lettre*, Mariama Ba was married and became a mother of nine. However, contrary to Ramatoulaye, Ba did not hesitate to divorce her husband when troubles arose within their marriage. These similarities between the author's life and that of the main female character led critics to often label the novel as an autobiography. Indeed, in addition to assuming the responsibilities of caring for their children by themselves, Ramatoulaye and Ba, two school teachers, share a common passion for literature and language. Both women believe in the healing and transcendent power of words. After her separation from her husband, Obèye Diop, Ba found refuge in the act of writing. In an interview with Barbara Harell-Bond in 1979, she reiterated the personal benefits she associates with writing. She declared, "Of course, first of all, [writing] is for one's self, to see where we are at, for our own development" (398).

Une si longue lettre, the first winner of the *Noma* prize in 1981, is today one of the most widely taught African Francophone novels in the world. A detailed account of a widow's story, *Une si longue lettre* provides a vivid criticism of Senegalese society. The novel is a series of reminiscences recounted by Ramatoulaye, a school teacher who recently lost her husband to a heart attack. Very early in the novel, readers discover the

"une maladie" (a sickness) as the reason why she quit teaching.

plight of Ramatoulaye, a newly widowed woman in her fifties who had been abandoned by her late husband Modou in favour of his second wife, a 17 year-old-girl named Binetou. In an almost healing process, Ramatoulaye undertakes to write a letter to her best friend Aissatou who was by then living in the United States where she worked at the Senegalese embassy. Aissatou knew all too well what Ramatoulaye was experiencing; her own husband Mawdo married a second wife, Nabou, a girl that she and her husband helped raise. But unlike her friend, Aissatou walked away from her marriage as she was not ready to rationalize much less accept the logic of polygamy that allows Senegalese Muslim males the possibility to marry up to four wives.

Polygamy, religion and tradition then and the consequences they breed become the focal point of criticism in the novel. In Ramatoulaye's letter, we discover that she and her late husband Modou had twelve children together and that they had been married for over twenty years when he, unbeknownst to his wife, decided to go on second nuptials with her oldest daughter's classmate. In addition to Ramatoulaye's story, as the letter unfolds, we are presented with other women and their subsequent reactions to the double standard that governed the lives of men and women in Senegal at the time. Indeed, while Ramatoulaye puts up with polygamy as she tries to find a difficult balance between her Islamic faith and her purely rationale mind, Aissatou on the other hand, not afraid to deal with the stigma attached to divorce and being a single mother, decided to end her marriage with Mawdo. And between the two ends of the spectrum that Ramatoulaye and Aissatou constitute, a handful of other women and their responses to their unique stories

of abuse are also depicted. From Ramatoulaye's own daughters—Daba and Aissatou⁵³—who represent the younger, more emancipated generation, to Jacqueline, the Ivory Coast born woman who went into a deep depression after her husband repeatedly cheated on her through more traditional women such as Farmata (the *griot*), Aunt Nabou and Lady Mother-in-Law (the die-hard traditional women and custodians of traditions), *Une si longue lettre* did not depict one single homogenous response to the plight of women. And interestingly enough, the wide range of responses to the different situations at hand is often conveyed through an equally diverse linguistic style.

In the novel, Mariama Ba then puts the Senegalese society under a microscope and questions the restrictions imposed upon women based on their gender and social status. Indeed, while Ramatoulaye faces a double standard which justifies polygamy, the origins of Aissatou's miseries lie in the system of caste deeply embedded in Senegalese society; in the low social class of "goldsmith" she belongs to. In identifying religion and culture as the two major forces that shape a woman's life, Ba offers a vivid criticism of her society as she lays bare complex issues that women are confronted with in the newly independent Senegal as well as the hurdles they face claiming what should be their new roles in taking over responsibilities from the French former colonizers.

Indeed, despite the novel being published in 1979, some 19 years after Senegal gained its independence in 1960, the setting of the story as well as the events Ba captures in *Une si longue lettre* take place in the immediate aftermath of independence, at a time

⁵³ Daba is Ramatoulaye oldest daughter; she is also her father's second wife's classmate. And Aissatou was named after the other Aissatou, the addressee of the letter and Ramatoulaye's best friend.

when a new class of national elites was getting ready to assume the responsibilities of leading their newly sovereign country. This transfer of power from the French former colonizers to the newly independent Senegalese people resulted in fairly radical changes. In politics for example, Senegal witnessed the election of its first national president, namely Léopold Sédar Senghor. But political freedom however did not mean that all ties with the former colonizers were severed. French, for example, was considered the exclusive official language of the country and was used throughout the high spheres of power such as government and education. In literature, most writers used the French language as their authorial means and Mariama Ba was no exception.

In *Une si longue lettre*, Ba inscribes herself within the tradition of African writers who not only claim their pride in writing in French or English, but who also see in literary plurilingualism a way to reappropriate Western languages and forge a new medium more recognizable and less alienating to their primary local readership. These hybrid writers to whom Ba belongs have found a way to write in French or English and still manage to forcefully convey local subject matters concerned with their everyday lives. In *Une si longue lettre*, although Ba uses French as her medium of expression, the thinking process she captures does not take place in that language. Ba then, through a heterogeneous French language, positions herself as a “history-teller” as she tackles sensitive issues facing particularly women in Senegal in the wake of independence.

Indeed, in the narrator’s detailed account, Ba uses stylistic elements from the Wolof culture such as proverbs, sayings, metaphors and repetitions to give greater authenticity and a sense of place to her narrative. At times, the blend of languages reveals

itself in the way she directly translates expressions from the Wolof culture into French instead of finding more idiomatic equivalents. These “short-cuts,” as Luanga Kasanga and Mambo Kalume call the direct translations, are necessary because the French language lacks corresponding idioms. For Kasanga and Kalume, the incorporation of the Wolof language, be it verbatim Wolof words (xenisms) or plain literal translation (peregrinisms), enables Ba to preserve forcefully and accurately the Senegalese subject matter while still using French. As a consequence, Ba’s medium “is a hybrid product, containing on the one hand facts, stories, themes and even styles related to the African culture and, on the other the [French] language with its flavour, stylistic subtleties and even beliefs” (Kasanga and Kalume 49).

Ba’s use of literary plurilingualism can be seen as a double-edged sword. For a non-Senegalese audience, some passages of the novel might sound unintelligible because of the juxtaposition of Wolof and French words, if not because of the direct translation from Wolof to French without any regard whatsoever that the final version in French might constitute a problem. But, at the same time, this blend of languages enables Ba to export her culture by making her customs and language directly known to her readers. To fully understand *Une si longue lettre* then, one has to be either knowledgeable about Senegalese culture and language or show some genuine interest in the culture, in general, as sometimes meaning can be discovered only by inference and association. Ba does not always contextualize the French language; at times, she resorts to a most formal and standard use of the language. She does not accept the Western unilateral mode of interpretation; neither does she reject it totally. She rightly manages to find the middle

path. And given that *Une si longue Lettre* constitutes one of the most widely taught Francophone African novels in the world, one can safely assume that Ba did reach her goal in writing an African novel in which both the subject matter and the art of writing very much feed off each other. In her own words, when addressing “The Political Functions of Written African Literatures,” Ba contends “[Literature] must combine harmoniously and inextricably commitment and artistic values. Form is part and parcel of content. And form enhances thoughts” (414). Further, when asked about her writing style, she claims:

You see, my style, my way of writing comes from lots of influences. From authors I like to read, of course. One picks up something here and there. It is like the honey from the bee. You see the bee flitting from flower to flower, sucking out the liquid, but the honey is really the bee’s own unique product. In French, we say, “style is man.” Everyone has her or his personal style, but in this style we find some influences from previous readings. But finally, our own writing becomes different, unique, from these influences. (Harell-Bond 398)

In Mariama Ba’s case, French constitutes a foreign language and partly a vehicle of foreign culture, regardless of her excellent command of it. In *Une si longue lettre*, a novel in which she provides a realistic criticism of her society, Ba successfully achieves and displays a linguistic heterogeneity in her work; her contextualisation of the French language, the method by which she makes French cohabit with other languages and fit her traditional narrative, makes her medium cope with concepts and issues far removed from its origins. Linguistic contextualizing then, in Ba’s case, moulds the French language in

accordance with the new cultural patterns and realities of Senegal. By so doing, Ba ultimately shows her audience, both domestic and foreign, the value of her traditional culture by engaging them as active readers.

By writing a novel heterogeneous on multiple levels (oral/written, vernacular/French, standard/indigenized...), Mariama Ba, far from showing a lack of mastery of French, shows instead a deliberate hybridization and blends of languages to capture the multilingual, culturally composite experience of a Senegalese woman in the latter half of the twentieth century. In many respects, plurilingualism in *Une si longue lettre* mirrors the hybridization of the Senegalese culture which questions the value of its traditions and customs in the light of the new culture which came along with colonization. Ba's ambivalence is reflected in the stylistic devices she chooses and further confirmed by the "multiplicity of voices" ("Theorizing" 63) in the novel. While Aissatou, Daba and part of Ramatoulaye call for sweeping changes, other characters such as Aunt Nabou, Lady-Mother-in-law, Binetou, Young Nabou and Farmata perpetuate and keep traditions alive. In the process, the medium of Ba's narrative moves back and forth between different literary traditions. In *Une si longue lettre*, writing becomes a means of affirmation and self assertion, especially for women. Through the act of writing, Ramatoulaye undertakes a search for her individuality, an individuality long stifled by the weight of her traditions and customs. As George Joseph remarks in « Centralité excentrique: la maison comme non-lieu dans *Une si longue lettre* de Mariama Ba, » "ne sachant pas quel chemin mènera sûrement à la libération, Ramatoulaye ne peut compter que sur l'écriture" ("not knowing which path will

definitely lead to liberation, Ramatoulaye can only rely on writing”) (369).

Writing is important not just for Ramatoulaye, but for Ba as well. When asked about the growing place writing was taking—and often at the expense of more traditional modes of communication rooted in orality—in African literature and about her choice to write in French, Mariama Ba declares:

I believe very deeply that to reach the masses we must write. When one writes, it is for everyone. Of course, first of all, it is for one’s self, to see where we are at, for our own development...The writer records her ideas, so that the masses can read and reflect. It is vital that the masses be able to read. Therein lies the importance of our African languages. And I believe it is important to write in our national languages. But if our ideas for change are to reach outside of Africa, we must also express ourselves in international languages. In this way, we can be heard outside. We will not isolate ourselves. Even here in Senegal, Wolof is not the only language that is spoken. In every African state, there is this problem of many languages. But in French-speaking countries, we were under the same colonial rule. We communicated in the French language. Thus we must not deny the importance of this language as a means of communication with others (Harell-Bond 400).

In *Une si longue lettre*, Ba takes advantage of the possibilities the French language offers to reach a wider audience. In the next chapters, we will explore how Ba’s ambivalence, her inability to categorically side with tradition or modernity is reflected in her language. We will see in more detail how exactly literary plurilingualism operates in the novel and

more importantly how Mariama Ba manages to “write resistance,” especially female resistance in a deeply Islamic patriarchal society.

B- Cheikh Hamidou Kane and *L’Aventure ambiguë*

Cheikh Hamidou Kane was born in 1928 in Matam, Senegal. Like his protagonist Samba Diallo, Kane was raised in a traditional Muslim environment. He first attended Koranic school where he learned about his religion as well as how to recite Islamic verses by heart. At the age of ten, he joined the French school in his local town. After his graduation from primary school, Kane moved to Dakar where he did his secondary education before flying off to Paris to earn advanced degrees in law and philosophy. Upon his return to his native Senegal, Kane held important administrative and political functions in Senghor’s government. He has represented UNICEF in many sub-Saharan African countries and served on the boards of major national companies.

Though the author of an award-winning⁵⁴ novel, Kane considers himself a part-time writer. In an interview with Lise Gauvin, he declares “je ne suis écrivain qu’à titre accessoire.”⁵⁵ This statement, if anything, might be an indication of why his work is not extensive; but, just like Ba, Kane’s reputation is not measured by the number of his publications. In addition to *L’Aventure ambiguë*, he is the author of only one other novel, *Les Gardiens du temple*, published in 1996. Kane immediately experienced fame following the publication of his first novel. Not only was *L’Aventure ambiguë* hailed one of the best novels to ever come out of Africa by critics and the publishers, but it also

⁵⁴ The book was awarded the 1962 Grand Prix Littéraire de l’Afrique Noire.

made the list of the rigorously selected books for admission to The Sorbonne.

A young man's journey from the Country of the Diallobé to France's city capital in hopes of learning "how to attach wood to wood" (15), *L'Aventure ambiguë* is Cheikh Hamidou Kane's first novel. Published in 1961, just one year after Senegal won its independence from the French, Kane's work was among the first to address the clash between traditional African (Islamic) values and the ones brought along with colonization. How to reconcile African traditional ways of thinking and its customs with newer Western modes inherited from colonization, this is the burning question *L'Aventure ambiguë* asks. The book is about Samba Diallo's spiritual quest as he transitions from a very traditional Koranic education system to the Western French school and ultimately to the French metropolis in pursuit of advanced studies in philosophy. In addition to Samba Diallo's quest for identity, the book poses the bigger question of an agonizing dilemma between two opposite cultures, one of the realm of faith and belief and another highly rational and Cartesian.

Much like *Une si longue lettre*, *L'Aventure ambiguë*, though not an official autobiography, is very much inspired by Kane's own life. In an interview with Janet Patricia Little, Kane acknowledged parallels between his biography and the novel. Both Samba Diallo and Kane come from aristocratic families where Islamic culture and oral tradition play important roles in shaping people's lives. Among the plethora of interrogations the novel raises we ask: should Samba Diallo, Thierno, and the Diallobé in general, fight to maintain their traditions and culture or should they give in and embrace

⁵⁵ "I am an occasional writer" (translation mine).

the Western school with its different modes of knowing? Should the two hermeneutics even be put into opposition in the first place? These are questions Cheikh Hamidou Kane attempts to answer, throughout the book, in a highly flamboyant prose that earned *L'Aventure ambiguë* the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire in 1962. Samba Diallo's story, in many respects, is an allegory of the Senegalese people in the wake of independence. It provides an insightful look into the psychology of a colonized mind who attempts to settle oppositions within his own being. In that regard, Samba Diallo's words when addressing the madman are very telling:

Je ne suis pas un pays des Diallobé distinct, face à un occident distinct, et appréciant d'une tête froide ce que je puis lui prendre et ce qu'il faut que je lui laisse en contre partie. Je suis devenu les deux. Il n'y a pas une tête lucide entre deux termes d'un choix. Il y a une nature étrange, en détresse de n'être pas deux.
(164)⁵⁶

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Koranic and French schools are directly put in opposition with each other. The presence of these two educational systems, if anything, invalidates a probable monolingual and homogeneous environment; it attests to the linguistic diversity of the Country of the Diallobé and more generally Senegal. Indeed, long before the French introduced their language in Senegal during colonization, Arabic was the first

⁵⁴ I am not a distinct Diallobé facing a distinct Occident, and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave with it by way of counter-balance. I have become the two. There is not a clear mind deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange nature, in distress over not being two
(135).

codified medium to make its way into the country in the Middle Ages; and along with it, came Islam, a religion the majority of the people would later adopt. The large number of Muslims did not translate into a wide use of the Arabic language, however. The latter, though it has existed in writing for centuries, was by no means an easily accessible language. Indeed, in Senegal and in the Country of the Diallobé, the precepts of the Holy Koran are widely taught among the populations but the teachings do not necessarily take place in the original Arabic. More often than not, Koranic teachers, because of the unavailability of the book in local vernaculars, would interpret the Koran and translate its meaning into whatever languages their students spoke to ensure some degree of intelligibility and acquaintance with the religion. Erudition then was not dependent upon a good command of the Koran's vehicular Arabic as only a select few students ever reached the point in their education where they could understand and be understood in that language.⁵⁷ But oddly enough, a huge emphasis was put on students' ability to learn by heart the different verses of the Koran in the original Arabic.

The education students receive at the "Foyer Ardent" is indicative and very typical of how Koranic schools operate at a wider level. If we agree that Samba Diallo is the most gifted and the most intelligent of Thierno's class, we can safely assume, judging by the way he learned his tablets by heart, not necessarily understanding their contents, that Arabic is a rather hermetic language; a situation in stark contrast with other places where the language is not just restricted to religion, but is commonly used for

⁵⁷ In Senegal, people's average knowledge of Arabic for communication purposes is so minimal that the issue of language (Arabic) registers does not apply.

communication purposes. Samba Diallo and his fellow students learn how to read and write Arabic without necessarily accessing the literature written in that medium. These limitations on Arabic stand in utter opposition to the possibilities the French language would later offer.

In fact, in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, the French language opens, for the protagonist, the doors to an intelligible and demystified world. With the colonizers' language, Samba Diallo acquires a personal and unmediated relationship to knowledge as he is able not just to put words together, but also to understand their meaning. Samba Diallo's relationship to languages, Arabic and then French, is very reminiscent of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's. In *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues*, a series of interviews conducted by Lise Gauvin, Kane, just like his protagonist, is in awe before the beauty and the unique opportunities the French language provides, specially for somebody who has never had a written medium of communication. He claims:

[...] Je pouvais, sans être en présence de quelqu'un, comprendre ce qu'il pense, ce qu'il veut me dire, rien qu'en lisant ce qu'il a écrit. Cela a été une fascination. Il faut essayer de vous mettre à la place de quelqu'un qui appartient à une civilisation de l'oralité. Pour lui, il n'y avait jusque là, comme seul moyen de communication, que le langage oral ou, en tout cas, les sons et la percussion : seulement ce qu'on pouvait entendre. Cette communication par l'écriture, c'était quelque chose d'assez extraordinaire. (148)⁵⁸

⁵⁸ I could, without being in a physical presence with someone, know what he/she was thinking, what they wanted to tell me, simply by reading their works. That fascinated me. Try being in the shoes of someone

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Kane's portrayal of the clash between two distinct cultures is undercut by strong linguistic undertones. Presenting Islam as an (ongoing) cultural phenomenon within a Francophone society helps Kane avoid simplistic and occasionally faulty contrasts between French modernity and the Islamic faith. By recognizing and incorporating all these different components that made him and his hero, Kane already acknowledges a fair degree of heterogeneity. As a consequence, regardless of the sophistication of his seemingly purist medium, it is safe to argue that plurilingualism will constitute an important aspect of *L'Aventure ambiguë*. Kane manages to navigate his way around a Manichean racial opposition to capture, like Mariama Ba, a man's inner turmoil in a very culturally and linguistically composite Senegal. From direct allusions to Arabic verses to hints about his Peulh vernacular through the beauty of the French language, evidence goes against a homogeneous authorial French language. Later in this project, against the majority of critics and sometimes against Kane himself, we will present in detail how literary plurilingualism permeates *L'Aventure ambiguë* far beyond diglossic considerations. Indeed, in his interview with Gauvin, when she presumes a totally homogeneous medium and asked the reasons why he refuses to use different registers of languages or even parenthetical notes in his novel, Kane, evoking his high command of the French language as an answer, seems to agree with his interviewer's assumption. He says:

who knows nothing but oral culture. For that person, the only medium of communication was orality—or to be more precise—anything that pertained to hearing and percussions: things that could be heard. Using writing then as a way to communicate was nothing short of extraordinary (translation mine).

Je trouve que c'est une solution de facilité que de prétendre écrire dans une langue sans la maîtriser de façon correcte. Si *L'Aventure ambiguë* et maintenant *les Gardiens du temple* ont un certain retentissement, c'est parce que grâce à une certaine maîtrise de la langue, j'ai réussi à me faire comprendre mieux que d'autres qui ne maîtriseraient pas la langue de la même manière. (150)⁵⁹

If indeed much of the praise regarding *L'Aventure ambiguë* goes to the high quality of its “purist” French medium, we will show, in the chapters to come that, on occasion, literary plurilingualism is achieved independently of the authors' intentions and claims. Furthermore, we will demonstrate, through detailed textual evidence, that far from signalling a lack of mastery of the authorial French or English, indigenization and the use of various languages and registers function as a deliberate attempt by the African writers to establish a hermeneutic of resistance; in other words, literary plurilingualism, a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, participates in what belongs to a new kind of writing, a technique that is today commonly referred to as “writing resistance.”

This reminder of the introduction and place of foreign languages in the Country of the Diallobé will help us understand the heterogeneous linguistic makeup of Senegal at large. Moreover, it establishes the relationship particular ideologies have with specific

⁵⁹ I believe it is an easy way out to pretend to write in a language one does not command. If *The Ambiguous Adventure* and now *The Guardians of the Temple* have had so much success, it is because of the high level of the language. I managed to make myself understood better than others who do not necessarily master the language the way I do (translation mine).

languages. Islam, as we have already seen, is a strong component that moulds people's lives both in *L'Aventure ambiguë* and *Une si longue lettre*. If, with Mariama Ba, it is patriarchy under the auspices of Islam that is partly responsible for the plight of women, with Cheikh Hamidou Kane, the opposition between a Muslim faith and a more rational Cartesian way of thinking is mediated through language. As a consequence, Samba Diallo responds to the expectations placed on him both on the level of faith and language.

Indeed, from the opening lines of the novel, "*L'Aventure ambiguë* pose la parole comme enjeu du récit" (Gauvin and Larouche 86).⁶⁰ Kane renders in a transposed French the words of the Holy Koran initially uttered in Arabic by Samba Diallo who himself is a Diallobé and can safely be assumed to be Peulh.⁶¹ The treatment of language here in the opening scene is indicative of Kane's overall attitude throughout the novel; in the chapters to come, we will see in more detail just how transpolingualism functions in the book as well as the other mechanisms by which the other languages in the background of the authorial French can be brought to light. In agreement with Umberto Eco, because "un texte veut qu'on l'aide à fonctionner," qu'il "veut laisser au lecteur l'initiative interpretative," we will do just that and literary plurilingualism will provide us with the tools for the analysis.

⁶⁰ "At stake in *L'Aventure ambiguë* is speech" (translation mine).

⁶¹ Peulh designates both an ethnic group and the language that group speaks. Peulhs are present in Senegal, especially in the north of the country where the Country of the Diallobé is located. The Peulhs are historically known to be among the first of the Muslim faith in Senegal and they are also very much attached to their language.

C- Chinua Achebe and *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, in the Eastern part of Nigeria. He was born from devout Christian parents, the first among their generation to have converted to the colonizers' religion. He was baptised Albert Chinualumogu Achebe after Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. He would later, in college, renounce his British first name Albert in favour of Chinua, a shortening of his middle name Chinualumogu which means "May God fight for us." This combination of traditional Ibo and British names reflects an attempt by Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, Achebe's parents, to incorporate values from both cultures in their children's education. Achebe then was exposed, as early as his childhood, to different and often opposing cultures as he was sent to a Christian missionary school where he would learn about a new language and a new religion while at home and in his surroundings, the strength of his native Ibo was very much kept alive. At school, the young Achebe was very much involved in religious activities and witnessed firsthand the gradual conversion of his people to Christianity. Following brilliant studies,⁶² Achebe graduated with a Bachelor of Art from the University College of Ibadan and later went on to hold various positions ranging from broadcasting, to teaching, literary criticism and writing. Of all his activities however, writing earned him his worldwide recognition. He was a prolific and versatile author who has had success in a variety of genres including poetry, essays, short stories and novels.

⁶² He wrote his first unpublished short story called "Chike's School Days" for one of his school activities when he was in primary school.

Winner of the International Booker Prize in 2007 and multiple time but unsuccessful nominee for the Nobel Prize, Chinua Achebe is, by many accounts, considered the most famous Anglophone writer from Africa.⁶³ Both his subject matters and the language he uses to write about them have been topics of major interest for his readers and critics. Typically, the encounter between African tradition and the Western culture that came along with colonization has been his major topic of predilection. This indeed is the case with his first novel *Things Fall Apart*, which he published in 1958, some two years before Nigeria gained its independence from the British in 1960. Achebe sadly passed away from a short illness on March 21, 2013 in Boston, Massachusetts.

By Anthony Kwame Appiah's accounts, *Things Fall Apart* constitutes the archetypal modern African novel. The book has been translated into fifty languages with over eight million copies sold around the world; this, according to Nahem Yousaf,⁶⁴ makes of Achebe the most translated African writer ever, and his first novel the most widely taught African fiction. The title was inspired by a line from a poem by William Butler Yeats entitled "The Second Coming." Though published in 1958, the setting of *Things Fall Apart* takes place around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, at an unspecified time, but undoubtedly at a period where colonization was in full swing in Nigeria. The novel precisely chronicles the life of Okonkwo, a local Ibo leader, as he encounters a new civilization brought about by colonization.

A well-to-do and strong warrior by all accounts, Okonkwo is the leader of his

⁶³ Despite his recent passing, this distinction will, in all likelihood, still hold strong for a long time to come.

⁶⁴Yousaf, Nahem (2003). *Chinua Achebe*. Tavistock: Northcote House.

village of Umuofia, a fictional group of nine villages in the midst of Ibo culture in Nigeria. Haunted by the weak image of his father, Unoka, whom he thinks of as lazy and effeminate, Okonkwo worked hard to gain a prestigious social status for himself. Too afraid to show any signs of weaknesses and overeager to always prove his virility, Okonkwo goes against the village elders' advice not to partake in the sacrificing of a young boy, a war trophy, who had been living with him and his family for three years. His disregard of the elders would be but the first step towards a series of misfortunes and an ultimate killing that would result in his forced exile for seven years away from Umuofia to ease the wrath of the gods. Upon his return to his land, Okonkwo finds Umuofia very different, almost unrecognizable. Indeed, during his time in exile, the colonizers had made their way into the village and along with them they brought a new religion, Christianity, to which many of Okonkwo's fellow countrymen had converted. As time went by, the strength of religion came to be intertwined with a growing new political order which resulted in an insidious transfer of power from the autochthones to the White men. Finally, in an attempt to reclaim control of their native land from the colonizers, Okonkwo and his countrymen rebelled against the White government; but faced with the stark realization that he was fighting for a lost cause because of a lack of will from his people, Okonkwo, ultimately hangs himself in order never to be at the mercy of the White men.

Of equal if not greater importance to the subject matter treated in *Things Fall Apart*, is the language in which the text is written. While his chronicling of the encounter between the British and the Ibo and the ensuing consequences that arose from the event is

important, as it is history told from the perspective of the colonized, Achebe's authorial language has recently been the object of even more studies than the subject matter itself. Indeed in 1958, it was not popular to incorporate characteristics of oral tradition into a work in print, especially works that were written in English. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe gives an account of colonization from his Ibo tribe's perspective. Prior to this novel, the events of colonization and their aftermath were almost exclusively told from the White men's perspective that often reinforced stereotypes about Africa as a locus of primitivism; a depiction of Africa as a place where people are devoid of a sense of history or culture. And it is in this context that both the subject matter and the original linguistic medium of *Thing Fall Apart* are to be understood.

Indeed, the novelty of the book does not just lie in the fact that Achebe reinscribes the African as a subject with a distinct history and set of values, it also rests in the way he painstakingly incorporates characteristics of his Ibo culture and language into his English medium; a defiant act full of symbolisms that linguistic purists might have considered a desecration of the English language. Understanding that language can act as a barrier between two cultures, and having not much of a choice but to write his Ibo experience of colonization in the colonizer's language, it is not surprising that Achebe adapted the English language to suit his narrative and purpose. More so than Mariama Ba in *Une si longue lettre*, any informed reader of *Things Fall Apart* would have either to have a strong knowledge of the Ibo culture and language or be very committed and active in the reading process in order to fully understand the book.

Recognizing the limits of the English language to convey accurately all the weight

of his (Ibo) African culture, Achebe writes in *The African Writer and the English Language*:

For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas...I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence. (qtd in Ogbaa 193)

The 1962 conference on African literature in English language held at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, marked a turning point in the discussion of African literature. For the first time indeed, major writers and critics from the continent met and formally discussed the influence of colonialism on the African writer, and more specifically the dilemma with regard to the language of choice in writing. While some critics like Ngũgi wa Thiong'o advocated then and now a return to local vernaculars and an abandonment of colonizers' languages, others not only claim these Western languages as their own, but even see in plurilingualism a hermeneutic of resistance in the African novel, whether it be Francophone or Anglophone. From the nativist Ngũgi wa Thiong'o to more conciliant critics like Chinua Achebe, the positions on the authorial language of African writers are diverse. In "The Use of Indegenized Forms of English in Ngũgi's *Devil on the Cross: A Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Analysis*," Luanga Kasanga and

Mambo Kalume write:

The discussion of African literature is almost inseparable from the language issue. The latter usually involves both the choice of the language to use in the literary works and how the language is actually used: (i) in its pure, standard form, and, therefore, the sole medium, (ii) in a style altered by translation; or (iii) in a hybrid style in which forms of a different language are incorporated into the main code used in the piece of writing. (43)

With the birth of an African literature, and later the process of independence, the issue of the authorial medium of writers only gained more heat. Could African writers effectively represent a personal or cultural identity through a language that is not their own, through a medium that is not entirely characteristic of their culture?

Chinua Achebe's answer to this question is an emphatic yes. Indeed, unlike Ngũgĩ who advocates a rejection of the colonizers' languages, Achebe made the deliberate choice to write in English, convinced as he was that English, or an "African English," could actually carry his African experience. In his essay "What Has Literature Got to Do With It?" Achebe however did warn against writers who emulate the trends of European literature down to the register of language Western authors use. While the English language can carry a writer's experience, Achebe remarked that the author's native attributes, in particular the various vernaculars in their multilingual environment, should find their way into the fictions, instead of ignored. In "The Novelist as Teacher," he chronicles his dismay before African writers who strive to show no signs of their native culture or language in their work.

Achebe strongly believed in the presence of local languages in African fictions. However, if we totally agree with him that it is a necessity for local vernaculars to be incorporated in fictions, then one cannot help but wonder about fictions written by African writers with subject matters from the continent and yet composed in a mostly standard Western language. What about *L'Aventure ambiguë* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane? Would Kane's text still qualify as an African fiction despite minimal direct references to local vernaculars? And beyond the particular case of Kane's fiction, I ask: Is indigenization an absolute requirement for any "true" African fiction written in European language? If yes, then can we talk about an African literary exception that has to incorporate traces of an author's native language into their fictions?⁶⁵ Plurilingualism, I contend, will bring some tentative answers to all these questions. Studying plurilingualism in a text will help uncover languages (vernaculars, different registers of language among others) that a reader who is not well informed might otherwise miss.

D- Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Nervous Conditions*

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Mutoko, Rhodesia in 1959, at a time when her country was still under British colonization. Born among the Shona ethnic group, Dangarembga however, unlike our three other authors in this thesis, claims English as her first language. Indeed, when her parents travelled to England in pursuit of higher education two years after she was born, Dangarembga moved with her family, and for

⁶⁵This thesis is not concerned with what exactly constitutes African literature. For an extensive discussion on the question, refer to the conference held in Nairobi regarding African literature.

five years, lived in England where she attended primary school. Back in the former Southern Rhodesia, she was enrolled in a mission school and then attended a local American convent school where she completed her secondary education. As a consequence of having received an education exclusively in English, Dangarembga lost most of her native Shona.⁶⁶ In 1977 she left her hometown a second time for Cambridge to study medicine. This second journey to England however would be short lived as a homesick and alienated Dangarembga would abandon her hopes of becoming a medical doctor to rejoin the soon-to-be independent Zimbabwe in 1980. Back in her hometown, she enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe where she studied psychology.

It is during her University years in Zimbabwe that Dangarembga further explored her early childhood writing abilities. She joined the University Drama Club for which she wrote three plays: *She No Longer Weeps*, *The Lost of the Soil*, and *The Third One*. After graduation, Dangarembga ended a brief teaching career to better focus on writing. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, *Talking with African Writers*, Dangarembga asserts “The writers in Zimbabwe were also [like the characters in the literature they produced] basically men at the time. And so I really didn’t see that the situation would be remedied unless some women sat down and wrote something” (qtd in George and Scott 309). Dangarembga was then determined to fill the gender gap that characterized the literary

⁶⁶Shona is both an ethnic group and the language that group speaks. In 1965, when Dangarembga came back home with the rest of her family, she relearnt her native language, Shona. She also started reading African (American) literature, which is a sharp contrast from the English Classics she was used to reading growing up.

scene in Zimbabwe at the time; she was the first Zimbabwean woman to ever be published in English. A very versatile author, Dangarembga has tried her hand at different genres from short stories, to plays and novels. In 1988, at the age of twenty five, she published her first novel *Nervous Conditions* which won the African section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize; a recognition that would catapult Dangarembga to the forefront of the African literary scene. After her success with *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga has been studying film productions in Berlin. More recently, some eighteen years after her first novel, she published a sequel entitled *The Book of Not* in 2006. Despite her varied aesthetic interests, it is the novel and particularly *Nervous Conditions* that has gained Dangarembga worldwide critical acclaim.

Simple coincidence or not, *Nervous Conditions*, just like the other three novels selected for this thesis, is in many respects considered an autobiographical fiction. The book is loosely based on events from Dangarembga's own childhood. The story recounts the lives of five women: Nyasha and Tambudzai—the two main protagonists—and their mothers and aunts who struggle just to exist and to find their place in a very patriarchal world that is still experiencing colonization.

Tambu, a young girl from rural Umtali who was accustomed to typical household duties, gets to fulfill a lifelong dream of going to school after her older and only brother dies and she becomes the evident and unique option left for her parents to send to school. At her uncle Babamukuru's house, Tambu shares a room with her cousin Nyasha who had spent her formative years in England while her parents were pursuing higher education. Because of the differences in their educations, the two girls quickly come to

the realization of the big gap that exists between European and African cultures, especially when it comes to the place and role of women. Indeed, as we see the struggles Nyasha is going through, trying to be and assert herself in a patriarchal environment that does not have much room for female agency, Dangarembga, through the eyes of her main female characters, addresses the larger ongoing problems that colonization by another country continues to constitute for the colonized subject. Unlike other traditional feminist novels, Dangarembga manages to interweave the “continuing struggle over the word” (qtd in Gorle 179) at the heart of power and gender politics. By adopting an unsentimental voice to talk about the dilemmas a formal schooling in the colonizer’s language bring to a traditional Shona culture, Dangarembga provides a vivid and realistic account of the tensions of “the prices that liberation through biculturalism demands” (Gorle 180). By acknowledging a plurality of voices and a wide range of coping mechanisms through her female characters, Dangarembga manages to capture the correlation between cultural power and linguistic hegemony. Moreover, she astutely avoids essentialism by not providing one single unified response to the fluidity of the language-power question. Language in *Nervous Conditions* is then seen as a tool to mediate and navigate the complex and often diversified reactions to colonial and patriarchal domination.

Indeed, Tambu has to navigate her way through two radical and opposing views vis-a-vis the presence of the English. While her mother, Ma’Shingayi, one of the five women who have had the least contact with the English school and the English language shows a total distrust of anything “English” as she believes it has killed her older son Nhamo and “will kill them all if they are not careful” (202), Nyasha, on the other hand, a

young girl who has been steeped in the English culture and language to the extent she has lost most of her native Shona, struggles head on with the deep-seated contradictions of living in a traditional patriarchal society with a worldview that has been mostly fostered by the West, by the British. By depicting a Tambu who, at first, merely saw in her mother “no more than a piece of scenery to be maintained...an obstacle in the path of [her] emancipation” (58), Dangarembga realistically addresses a side of English culture and language that can be pervasive and often lead to destruction as is the case with Nyasha. Tambu gradually come to realize that far from being an innocent tool for emancipation and social ascension, the English language and culture can and often do clash with her native culture to the point that it might “mak[e] a mockery of the people [she] belong[s] to and plac[e] doubts on [her] legitimate existence in this world” (163). In *Nervous Conditions*, and particularly with Nyasha, Dangarembga presents cultural alienation in terms of linguistic deracination. The English language does not just replace Shona for Nyasha; it supplants her native culture and outlook on life with a hybrid one and as a consequence, she feels out of place and cannot be accommodated in her patriarchal native culture. As Gilian Gorle accurately observes, Nyasha “is caught in a double bind, trapped by both language and gender” (188). Tambu, on the other hand, because of her plurilingual, therefore culturally composite nature, goes through a much less destructive path in her journey towards self-discovery.

Nervous Conditions then, in the context of postcolonial African literature, deals with an aspect that has for the longest time been neglected; that is the inscription of the female—young or older—as a worthy subject of study. As Alice Walker remarks in her

assessment of the novel, “it introduces quite a new voice that in its self-assurance, sounds, at times, very old. As if the African sisters, mothers and cousins of antiquity were, at last, beginning to reassert themselves in these perilous times and to speak. It is an expression of liberation not to be missed” (qtd in George and Scott 309). But of equal interest to the topic Dangarembga tackles in her novel is her use of literary plurilingualism to mirror the characters’ eclectic reactions to cultural and linguistic domination brought about by colonization. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga investigates the relationship between language, power and gender as the Rhodesia of the 1960’s and 1970’s⁶⁷ was not only informed by colonization, but also by strong gender inequalities rooted in a deeply patriarchal society.

In the novel, cultural hegemony and gender alienation are presented in linguistic terms. By refusing to squarely side with either English or Shona, Dangarembga manages to capture the tensions and ambiguities that the encounter of two competing languages and cultures generates. By adopting an egalitarian approach towards the diversity of languages and literary traditions, an approach I here call plurilingualism, I will let the text speak. The analysis I propose here departs from more traditional avenues that have continuously sought to establish the authenticity of the African novel.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga deals with the complexities of colonization not simply in terms of colours, but mostly in terms of language. Literary plurilingualism is used by the author as a means to articulate her ambivalence towards the hybrid,

⁶⁷ Remember that the opening page of the novel sets the plot in 1968, when Nhamo died (Tambu was then 13years old).

culturally composite situation of the Shona people that came as a result of colonization. By acknowledging and subscribing to a wide range of languages and literary traditions, Dangarembga demonstrates that she does not adhere to a facile dichotomy whereby only the alienated speak the language of the Other. It is true that Nyasha, her brother and even Nhamo's disconnect vis-a-vis their culture is conveyed through a mastery of English at the expense of their native Shona. However not everyone who masters the colonizer's language forgets Shona much less the culture associated with it. Inversely, not just native people are exposed to a foreign language, missionaries are too. By Tambu's own account, some of the missionaries liked to speak Shona more than they did English: "the missionaries, the strange ones, liked to speak Shona much more than they liked to speak English. And when you, wanting to practise your English, spoke to them in English, they always answered in Shona" (106). In *Nervous Conditions*, resistance is articulated in terms of alternatives rather than opposition. Just as there are other languages worth uncovering underneath the authorial English, their presence does point to alternate ideologies and thought worlds that are different from the immediate British one.

In the next two chapters, I will study in detail what those other languages are and how they participate in the negotiation between tradition, emancipation and self-assertion.

Chapter Three: The Cultural Spaces of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth

Ma patrie, c'est la langue française

(Albert Camus)⁶⁸

Today, La Francophonie and The Commonwealth constitute two international institutions each of which gathers people and countries from around the world. Both organizations have language as unifying elements⁶⁹ and state membership in both institutions seems to take place along the same lines as the former French and British empires. In actuality, neither La Francophonie nor The Commonwealth can thoroughly be understood without a historical reading of the (hi)stories of France and Great Britain and their respective colonial expansion. The geographical contours of both institutions, in many respects, espouse the limits of the French and British Empires respectively; and the former colonial powers—France and Britain—each plays a paramount role in the life of the present-day institutions. If The Commonwealth has the Queen of England as its sovereign in addition to the recognition of the English language as the language of the institution, La Francophonie does not just have the French language as its sine qua non condition of entry; it also strives to promote a collective Francophone identity which too often has been considered interchangeable with a (Franco-) French culture. Today, just as it was the case under colonization, accusations of linguistic and cultural hegemony

⁶⁸ My homeland is the French language (translation mine).

⁶⁹ In both institutions, the primary criterion for state membership is the use of French and English.

permeate the lives of the two institutions. For these reasons, a quick look back at the evolution of the treatment of language both during and after the colonial expansion of the French and English empires in Africa is necessary to accurately set the tone for the discussion of plurilingualism in the Francophone and Anglophone African novel. Indeed, as Edward Said once claimed in *Orientalism*, “Culture and histories cannot seriously be understood without [...] their configurations of power being studied” (5).

Although they were set up at different times in history,⁷⁰ the origins of the two organizations are in many respects similar. Both institutions are born from the process of colonization and are made viable largely by the independence of formerly colonized countries which today constitute the majority of member states in each structure. In addition, both organizations, though centered around a unifying language (French and English) are nonetheless made of varied cultural, linguistic, religious or even political backgrounds. Both institutions claim to be international networks that actually distance themselves from the colonial experiences that inform their origins. They both define themselves as spaces where heterogeneous countries meet depending on cultural and political choices in spite of persisting claims of linguistic imperialism.⁷¹

⁷⁰ La Francophonie is celebrated the 20th March of every year in remembrance of the foundational treaty (proclaiming the ACCT: Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique) signed in Niamey, Niger, in 1970. However, the OIF itself was founded in 1986. As far as the Commonwealth is concerned, the organization was formalized in 1931 with the statute of Westminster.

⁷¹ Both institutions promote a particular language (French and English) despite the linguistic pluralism which characterizes them. Multiple languages are used by members from both organizations; yet only French and English are used within the institutions.

From a chronological point of view, The Commonwealth (1931) was known on the international scene well before La Francophonie. The Commonwealth has existed in varying forms since the 1870's and has transitioned, both in its internal organization and its naming, from a colonial gathering into a more independent association of free states.⁷² Just like other organizations for which it paved the way,⁷³ The Commonwealth is a language-based structure. However, unlike La Francophonie, The Commonwealth does not have an open mandate or mission to promote the English language and culture around the world.

La Francophonie, inversely, appeared on the international scene decades after The Commonwealth first did (1970). It is an organization that pleads allegiance to the French language and culture as well as to the humanistic values associated with it. And partly because of that, and because of the tremendous role France plays in the life of the organization, discussions of La Francophonie more forcefully raise the bigger question of a supposed (or real) alienation through language. Indeed, contrary to its counterpart which can roughly be defined as a gathering of actual (though not limited to) former British colonies and territories, defining La Francophonie is in fact a more difficult undertaking. The contours of the organization tend to homogenize eclectic spaces—geographical, linguistic, institutional and even ideological—by only taking a common denominator into account: a shared French language and culture. Through La Francophonie, or more

⁷² I will elaborate on this in the last section of the chapter.

⁷³ Here I have in mind, among other organizations, La Francophonie, The Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and The Organization of Iberian-American States.

specifically, through a shared French (or maybe Francophone?) heritage, a uniform, homogeneous collective identity is indeed proclaimed.⁷⁴

As a matter of fact, studying the questions of enunciation and plurilingualism within La Francophonie and The Commonwealth not only allows for a revisiting of the origins of the two institutions as well as their competing interests, but it also calls for a more complex problematization of the notion of empire and borders to ultimately bring to light how the notions of physical boundaries, when discussing such concepts as cultural, gendered and linguistic identities, can be fluid phenomena. As I have shown in the previous chapter, both the adjectives Francophone and Anglophone refer to things respectively French and English and yet from non-metropolitan origins. In the domain of literature particularly, Francophone and Anglophone literatures—considered by some critics as marginal because existing essentially in relation to main French and British literatures—question and challenge, through the medium of the written word, hegemonic and ideological undertones that often underlie the histories of the two organizations. My analysis looks at the complicated relationships to language in African Francophone and Anglophone literature by interrogating their different modes of expressions ultimately to uncover equally complicated relationships of the African Europhone self through

⁷⁴ Just exactly how homogeneous the Francophone identity is depends on who the question is addressed to. Brian Weinstein did an extensive analysis profiling people on the different sides of the debate. “In Francophonie: a Language-Based Organization in World Politics,” he identifies French nationals as well as elites from former colonies (among others) as the believers in a genuine homogeneous collective identity carried through the organization. For more detailed information, see the article in question.

linguistic pluralism.

A- La Francophonie: Origins, Definitions and Spaces

1) A Linguistic Community and More

By many accounts, “La Francophonie” is a somewhat hackneyed term. Back in 1977, Jean Marc Léger, in fact, contended: “vocabulaire au bonheur éminemment discutable, la francophonie a quelque chose d’une version contemporaine de l’auberge espagnole, chacun y trouve ou croit y trouver ce qu’il y a apporté” (qtd in Deniau 11).⁷⁵ The ambiguity or porosity of the concept is commensurate with its many definitions which often fail to harmonize. La Francophonie indeed can be defined on linguistic, geographical, institutional and even ideological grounds. Though it makes the shine and spread of the French language and culture worldwide its main mission,⁷⁶ the institution nonetheless claims to be an advocate of cultural diversity through which a collective “Francophone” identity is proclaimed. This very notion of universalism, when read into the definition of La Francophonie, uncannily reminds of the humanistic investment of the French language during colonization. For the French, their language indeed is more than a mere communication tool; it is endowed with values and virtues that few—if any at all—other languages have. As early as 1783, in *Discours sur l’universalité de la langue*

⁷⁵ “A highly debatable terminology, Francophonie is somewhat reminiscent of the Spanish Inn where everybody can find, or at least believe they can find what they brought”—Translation mine.

⁷⁶ The OIF proudly describes its members as those who have the French language in common, “le français en partage.”

française, Antoine Rivarol eloquently spoke about the characteristics of the French language; he proclaimed; “Ce qui n’est pas clair, n’est pas français; ce qui n’est pas clair est encore anglais, italien, grec ou latin.”⁷⁷ This conception of the French language as inherently “superior”—even in relation to other Western languages—will be carried into the newly linguistic space that La Francophonie constitutes. Regardless of the other languages in existence in the many countries that make up the institution, only French is in fact used and promoted.

As argued in the previous chapter, writers in the Francophone world, unlike their Anglophone counterparts, rarely debate the pertinence of choosing French as their authorial language. Even when such concepts as Négritude or Créolité are brought forth, countries and people members of La Francophonie all plead allegiance to the French language; and in former French colonies, the French language often constitutes an official language—if not the only official language—at the expense of other local vernaculars. This recognition and promotion of French in a space where multiple other languages are used highlights the big dilemma of the institution; how can an organization genuinely claim to celebrate diversity at the same time that it makes the acknowledgment of one single language (and culture), among many others, its *sine qua non* condition of entry? Is La Francophonie an authentic space that celebrates cultural diversity or is the belief in plurality in the institution a mere “intellectual utopia” as Olivier Milhaud argues?

To answer these questions, we have to pay even closer attention to the

⁷⁷ What is not clear is not the French. What is not clear is rather English, Italian, Greek or Latin (translation mine).

significance of the adjective “Francophone.” In fact, if in the expression “Francophone Literature” Francophone often means productions written in French and yet different from that of the French metropolis, the qualifier Francophone, derived from the concept of Francophonie on the other hand, defines a shared, much broader heterogeneous heritage that only needs to be about or expressed in French. According to Milhaud, Francophone signifies a “place of cultural universality through linguistic diversity;” an understanding of the attribute, to say the least, different from that of Forsdick and Murphy, who instead, advance the following:

the use of the epithet ‘Francophone’ itself—in phrases such as ‘littérature francophone’ [Francophone literature], referring to all literatures written in French except that produced in France itself--suggests a neo-colonial segregation and a hierarchization of cultures that perpetuates the binary divide on which, despite the rhetoric of a ‘civilizing mission,’ colonization depended for its expansion and consolidation. (3)

There actually exists a multiplicity of understandings for the qualifier “Francophone” and consequently equally various perceptions of Francophonie that are not necessarily tied to its root adjective. Today, over fifty years after most African countries gained their independence, questions about the true nature of the concept and of relationships between France and the countries that once made up its empire are still relevant. With “la Françafrique,” a reality that bears witness to the “particular” close ties that still unite the former colonizing power to its then colonies, a major interrogation regarding La Francophonie, an organization in many ways reminiscent of that historical

past, is the conservation and maintenance of a “French empire” in the wake of decolonization.⁷⁸

This linguistic hegemony of the French language and culture will however be challenged by political, cultural or even literary personalities within the institution. From Lucien Bouchard⁷⁹ to Leopold Sedar Senghor,⁸⁰ dissonant voices were raised to protest a monoglossic, Franco-French understanding of La Francophonie as a space where only the French language and culture are given visibility and allowed to flourish. Indeed, in the light of the differential treatment between French and local vernaculars in former French colonies,⁸¹ some critics saw and continue to see in La Francophonie, especially in the

⁷⁸ Depending on which specific aspect of the organization one focuses on, and who gets asked the question, La Francophonie is defined as a Franco-French hegemonic space or a witty space of genuine diversity where people come together, not on the basis of class, or economic riches, but rather on the grounds of a shared language and shared humanistic values. If anything, this exercise allows the study to firmly ground the analysis in history as ahistorical and decontextualized readings are some of the major accusations that have often been levelled against particular studies on La Francophonie.

⁷⁹ Lucien Bouchard was the Quebec Premier from 1996 to 2001. During the 1999 summit of La Francophonie held in Moncton, New Brunswick, he stressed that the organization should and ought to be a multicultural space wherein all the different cultures that make up the institution will be allowed to flourish. For the first time in the life of the organization the notion of “diversité culturelle” (cultural diversity) was brought forth, a concept Bouchard defined as “l’expression de l’identité des peuples” (the expression of people’s identities).

⁸⁰ Long before Bouchard, Leopold Senghor talked about “le dialogue des cultures” (the dialogue of cultures).

⁸¹ The French language policies in their former colonies left no room for expression in local vernaculars in

allegiance to the French language, another outlet for France's domination, yet another avatar of colonization.

2) A Politically-Loaded Concept

Even though the official ground works of the organization were laid only in 1969 by personalities who did not originate from the French metropolis,⁸² a quick look back at history actually brings to light the existence of prior venues where similar missions and objectives to that of La Francophonie were already brought forth.⁸³ Indeed, before the independence of the majority of its former colonies in the 1960's, regardless of the rhetoric which insists on France's initial disapproval of La Francophonie, critics did not fail to properly account for the uncanny coincidences between the evolution of the term and France's wish to gain greater visibility and power on the international scene. At a time when major political changes were taking place in the world,⁸⁴ France particularly, a

official spaces. For more information, cf chapter 2.

⁸² See Brian Weinstein's article for an analysis of how France, unofficially, supported the background talks that led up to the actual organization. And for a detailed report on the major chronological events in the life of the organization, see this website: <http://www.francophonie.org/Chronology.html>.

⁸³ In 1946 the French Union was created under the Fourth Republic, as a political entity aimed at replacing the French Empire. Later in 1958, under General de Gaulles, The French Community was born, an attempt to still keep emancipated former colonies under the rule of France. That coalition however fell apart as most, if not all, of the French colonies, at least in Africa, acceded to their independence the year of 1960.

⁸⁴ Here I have in mind development all over Eastern Europe, not to mention changes that were going in Africa as well. In the words of Gabrielle Parker, "[...] Francophonie's further redefinition in the 1990's coincides, politically, with a readjustment of influences at global level, with the fall of the Soviet Empire,

country which presided over one of the largest colonial empires, only second to Britain, and then in a state of decline regarding its global influence,⁸⁵ saw in La Francophonie a unique stage whereby it could make its voice heard louder across the world. By channelling its voice through La Francophonie, France indeed makes sure it has a stronger footing worldwide and that it is better geared to fight a political Anglo-American hegemony, but also—and not the least important—that it can counter and limit the growing influence of the English language and its “negative effects” on the lustre and prestige of the French language.

La Francophonie, as a consequence, has been looked at as a loaded concept whereby France seeks to further and sustain its linguistic and political presence on the international scene. However, interestingly enough, as noted earlier on, France itself, at least in its official discourse, was against the creation of La Francophonie in the first place; the ground works of the “concrete” institution were laid by personalities outside of the Hexagon. What Reclus thought of in abstract terms, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Habib Bourguiba and Hamani Diori turned into a more palatable organization; an organization however still carrying the “lofty” goal of spreading and sustaining the French language and culture worldwide.

From discussions regarding its postcolonial nature to the exclusive role and place of the French language in the life of the institution through the oversight of the French Academy—which filters and vigorously regulates the language often according to

the reunification of Germany, and the new “scramble” for Africa triggered by the [new] world order” (93).

⁸⁵ See Weinstein’s article for more details on France’s dwindling power on the international scene.

Franco-French standards mainly—La Francophonie is often viewed by critics as an organization that essentially exists to serve and further France’s domination.⁸⁶ As a consequence, a lot of ink has been spilled in attempts not only to define the term, but also to address the different spaces the evocation of the concept brings about. For many critics from the Hexagon, La Francophonie is an organization with absolutely no ties to the history of the French empire. This strong will to dissociate France’s imperial past from any aspect of La Francophonie echoes what Henri Boussi terms the “Vichy syndrome” which he defines as an “active suppression of colonial memory” (qtd in Forsdisck and Murphy, 2). This position however, short of historical amnesia, can hardly be argued convincingly. Everything in La Francophonie—from the origins of the word, to the primordial role played by France in the life of the organization—points back to the spread of the French Empire and the subsequent independence of its then colonies. The adjective Francophone is not just understood as a linguistic and a geographical community; but also as a community which uncannily resembles that of the lost French empire.⁸⁷

The parallels between La Francophonie and France’s imperialism and cultural domination during colonization dim the lights on the definition of the organization as a

⁸⁶ Claims of La Francophonie furthering France domination do not necessarily come out of a vacuum. France indeed controls among other things: the finances of the organization as well as the Académie Française which oversees usage of the French language that all member countries are supposed to share.

⁸⁷ With the exceptions of Algeria (who never was a member) and Rwanda and Burundi who just left the organization (Rwanda later joined the Commonwealth in 2009), almost all former colonies—now independent states—are members of La Francophonie. The organization is not limited to the countries that once made up France’s empire, but it includes the majority of them.

linguistic community. More often than not, the debate surrounding La Francophonie centers around more abstract and more ideological issues. Xavier Deniau, as a matter of fact, observes that in any serious discussion of La Francophonie, “la simple constatation linguistique s’efface au profit de sens plus diffus peut être, mais également plus philosophiques”⁸⁸ (14). Just how elusive the concept can be is best articulated in the words of Habib Bourguiba, one of the official founding fathers of the International Organisation of la Francophonie. Bourguiba indeed, speaking about the humanistic values of the French language—the backbone of the organization—places the institution on an ahistorical, timeless, even ubiquitous level. He contended “[La Francophonie] is situated beyond politics or geography—its criteria are above all philosophical, involving the great ideals of 1789 and the aspirations of humanity to freedom, dialogue and mutual support” (qtd in Salhi 3). This point of view, if anything, speaks to the difficulty of appropriately and meaningfully containing the term.

B- Francophonie and Francophone Literature

1) Contesting a “French” Hegemony

With the mission of La Francophonie to spread the influence of the French language and culture beyond France’s hexagonal limits, a newer configuration of the organization started to take shape; an understanding of the concept that calls for a

⁸⁸ The simple linguistic connotation gives way to perhaps more diffuse, but also more philosophical meanings (translation mine).

rethinking of the pre-established “virtual”⁸⁹ linguistic community as the new borders of the French Empire following colonization would delineate the geographical “boundaries” of the organization. Interestingly enough, mapping these two connotations—linguistic and geographical—would turn out to be a nearly-impossible task.⁹⁰ Indeed, the historic limits of the then French Empire, which, in the wake of colonization made the greatest contribution yet⁹¹ to what is now commonly referred to as La Francophonie, did not necessarily coincide with the linguistic cartography of the French language as conceptualized by Reclus. From South America to Eastern Europe, the French language extended well beyond the confines of France’s domination; a situation which led critics, Francophone critics particularly, to question the attraction of the French language and culture around the world. Despite the rhetorical goal of La Francophonie to promote diversity,⁹² the organization, by all actual standards, appears as a vehicular tool in the promotion of a Franco-French culture.⁹³ This focus on France’s interests is further

⁸⁹ Indeed, when Reclus coined the term Francophonie back in 1884, no geographical boundaries were associated then with the definition of the term.

⁹⁰ In its linguistic sense, La Francophonie regroups all countries where French is used as an official or simply as a vehicular language. The case of Algeria, a country that used to be part of the French empire and yet not a member of La Francophonie is often brought up to highlight the difficulty of mapping the different areas of the institution.

⁹¹ Indeed, the majority of French speakers are to be found in Francophone Africa even though most of them do not claim the French language as their mother tongue.

⁹² We remember concepts like Bouchard’s “diversité culturelle” or Senghor’s “dialogue des cultures.”

⁹³ See Réda Bensmaïa and Alyson Waters in their article entitled “Francophonie” where they discuss how,

illustrated with the presence of the French Academy determining acceptable standards of grammar, vocabulary as well as registers of languages. Traditionally—prior to the newfound interest in Francophone literature—registers of French outside the ones spoken in the Hexagon were dismissed from any serious study of the French language.⁹⁴ This linguistic hegemony, though at first readily accepted by the colonized,⁹⁵ would increasingly become a topic of controversy, especially in the years after decolonization.

2) Francophone Authors' "Surconscience Linguistique"

By definition, a Francophone author uses the French language as his/her medium of written expression. Contrary to metropolitan French authors, Francophones usually do not speak French as their only—or even first—language. More often than not, they evolve in environments where multiple languages are used. Their choice of French is motivated by more than simply linguistic reasons; it is also a political choice. By writing in French,

in the academic world, up to the late 1980's French literature was unambiguously understood to mean the exclusive study of texts and authors from the Hexagon.

⁹⁴ Here a cautionary note is called for as one should also be reminded that in the Hexagon, contrary to what is officially portrayed, different dialects and registers are actually in use in France itself. For more information, see Heather William's article entitled "'Séparisisme', or internal colonialism." And on the variations of the Hexagonal register, I particularly have in mind differences in the French spoken in Quebec and Africa.

⁹⁵ In Senegal for example, there was the infamous "symbole" that, to an extent, symbolized how deeply the colonized internalized the superiority of the French language. Traditionally, the "symbole" was a piece of wood or a bone out of which a chain meant to symbolize shame was made and passed around to anybody who was caught speaking a language other than French in the school premises.

Francophone authors make sure they reach a wider audience well beyond the confines of the communities where their local vernaculars are spoken. This context which requires the Francophone author, a person with plurilingual abilities, to express him/herself in French mainly, creates a situation where he/she becomes particularly aware of the many languages in his/her environment; a condition Lise Gauvin terms “surconscience linguistique.”

With globalization, migration, hybridity and multiculturalism as heightened realities, the compartmentalisation of languages according to social prestige which dictated diglossia⁹⁶ becomes less and less relevant, even in former French colonies. Various languages cohabit not only in the social (multilingual) setting where Francophone authors evolve, but in literature as well. For Francophone authors, writing in French does not obliterate the reality of all the other languages they speak. More often than not, they resort to various mechanisms whereby to take charge of the language issue in their works. From indigenizing the authorial French to incorporating local xenisms through allusions to oral literature, the strategies of detours are plenty in Francophone texts as French-speaking authors manage their “surconscience linguistique.” With Francophone authors, what was once deemed a desecration of French is now cultivated and even celebrated as a sign of strength, diversity and identity. These features of plurilingualism are indeed used to account for the true heterogeneous nature of the novel in general, and the African Europhone one in particular. In fact, the use of French alongside local languages in Francophone literature does not simply bear witness to the

⁹⁶ And to an extent also informs the promotion of French within La Francophonie.

necessity of language change; it is a deliberate effort from these French-speaking (plurilingual) authors⁹⁷ to validate and bring exposure to the different cultural spaces each language in their narratives points to. Language then becomes, for Francophone authors, a site of contestation.

C- What Is Next for La Francophonie and Francophone Literature?

Despite the many, oftentimes contradictory definitions of the term, one thing remains: the origins of La Francophonie will forever be tied to the history of France and its colonial empire.⁹⁸ Today, more than half a century after the majority of ex-French colonies gained independence, the French language and culture are still being used and promoted beyond France's hexagonal confines. Francophone writers face the rather antagonistic task of expressing themselves in the same hegemonic language used for assimilation purposes. By using the French language as a practical tool through which they articulate their differences and their identities, Francophone authors turn La Francophonie, an ambiguous concept, into a space where diversity is celebrated. And at the heart of this "decolonizing" project is the very same language used for hegemonic purposes, a language heavily guarded by the French Academy. While there is no arguing that to be Francophone, by definition, means to subscribe to "une communauté

⁹⁷ Here it is interesting to note the different denominations of this body of literature written in French and yet from non-metropolitan origins. Before critics actually settled on the adjective "Francophone," other qualifiers like "littératures d'expression française" had been used but failed in popularity.

⁹⁸ For an in-depth chronology and detailed analysis of the emergence of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, see the website <http://www.francophonie.org/Chronologie.html> .

d'allégeance à une langue" [community of allegiance to a language] as Maurice Druon puts it, one can as well safely make the point that the language in question here is a plural French, a French language in touch with the many cultural and linguistic specificities of the different countries that make up La Francophonie.

Contrary to ideologies such as Ngũgi's, in the French colonial empire, there was not necessarily a sharp parallelism between language and culture and as a consequence, the wars of liberation did not necessarily take aim at the French language in the same fashion they did in the Anglophone world. In 1966, Senghor famously contended that "la décolonisation culturelle de l'Afrique francophone ne devait en aucun cas passer par une remise en question de la langue française, considérée comme intrinsèquement émancipatrice" (qtd in Mollier 160).⁹⁹ While some critics will disagree with the liberating value that Senghor bestowed on the French language, it wasn't until later however, with the publication of seminal works such as *Orientalism* (1978) and *Invention of Africa* (1988), that we witnessed the early wave of African Francophone writers openly and loudly take aim at monoglossic Franco-French and classical versification codes of the French language. Regardless of how La Francophonie is defined—from a linguistic, geographical, political or even ideological point of view—one thing always remains constant: the organization/concept has at its core the French language itself. In the words of Djemal Elabe, a former Minister of education from Djibouti, in *Francophonie*, "[la]

⁹⁹ Cultural decolonization in Africa should not necessarily take aims at the French language; a language fundamentally liberating (translation mine).

frontière c'est la langue française" (qtd in Deniau 39).¹⁰⁰

Today, the configuration of cultural spaces created by means of the French language is still evolving and the different cartographies of La Francophonie still do not necessarily map onto each other. In its publication dated March 16, 2007 in *Le Monde*, a group of forty-four writers of French expression from the Maghreb, Africa, France itself and the West Indies (among other locations), wrote a manifesto in defence of a world literature in French entitled "Pour une 'littérature monde' en français." In it they proclaim the death of Francophone literature, a concept they view as perpetrating a colonizer/colonized divide. By playing down the ideological underpinning inherent in Francophone literature, Michel LeBris and allies seek to do away with the historical and political power relations that once existed (and still exist?) between France and its former colonies.

Though the institution of La Francophonie comprises members who never were part of the French colonial empire, it remains nonetheless that its once imperial and hegemonic conception of the French language and culture as superior and universal seems still to be carried out within the institution. By using and promoting a single language, La Francophonie, whether willingly or not, presents linguistic identity as homogeneous, overlooking the obvious multilingual reality of the populations that make up the institution. More than the rhetorical claims of "dialogue des cultures," the continued lustre of the French language and the consolidation of the French Republic as a dominant power of its time, seem important goals of the institution.

¹⁰⁰ "The border is the French language" (translation mine).

Well before the French Community in 1958 or even the French Union back in 1946, Great Britain in its emancipating colonies succeeded in creating a space where countries newly-granted the status of dominion would still remain in close relationship with their former colonizer. Contrary to the French who still deny any relationships between the two aforementioned organizations with that of La Francophonie, the British on the other hand unequivocally and without any ambiguity proclaimed, with the advent of The Commonwealth, their wish to somehow maintain the particular ties they had with their former colonies with which they shared not only a common history, but also a common language. In addition to having similar historical trajectories between former colonizing powers and the majority of countries that make up each organization, both La Francophonie and The Commonwealth have language as their unifying symbols. After an in-depth analysis of the concept and the different spaces La Francophonie generates, a similar approach is in order with The Commonwealth.

D- English or “Englishes” within The Commonwealth

If there is no arguing that English, just like French, cohabited in a diglossic relationship with local vernaculars in former British colonies during colonization, it should also be noted that, contrary to the French, at least in their public discourse, the British attached no “humanistic” characteristics to their language. English was not officially invested with civilizing attributes despite the high regard and standard it benefitted from, especially in comparison to local vernaculars. The reality, however, was quite different. Critics in British colonies did not fail to draw a parallel between the implementation of the English language and a project to further ideological domination

among the colonized. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o vigorously decried the establishment of English faculties in African universities. For Ngũgĩ, more than just a language, English in fact stands as a vehicular means for the implementation of the English culture. Along with the English language, comes a school curriculum promoting English subjects and values. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha does not just speak English; her mind is very much like the ones found among English women. Her choice to read D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*¹⁰¹ (75) and her parents' subsequent disapproval of the book speak to the disconnect between the promise of formal British education and the actual reality among Africans. For Nyasha, the novel in question "is only a *book*" and "[she] is only *reading* it" (75). While she fails to recognize possible relationships between what she reads and her mindset, the connections are however not lost to her parents who deem the book unsuitable. The relationships between literature and ideology, despite Britain's official discourse against assimilation, are very much a reality. In different parts of the British Empire, similar voices echoing Ngũgĩ's concerns about the humanistic investment of the English language were raised. In *Masks of Conquest*, Gauri Vishwanathan indeed established that English literary Studies, as a formal academic discipline, were first implemented in Britain's colonies, in India specifically. She contends, "English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country" (3). Viswanathan goes further to demonstrate, just as Althusser did in his theory of ideological state apparatus, that English

¹⁰¹ Partly because of the excessive description of sex, the novel was banned in Britain up until 1960. When Penguin Press finally published the unabridged version in 1960, it was tried for obscenity.

studies, in fact, far from being a random subject in the colonies' school curricula, participates in moulding the colonized consciousness into internalizing the British's discourse that justified imperialism in the first place.

In a purely linguistic sense, despite the relationships between ideology, literature and the English language, the latter was more subjected to change compared to the French language. Within the British Empire, and in Africa in particular, English underwent (and is still undergoing) a large amount of indigenization that has taken it further and further away from its metropolitan standard. In the context of Sub-Sahara Africa, we remember Frederick Lugard's "Dual Mandate" in which he theorized a differential treatment when it came to teaching the English language to native and British subjects. In "Linguistic Apartheid: English Language Policy in Africa," Augustin Simon Bobda analyzes how practically lower standards of the language were taught to the colonized instead of the level of language the British themselves spoke.¹⁰² This same attitude and openness toward language change during the colonial period would, to a certain extent, inform the later attitude towards the English language within The Commonwealth. The organization, though sharing the element of language as a founding principle with La Francophonie, is nonetheless rather different from the latter. From very early on indeed, English more readily presented itself as a plural language. Contrary to French, a language tightly regulated by the French Academy, English was—and still is—a more diversified medium.

¹⁰² For more information on African Englishes, cf chapter 2 of this study and/or see Edgar Schneider's *The Dynamics of New Englishes: From Identity Construction to Dialect Birth* and *The Handbook of World Englishes* (2006) edited by Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson.

“New Englishes” different from the standard used in Britain were readily accepted as appropriate forms of the language¹⁰³. For the British, the expansion of colonial power was not necessarily tied to the spread of their language and today critics hardly—if they do at all—justify the existence of The Commonwealth as a tool to sustain and further spread the English language.

Interestingly enough, however, it was in former British colonies that the opposition to and rejection of Western languages was the most vocal. In Africa specifically, critics like Ngũgi wa Thiong’o or even Chinwezu advocated a complete ban of English and English-related subject matters in favour of a return to languages and literary media more typical of the African continent.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of the value—or lack thereof—of accusations of linguistic imperialism in La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, it remains that both France and Britain seem to be in some sort of continuity with their language policy in place during colonization. The Commonwealth more easily waves off accusations of linguistic imperialism thanks to the ever-growing power of the English language. In addition, by not counting the United States of America—a former British colony, yet most powerful country in the world—among its

¹⁰³ This does not mean by any standards that there were no challenges or oppositions to these new forms of language. Though they seemed to accommodate themselves better with the indigenization of their language, the British nonetheless considered these different standards as lower in merit.

¹⁰⁴ From Ngũgi, see: *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African literature* (1986), *Writing Against Neocolonialism* (1986), or even *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (1993). And From Chinwezu: *Decolonizing the African Mind* (1987), *West and the Rest of Us* (1975).

member states, The Commonwealth presents itself as a more democratic organization with lesser ambitions of domination than La Francophonie. Unlike French, the English language does not have to struggle or fight for its survival and prestige. Throughout the world, English occupies an unarguable place of choice. According to Lewis, the English language ranks second (to Chinese) in the world by the number of speakers. Moreover, because it is the first language in most of the world's most powerful countries, English has turned out to be the lingua franca of the world; it is the first language of publication and more and more people claim it as a second or third language. Unlike the French who feel the need to defend and protect their language both from a dwindling number of users and a growing influence from foreign languages¹⁰⁵ the English language on the other hand—which poses the biggest threat to French—is experiencing an ever-increasing popularity and a steady growth in its number of speakers.

Additionally, we still have in mind that postcolonial studies—a discipline partly aimed at deconstructing claims of hegemony within prominent Western narratives—primarily originated in former British colonies (and North America where a number of scholars from the former British colonies wrote) where local elites have for a longer time been trained to take on responsibilities.¹⁰⁶ It is in countries formerly under the rule of the

¹⁰⁵ Indeed we remember that in 1994, Jacques Toubon then Minister of Culture passed a series of laws specifically aimed at deterring the influence of English in the French language. The “Toubon Laws,” as they are called, mandate that French be used in all public spheres (government, advertisement, workplace, commercial contract...).

¹⁰⁶ In British Africa, with time, the transcription of strictly religious African-language texts was expanded

British then that we witnessed—and continue to do so—a much greater diversity when it comes to literature.¹⁰⁷ With the combination of “New Englishes” and a more genuine acceptance of the worth of “Commonwealth literatures,” The Commonwealth (both as an institution and a space) has finished establishing itself, at least by external standards, as a more heterogeneous space where various languages, cultures and traditions are represented. Moreover and also more significantly, the evolution, both in its organizational structure and its naming, more convincingly established The Commonwealth as a more egalitarian space which has distanced itself from the history of the British colonial empire more so than La Francophonie.

In the following section, I will revisit the origins and different stages of The Commonwealth to better understand the dynamique of plurilingualism, especially in the African Europhone novel, the main subject of this analysis.

1) The Origins of The Commonwealth: (Hi)Story of a Community

The Commonwealth of Nations is an organization founded in 1949 aiming at

to the publication of secular ones. Some African pupils were even encouraged to try their hand at original composition, and the origins of modern *written* African language literatures can be traced to these beginnings (218).

¹⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, going back to the early 19th century, right after World War I, The British issued a report (also known as the Phelps-Stokes Fund) in which they were already recognizing the importance for African people to keep their own maternal languages. The report states: “no greater injustice can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their own language” (qtd in Michelman 218). This newfound awareness of the close relationship between a community and the language, one can argue, will lead to a better cohabitation between the English language and local vernaculars.

celebrating the relationships between Britain and its former colonies. In this sense, just like La Francophonie, it is intimately tied to colonization as it represents an obvious testimony to Britain's past as a colonial empire. The organization counts among its member states almost all countries formerly under the rule of the British Empire; but the geographical limits of The Commonwealth are in no way restricted to that historical reality only. Indeed, the organization has extended well beyond the historical boundaries of the then British Empire to include even countries which have historically been under the rule of "rival" powers like the French.¹⁰⁸ As a consequence, the cultural spaces created by the modern Commonwealth loosely espouse the colonial empire of the late 19th century. In 1884, Lord Roseberry first used the term "Commonwealth of nations" to refer to former British colonies that were granted the right to self-governance. In 1931, the first legal seeds of the organization were adopted by the British parliament who consecrated the official birth of the British Commonwealth. But it wasn't until 1947, the year India and Pakistan became independent, that the qualifier British would be dropped from the naming, therefore giving way to the present day understanding of The Commonwealth.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, prior to India's independence, the historical ties between member states and their

¹⁰⁸ Remember that the United States, a former British colony, are not member of The Commonwealth. Rwanda, a French-speaking country, formerly a Belgian colony, left La Francophonie to join The Commonwealth on 29 Nov. 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Indeed India's accession to independence constitutes a landmark in the life of the organization, formerly known as the British Commonwealth; the qualifier British was dropped in 1947 to allow the newly independent India to join the organization without pledging allegiance to the British Crown.

former colonial power were, to some extent, still in place. In The British Commonwealth, Great Britain was still dealing with countries under its political domination as the latter had not been granted complete freedom. The organization was mainly composed of “autonomous communities [still] under the British Empire” (The Royal Commonwealth Society). Today, The Commonwealth of Nations comprises independent nations¹¹⁰ which all still recognize the British Monarch, Queen Elizabeth, as the head of the organization.¹¹¹

In literature, as argued in the previous chapter, Commonwealth literature sought to give greater visibility to non-British voices. At the heart of the discipline was a project to reclaim and disseminate voices from non-British metropolitan origins. Commonwealth literature then paved the way for a more encompassing and more contemporary discipline of postcolonial literature which Stephen Slemon qualifies as “an outgrowth of what formerly were ‘commonwealth’ literary studies” (105). But the expression Commonwealth literature, a project to broaden and diversify the literary curriculum, was mired in controversy since its beginning. Critics did not quite agree on what exactly

¹¹⁰ Currently, the Commonwealth is made up of 53 independent states, 52 of which used to be under British domination.

¹¹¹ This shared history of British rule was also celebrated beyond the confines of politics. In almost all other areas of life, the organization spread its influences: from entertainment, to education through sports and publishing—among other—the privileged ties between British and its former colonies continue to be further celebrated. The important question that comes to mind is how did an organization born from an authoritative empire today claim total equality among its state members?

constitutes the “discipline.”¹¹² Salman Rushdie for example, went as far as to argue against the very legitimacy of the concept which he see as ghettoizing productions some critics believe to already exist on the margins.¹¹³ In the now canonical *The Empire Writes Back: The Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin question the opportunity to gather a body of eclectic texts solely in the name of a shared (political) history. For critics like Ken Goodwin, Commonwealth literature is only valuable in the sense that it brings exposure to a body of texts which would not otherwise be recognized on the international scene; however, Goodwin is quick to point to the limitations of the concept as a viable academic discipline. In “Studying Commonwealth Literature,” Goodwin, among other concerns, speaks of the impossibility of producing a “Commonwealth” reading of any text.

2) From Empire to International Organization

The Commonwealth is a family of 53 countries; it is a multiracial and multicultural association around a unified language and common interests. Starting from a handful of British dominions, the organization has grown today to encompass a quarter of the world’s population. It all started in 1867 when Canada became the first British colony to be granted the statue of “Dominion,” a situation which took the latter from a colony to a quasi equal of Britain. Ever since that landmark, other countries formerly under the rule

¹¹² Some argue that Commonwealth Literature is literature produced, in English, in Britain’s former colonies and others wanted this definition broadened to encompass literatures in languages other than English as long as they have their origins in countries formerly under the domination of Britain.

¹¹³ See Rushdie’s article entitled: “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist.”

of Great Britain would gradually join the organization as they gained access to independence.

The organization has not always existed in its present-day form. It went from a rather small gathering of mainly Western countries¹¹⁴ still somehow “attached” to their former colonizer to a much wider association of free nations. And because of the particular historical ties that unite its member states with Britain, critics often bring the issue of domination and hegemony into most discussions on the organization. Just as it was the case with La Francophonie, a hot topic with The Commonwealth is whether or not the organization is a smoke screen aiming at obscuring the realities of a dying colonial empire. Unlike its French counterpart whose clear objective is to spread the French language and its associated culture around the world, the purpose of The Commonwealth is hard to define. The organization is not devoted to any particular issue; rather, it concerns itself with a wider range of topics, most of which are platforms on which other major international organizations such as the United Nations operate.¹¹⁵

From a chronological and legal point of view, a series of declarations led to the present status of The Commonwealth. It all started with The Balfour Declaration in 1926 where the term “dominion” was first defined as well as what the organization of The Commonwealth would be about. The Statute of Westminster in 1931 legally sealed the

¹¹⁴ The countries in questions are Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and they all were dominions at the moment they joined the organization.

¹¹⁵ Here we have in mind issues like “equal rights for all citizens” “free flow of International trade” and “conflict resolution.”

existence of the organization. In 1949, The London Declaration was passed. It amended the Balfour Declaration by making it possible for republican constitutions to still be members of The Commonwealth if they wished. The organization had then transitioned from a gathering of a selected few countries to a more democratic structure. While there is an obvious evolution towards more democracy and more equality among its member states with the admission of free independent countries from 1947 on, the mandate of The Commonwealth on the other hand is still hard to define. Sir Shridath Ramphal, the second Secretary General of the organization, probably best articulated what The Commonwealth is about. He contends:

The true value of The Commonwealth derives not from likeness or even like-mindedness, but from variety. It derives from the fact that this family is a comingling of the world's diversity. What The Commonwealth tries to do is to harmonize differences over a wider range and to a further degree than any other grouping. (qtd in "The Development of the Modern Commonwealth" 7)

As this brief review shows, it is no coincidence that La Francophonie and The Commonwealth are often studied together. Despite major differences in the mission, and objectives of the two organizations, both share some uncanny historical trajectories. Britain, unlike France however, takes full ownership of the creation of The Commonwealth as a space to celebrate and share common interests with its former colonies, thereby totally acknowledging the colonial histories and ties that unite it with the organization's member states. La Francophonie, on the other hand, is better known to

have originated from the ideas of personalities outside of the French metropolis. While the contribution of Senghor, Diori and Bourguiba is undeniable, without minimizing their input, one cannot fail to associate France's colonial past with the genesis of La Francophonie in spite of official discourse to the contrary. One thing though remains certain, both The Commonwealth and La Francophonie have the English and French languages respectively as their unifying symbols. Both are multicultural organizations made of varied people from different linguistic backgrounds; in both spaces, members comply with the linguistic requirement to join the organization, but they still remain very much plurilingual and this shows especially in literature. In the next chapter, focusing on the four core novels in thesis, namely *L'Aventure ambiguë*, *Une si longue lettre*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Things Fall Apart*, I will show in detail how the Francophone and Anglophone writer, particularly the African author, has turned language, the ex-colonizer's languages, into a site of affirmation and protest.

Chapter Four: Enunciation and Plurilingualism

Enunciation is the individual act of language production, in a given situational context, structurally and pragmatically manifested as intention-laden and interaction-dependent meaning. (Brandt 3)

Language is marked so deeply by the expression of subjectivity that one might ask if it could still function and be called language if it were constructed otherwise. (Benveniste 1971)

The African novel—both Francophone and Anglophone—has been, since birth, exposed to and informed by multiculturalism. Indeed, the adoption of the novel as the preferred genre of expression automatically brought into contact various—often competing—languages and literary traditions that participate in creating, within the fiction, a reflection of the realities and tensions that take place in the actual world. By choosing to express themselves in writing and through the specific genre of the novel, African authors had to subscribe to foreign languages and literary conventions directly imported from Europe. In fact, contrary to poetry, drama, or any performative art for that matter that is more apt to carry their traditional oral culture, the African novelists chose to write in French or English, the languages of their (former) colonizers.¹¹⁶ The dichotomies rooted in the paradoxes between performative arts/novel, oral/written,

¹¹⁶ More often than not, the majority of Black African writers discovered the written word with the languages of their colonizers. Prior to the advent of French or English, local cultures were essentially oral with emphasis on hearing and information passed down from generations to generations.

colonial/indigenous, European languages/local vernaculars, do not just exist in the author's actual world; they are more often than not carried into his/her fictional environment as well.

However, if the subject matters leading to these aforementioned paradoxes are not always squarely addressed or dealt with in their productions, authors nonetheless still find effective ways to articulate the tensions that are generated, as a result, in aesthetic terms. Literary plurilingualism, the topic of this analysis, is one of the major hermeneutics to which authors resort in order to address and showcase the complexity and diversity of the worlds their characters live in. This representation of the diversity of languages and literary traditions in fiction does not simply provide a realistic picture of the linguistic makeup of the authors'—and readers'—actual worlds; more importantly, it enables the narrative to question underlying social, political and ideological concerns.

In fact, while local vernaculars open the fiction up to the indigenous world and its corresponding civilization, system of beliefs, and ideologies, the vehicular French or English media, on the other hand, provides a glimpse into the foreign Western spaces to which they have historically been linked. In any case, the presence of such competing voices within the text of fiction serves various purposes: it presents the African novel as an inherently hybrid and heterogeneous form as it brings together different referential worlds with their corresponding discourses and ideologies. By so doing, the plurilingual novel also questions the relationship of the self to the Other and participates in problematizing questions of identity and recognition that permeate African Francophone and Anglophone fictions. Furthermore, this linguistic diversity calls for a necessary

dialogue among the “micro worlds” represented in the fiction not to mention an equally important dialogue between the text and its readers. By recognizing and engaging with the novel’s many levels of heterogeneity, the reader confronts his actual world with the fictional and more importantly, takes an active—and indispensable—part in the production of meaning.

In addition to linguistic plurality, the problematic of the Other is also articulated in historical and cultural terms with the recurring issue of colonization which can, very rarely, be overlooked in any discussion of the African novel. The inscription of plurilingualism at the heart of discussions on issues pertaining to colonization turns historical and cultural spaces such as the colonial, postcolonial and today La Francophonie and The Commonwealth into fertile exchange grounds as important issues are being represented at the level of the word. This is exactly what this present study ambitions to do. In the next chapters, we will analyze how gender, political and identity questions are dealt with through plurilingualism both in the Francophone and Anglophone African novels. But before we proceed any further, a close look at the concepts of plurilingualism and enunciation is in order.

A- On Plurilingualism

1) History and Evolution of a Concept

Plurilingualism or more generally language diversity has not always been a feature to be celebrated. For the longest time, scholars have wrestled with the idea of a single original language. Going as far back as The Bible with The Tower of Babel, the ability to speak different languages was looked down upon as a divine punishment

comparable to Adam and Eve's original Fall. Indeed, because of an act of defiance from humanity, God, according to Genesis 11: 1-9, ordered people to be scattered and the one single language they all had in common turned into a multiplicity of languages to impede communication among various groups.

This belief in the superiority of one mythical original language indeed remained strong over the ages. From Aristotle to Benedict Anderson, critics have traditionally highlighted a unified language as the solid basis upon which communities existed and thrived. *In Returning (to) Communities: Theory, Culture and Political Practice of the Communal*, Stefan Herbrechter and Michael Higgins compiled a series of compelling articles revisiting how plurilingualism has systematically been dismissed at the same time as its opposite, monolingualism, was being made an essential condition of the existence of the community. In his article entitled "Multilingualism and its Discontents: Hetero-Lingual Collectivity and the Critique of Homo-Lingual Society," Antony Adolf deconstructs the monolingual bias and the lack of due attention to difference that permeate such great works of literature as Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities" or even Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities." Even though Adolf's study does not speak directly to our concept of literary plurilingualism defined as the ability of a person to speak and appropriately use different languages or registers of languages depending on the situations at hand, the conclusions of his analysis eerily echo the biblical reference to language plurality as "reprehensible."

His study forcefully brings to light the reticence and lack of early interest in language diversity. Adolph's article then, if anything, constitutes an indicator of why

literary plurilingualism is a relatively new discipline as critics had often to go against the grain, against religious references. By challenging the accuracy of such assertions that present “homo-lingualism” as the vital prerequisite conditional to the emergence of community (Adolph 145), Adolph makes an important contribution to re-establishing the scope, validity and worth of language diversity. In response to Fish and Anderson, Adolph, argues that recognizing the plurilingual nature of communities does not actually play any role as far as the size of the latter is concerned; in other words, acknowledging plurilingualism would not “threaten” a given community, what it would achieve on the contrary is to celebrate as many sub-communities as possible, sub-communities usually identifiable by the particular language they speak.

By subordinating the definition of community to what is common among people, Fish and Anderson indeed pay little or no attention to what actually makes the individuality of each—a rationale that Adolph finds reductive at best, if not plainly erroneous. He writes, “This politics of inclusivity has as its *modus operandi* not the affirmation but the erasure of differences between individual parties in a group, above all linguistic [...]” (145). By seeking “to replace the common *us* with the differential *we* [...] to take into consideration the differential principle of multilingualism within a monolingual framework,” Adolph in fact conducts a study to a large degree similar to the one this thesis has the ambition to carry out. Reading beyond the obvious signs of unity and homo-lingualism to bring to light the many levels of heterogeneity not just in a social setting but also in the literary environment of the characters, such is the purpose of this study.

If during and immediately after colonization the Francophone and Anglophone African novels were thought of as essentially monolingual because of their use of French and English, and mostly because “the colonized [were] conveniently made into Aristotelian barbarians”¹¹⁷ (Adolf 150), today, the plurilingual nature of the African society and the worldview associated with it is recognized and celebrated. This study shows that unity can still exist despite and even because of differences and of linguistic differences particularly.

2) On Plurilingualism in Literature

Contrary to multilingualism or diglossia, two other important concepts in the study of language plurality that mostly deal with the diversity of languages and their use in a given community, literary plurilingualism concerns itself more with the “*jeu des langues*” (Gauvin 1999)¹¹⁸ in a literary text. With plurilingualism, unlike with diglossia for example, there is no hierarchy when it comes to the worth of each language; there is no high or even low language, they all have the same dignity, purpose and value even though Francophone and Anglophone literatures definitely acknowledge French and English as a common medium, a *lingua franca*. In addition to language plurality, literary plurilingualism also acknowledges another dimension outside of linguistics that comes in as a necessary supplement in the understanding of “*le jeu des langues*,” namely the

¹¹⁷ Still in reference to the poor reception of plurilingualism, mainly due to biblical references, individuals who spoke multiple languages were referred to as barbarians by Aristotle.

¹¹⁸ The interplay of languages—translation mine

enunciation context.¹¹⁹ Plurilingualism, as a consequence, needs to be understood both as a sociological and psychological phenomenon; meaning the fact that several languages are spoken in a given community conjugated with an individual's composite competence to pick and choose which language or even which registers of language to use at a given time. In this sense, plurilingualism is not simply a multitude of languages one next to the other (the definition of multilingualism); rather a plurilingual person, beyond his/her ability to speak multiple languages, is particularly able to use the latter for different purposes with different levels of command. Here is what Jean Claude Beacco says about the co-existence of diverse languages within a plurilingual individual:

The individual plurilingual repertoire is ... made up of various languages he/she has absorbed in various ways (childhood learning, teaching, independent acquisition etc.) and in which he/she has acquired different skills (conversation, reading, listening etc.) to different levels. The languages in the repertoire may be assigned different, perhaps specialized, functions, such as communicating with the family, socialising with neighbours, working or learning, and, as has been pointed out, provide building blocks for affiliation to groups which see themselves as having shared cultural features and their own identifying languages. (19)

Clearly then, every person is by nature plurilingual whether or not he/she is conscious of it. All individuals carry within themselves a plurality if not of languages, at least of registers of the same language. Plurilingualism, instead of "elevating one particular language, develops an openness to languages—an awareness of the diversity of

¹¹⁹ Here I mean both the context within the fiction and the social context of the author.

repertoires and a shared but plural manifestation of identity/ies” (Baecco 19). With plurilingualism, languages are infused with the capabilities to create, reveal and even subvert meanings. This assertion is even more relevant in the context of literary plurilingualism where the intentionality of the author and the intentionality of the characters come in to complicate and render the concept even more interesting.

Generally speaking, plurilingualism is a characteristic of all novels, not just Europhone African ones. In fact, past the most recognizable authorial language in which the novel is written, a situation that can falsely lead to conclusions about the genre as a linguistically homogeneous production, research has shown that a diversity of languages, of voices, of literary traditions, and of styles permeate any work of fiction. Indeed, the many characters that populate the novel all have voices of their own and are perpetually engaged in exchanges, the analysis of which helps uncover infinite discourses and spaces not to mention the plurality of cultural and historical spaces that serve as referential contexts. Due to gender, social, political, or even occupational considerations, not all characters, however, are preoccupied with the same issues. Nor do they address them in the same fashion. As a consequence, language in the novel is very eclectic and usually points to as many ideologies as there are characters. In agreement with Mikhail Bakhtin, we will contend that the novel is a production that is inherently “plurivocal” and “plurilingual.”

In addition to revealing the heterogeneous factor in each and every locutor, literary plurilingualism serves another big purpose as it questions the relevance of the various languages’ “mise-en-texte.” Paraphrasing Sherri Simon, Chantal Richard argues,

“plurilingualism as a dialogical principle runs counter to the dictatorship of the One. In other words, when there is a multitude of languages, there is also a multitude of voices, and consequently, of ideologies, cultures and traditions” (450). The term plurilingualism then does not merely imply a variety of languages and literary traditions; it points to the notion of the *Other*. In an article entitled “Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation,” Rainier Grutman and Dirk Delabattista give an insight into the pertinent questions plurilingualism seeks to answer. Among the most crucial are:

[...] Which ‘other’ languages are imbedded in the overall text and made to interact with each other and with the text’s ‘main’ language? How is the verbal space of the text divided between the different languages? How does the text linguistically orchestrate the various character and narrative voices? If different languages are made to resonate at various textual, paratextual, and intertextual levels (prefaces, citations, annotations, metafictional passages etc.) that make up the text, how and why is that done? What is the function and effect of all this? (16)

Plurilingualism indeed can be used both as an aesthetic and a political project; not only does it bring to light “le jeu des langues,” but it also questions the relevance and purpose of a given linguistic reality. As a practical system, the concept is made of two main paradigms that help uncover the many languages that inform a literary text. They are heterolingualism and transpolingualism theorized respectively by Rainier Grutman and Laté Lawson-Hellu.

By identifying heterolingualism, a neologism in some respects reminiscent yet in no ways synonymous to previous concepts such as Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, Grutman

offers some major theoretical and practical ground towards the study of modern literary plurilingualism. Heterolingualism will later be revisited by critics such as Jean-Marc Moura, who expands the relevance of the concept beyond its initial provincial boundaries of Quebec to be applicable to all literatures, mostly the Francophone ones. Still in an effort to further comprehend literary plurilingualism, other critics such as Lawson-Hellu, working along the same lines as Grutman, developed the paradigm of transpolingualism as the missing link toward a more comprehensive understanding of plurilingualism. In the particular context of African literature however, where authors have been introduced, not just to a new genre—the novel—but also to new languages removed from their culture and traditions which have for the longest time been exclusively oral, no analysis of plurilingualism could be complete without going back to orature. Indeed works on orality, indigenization and relexification all fall under the general theory of plurilingualism even though, in its most recent connotations, the concept is best understood as a sum of heterolingualism and transpolingualism.

3) On the Contribution of the Oral

Discussions on plurilingualism in the African novel, as indicated earlier, cannot be thoroughly conducted without a reference to the contribution of orality. Indeed, as Harold Scheub affirms, “there is an unbroken continuity in African verbal art forms, from interacting oral genres to such literary productions as the novel and poetry” (1). This is a thought echoed by Luanga Kasanga and Mambo Kalume who maintain:

The discussion of African literature is almost inseparable from the language issue.

The latter usually involves both the choice of the language to use in the literary

works and how the language is actually used: (i) in its pure, standard form, and, therefore, the sole medium; (ii) in a style altered by translation; or (iii) in a hybrid style in which forms of a different language are incorporated into the main code used in the piece of writing. (43)

As can be inferred from this quote from Kasanga and Kalume, orality and its different modalities of inscription in a text, in fact, constitute an integral part of the definition of plurilingualism. African cultures are indeed widely known to be traditional oral cultures, where until the introduction of writing, knowledge was handled down orally from one generation to the next.

In the same fashion that the multiplicity of languages was looked down upon by early critics mainly because of negative biblical association, the contribution of orature in literary texts has not always been seen in a good light either. The nature of the relationship between orality and literacy has been and still is, to a degree, a source of controversy among scholars. While some critics see these two forms of artistic expression as mutually exclusive, others consider them to be complementary and mutually nurturing. Writers from the Romantic Age, for example, saw literature and orature as mutually exclusive. The Romantics valued literacy over orality as they expected the artist to create ex-nihilo. They assessed verbal artistic expression according to its originality therefore dismissing the idea that verbal art might incorporate features from the oral tradition, which they viewed as repetitive, redundant, and lacking novelty. For these reasons, the aesthetic significance of orality is a relatively new critical “discovery.” In fact, by tracing the evolution of studies on orality, it becomes obvious that oral literature, whether spoken

or transcribed, has long been overlooked as a distinctive artistic form with special literary characteristics and conventions of its own.

The object of this study on plurilingualism, as we have mentioned earlier, is not to argue that one specific literature, language or literary tradition is worthier of study than another; on the contrary, it sets out to recognize all styles and traditions as worthy of study. All literatures are of equal interest because they produce evidence of how a particular people lived. Studies of literary traditions and intellectual activities yield results not only about the language and literary genres people used, but also shed light on these people's very customs and traditions.

For these reasons, and in anticipation of the contribution of oral tradition in the works I will be studying in the next chapter, a quick overview of the modalities of inscription of orature is in order.¹²⁰

In *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, (1996), Walter J. Ong offers a detailed analysis of the characteristics of oral literature.¹²¹ Ong posits that some of the differences between oral and literate expressions are to be found in the realm of grammar, in particular syntax. Oral expression, he maintains, is “additive,” while literate

¹²⁰ Indeed, there is no arguing the important contribution of orality in all four novels selected for this thesis; and since oral tradition constitutes one aspect of literary plurilingualism, it is only logical that we provide the tools by which to recognize it in a text.

¹²¹ Prior to Ong, Milman Parry, studying the *Iliad and the Odyssey* came to the conclusion that Homer's work was a collection of once oral poetry and identified some formulaic thought patterns in his analysis. Parry constitutes another big name in the study of oral literature.

thoughts are “subordinative” with an emphasis on the art of composition (37). Further, he adds, the organization of oral cultures is basically “formulaic, structured in proverbs and other set expressions [...]” (38), “participatory rather than objectively distanced” (45), “situational rather than abstract” (49) whereas literacy is “clear, transforms consciousness, producing patterns of thought” (78).

Another characteristic of oral discourse is that it is “aggregative rather than analytic” (Ong 38); aggregative referring to the use of repetition, phrases one can easily learn to assist the memorization process as knowledge is passed down from one generation to another. In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost: fixed formulaic thought patterns are therefore essential for wisdom and effective transmission of knowledge; and Ong accurately observes “Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight” (38). Because, as critics have noted, expressions are perfected from one generation to another, words are memorized along with the adjectives that qualify them. Rarely, if ever, are traditional phrases dismantled and as a consequence, memorization of sometimes whole sets of expressions, becomes another important feature in oral discourse. Quoting Claude Levi-Strauss, whose attitude towards orality echoes Aristotle’s view on plurilingualism, we will say “the savage mind totalizes” (qtd. in Ong 39).¹²²

¹²² Here it is interesting to note how both Levi-Strauss and Aristotle qualify as “savages” people who are respectively multilingual and those who belong to traditional oral cultures.

As a precautionary note however, it should be stressed that these attributes of orality are not to be found solely in the African novel. Along with Eileen Julien, we will try to avoid what she terms an “African exceptionalism” by equating literature from the continent with orality exclusively. In that regard, Emevwo Biakolo sounds a warning against the dangers of stereotyping. In “On the Theoretical Foundations of Orality and Literacy,” he writes:

Many of the so-called oral cultures globally have undergone so many changes in their mode of life, including media of communication, that to speak of them as if they are fixed in a putative pristine oral condition is a piece of anachronism. On the other hand, not even the most rigorously literate society today is completely devoid of features of orality. And if it needs reminding, we are not even concerned at this stage with the technical communicative understanding of orality. (48)

Biakolo’s remark speaks to the point this thesis tries to make. Indeed, plurilingualism, I contend, with all of its characteristics, among which orality, is a distinctive feature of the novel in general, not just the African, nor those with a heavy influence of orality. And since orality constitutes only one feature among many others of plurilingualism, I shall continue the analysis to talk about the other paradigms of the concept, mainly heterolingualism in general and transpolingualism.

4) Leading Up to Heterolingualism: On Mikhail Bakhtin’s Work

Rainier Grutman is commonly referred to as one of the pioneers in the present day understanding of plurilingualism, especially with his theorization of heterolingualism. Other critics before him, however, have addressed this issue of linguistic diversity as well

as the necessary dialogue of languages conditional to the production of meaning. From Mikhail Bakhtin to Tzvetan Todorov, linguistic plurality has often been celebrated in writing; but it was not until Grutman that, in addition to addressing “le jeu des langues” in a literary text, the very modalities of the languages’ inscription were dealt with.

Studies on modern plurilingualism can indeed be traced as far back as Bakhtin with his essay entitled *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. In his analysis of how Dostoevsky managed to represent, instead of the single consciousness of the author, the multiplicity of the characters’ consciousnesses in *Notes from Underground*, Bakhtin came up with the concept of the polyphonic novel—a concept that makes it possible for all the voices in the novel to be represented equally as they all participate in the production of meaning. With the polyphonic novel then, no single voice is worth more than another. From the author to the main protagonists through the secondary characters, there is a perpetual dialogue between all the parties, not to mention the reader’s engagement with the text as well. The polyphonic novel achieves in Bakhtin’s terms “a complex unity of differences” (12). With Bakhtin, a new epistemological hermeneutic is brought forth, dialogism, whereby “[e]verything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole; [Where] there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (426). This dialogic relationship, as argued above, does not just occur among characters, it also takes place at another level, with the reader engaging with the fiction to produce “a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order” (16).

In 1934, in his *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin came up with the notion of heteroglossia in an attempt to further describe the process by which meaning is created in

discourse. Bakhtin claims that the very significance and complexity of a text lie in the coexistence and tension between codes. Indeed, expanding his previous concept of polyphony—diversity of voices—he proposed the more encompassing notion of heteroglossia to account for the plurality of languages in a text. In his ongoing exploration of how the different types of speech condition the very existence of the novel, especially in their simultaneous cohabitation and conflict, Bakhtin identifies, next to a multitude of voices, a whole range of other linguistic traits that also participate in the creation of meaning. Voices alone then do not account for the heterogeneous nature of the novel; different languages, styles, sub genres also are part and parcel of the diverse linguistic makeup, and as a consequence, they should also be accounted for when discussing dialogism. However, by insisting so much on the identification of the world of fiction with that of the readers, Bakhtin puts more emphasis on the actual world of the author rather than the one created within the fiction. His theorization of plurilingualism then could be seen more as a social concept than as a literary one. Lise Gauvin in *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*, precisely takes aim at the very Bakhtinian definition of plurilingualism which she finds reductive and lacking precision. She contends that Bakhtin's understanding of the concept—plurilingualism—is a rather complex one and is concerned more with the plurality of voices than the diversity of languages (11).

In 1981, Tzvetan Todorov in *Bakhtin, le principe dialogique* revisited the scholar's work and also attempted to clarify his thoughts to the general public. On the topic of heteroglossia, he provided a much broader and more encompassing definition of

the concept. Indeed, Todorov's redefinition of heteroglossia went beyond a mere plurality of voices to include a plurality of languages and a plurality of styles as well. Regardless of this valued precision, Bakhtin's heteroglossia however continued to be viewed by critics still as a limited concept.

In *Des langues qui résonnent: l'hétérolinguisme au XIX siècle québécois*, Grutman, in his attempt to account for the particular linguistic diversity in Quebec literature, called for the necessity to come up with more accurate, more encompassing and yet less charged terminologies than the ones that had been used by critics up to then. For Grutman, fiction only pretends to copy reality (38) and consequently the same concepts used to describe languages in social settings ought not necessarily be used for the study of language diversity in the works of art. By sounding a warning of the dangers of equating social and literary plurilingualism, Grutman indeed demonstrates how highly rated concepts—such as multilingualism and diglossia—used in the discussion of the general topic of language diversity, could in fact turn out to be inaccurate at best, if not simply misleading when discussing the presence and pertinence of various languages in fictions.¹²³ Briefly summarized, this is how heterolingualism came to be theorized at a time when, admittedly, there was no shortage of terms to refer to language diversity in

¹²³ Multilingualism, according to Grutman, is not just an inaccurate concept for the study of literary plurilingualism. In the more specific context of Quebec literature, the concept indeed, contends Grutman, has very negative undertones because of unequal uses of French and English, regardless of the fact that the two languages both enjoyed, at least, the same official status. "Bilinguisme" Grutman notes is very different from its English counterpart of "bilingualism."

general.

5) Grutman's Heterolingualism

According to Rainier Grutman, heterolingualism constitutes a stronger concept than any of the other previous ones so far used to account for the many levels of diversity within a literary text. Indeed, in *Des langues qui résonnent: l'hétérolinguisme au XIX siècle Québécois*, Grutman revisits in detail how and why his newest neologism should be preferred over existing concepts such as multilingualism, bilingualism or even diglossia.¹²⁴ Heterolingualism was then coined; a concept defined as “la présence dans le texte d’idiomes étrangers sous quelque forme que ce soit, aussi bien de variétés (sociales, régionales, ou chronologiques) de la langue principale” (37). By definition, heterolingualism sets out to uncover the various registers as well as the different signs of

¹²⁴ In the delicate context of Quebec literature where productions written in French face an uphill battle to gain the recognition they deserve in a country where English constitutes a dominant language despite an official bilingualism, the very concepts of multilingualism, bilingualism or even diglossia, Grutman remarked, have fairly negative connotations. In fact, Grutman maintains that for Quebecers, the concept of bilingualism in particular carries some hegemonic bearing as “les francophones y voient et continuent d’y voir un instrument d’assimilation linguistique, un signe de déchéance culturelle” (1997:37). For Grutman, “bilinguisme” does not have the same implications “bilingualism” does. In fact, depending on who is uttering the term, from a Francophone or Anglophone point of view, the concept could signify equality or lack thereof. As for the concepts of multilingualism and diglossia, critics in general (Gauvin and Grutman among others) readily admit that the two concepts are better suited when discussing language diversity in social settings rather than in fiction. For all these reasons then, Grutman came up with a terminology very much reminiscent of, yet in no way synonymous to, Bakhtin’s heteroglossia to account for plurilingualism in the novel.

“foreignness” within the main language of a given text. As such, one could easily expand the relevance of the concept beyond Quebec literature for which it was first elaborated. This is exactly what Lise Gauvin and Jean-Marc Moura achieved. Neither Gauvin nor Moura did anything to further develop what Grutman initially stated; what they accomplished instead was to carry the concept of heterolingualism above and beyond its original provincial confines. Both authors actually show an understanding of the concept much along the same lines as Grutman, but in refusing to accept heterolingualism as an exclusive original characteristic of Quebec literature, they raised its currency first by extending its scope but more importantly they successfully managed to present the concept as a writing strategy able to account for the inscription of the hybrid language texture in the Francophone novel as well as in all post-colonial writings in general. Indeed, when Moura talks about “cette présence de divers idiomes, cette pluralité langagière”¹²⁵ (qtd in Grutman 74) his statement could be applied to any text given that a plurality of languages, if not of registers of languages constitutes an intrinsic characteristic of the novel in general, not just the one from Quebec.

In his article entitled “L’hétérolinguisme dans le roman Francophone d’Afrique subsaharienne,” Laté Lawson-Hellu puts the concept to the test as he studies how exactly heterolingualism manifests itself in the African postcolonial and particularly Francophone novel. Lawson-Hellu identifies two main processes by which heterolingualism is carried through, mainly “emprunt” and “intégration.”¹²⁶ Indeed, revisiting the works of such

¹²⁵ This presence of various idioms, this linguistic plurality—Translation mine

¹²⁶ “borrowing” and “integration”—Translation mine

critics as Amadou Ly, Alioune Diané and Jean-Marc Moura primarily, Lawson-Hellu concludes that heterolingualism is the sum of the various manifestations, mainly “visible,” that set the writing apart from the standard French (or English) in which the text is composed. Indeed, if heterolingualism is the manifestation of what is “foreign” within a language, one could safely assume that there are bound to exist some “markers” by which to tell the difference between some standards of a language and anything that could be considered a “deviation.”

By resorting to xenisms or peregrinisms, two different strategies by which an author respectively incorporates, without any warning, foreign words, sentences or even phrases directly into the narrative, or with the help of marginal references, and still convey in a seemingly recognizable French or English language, concepts that are deeply rooted in the atavic culture and languages of the African authors, the Francophone and Anglophone African texts prove once again that they are heterogeneous productions written in more than just one language; and as such, heterolingualism lends itself well to the study of language diversity. In fact, both processes result in conferring on the texts written in French or English a certain degree of “foreignness,” a certain degree of difference from mainstream standard language conventions. If some “xenisms” are more easily recognizable because they primarily consist of the use of foreign, borrowed lexicons in plain contrast with the authorial French or English, some others are less identifiable as at first glance they do belong to the authorial language of the text even though their primary meaning or connotation in the fictions might be different from their standard definitions.

Peregrinism also participates in affirming that level of “foreignness” in the Francophone and Anglophone texts. But unlike xenism, peregrinism is a paradigm that is less readily identifiable as it redefines the primary use of a word from a source language to confer onto it a secondary meaning that only makes sense in the target language. In other words, peregrinisms are not about obvious signs of difference as far as lexicons are concerned, they are instead about different usages, different semantics. Amadou Ly writes:

Pour ses utilisateurs, le pérégrinisme vise, au delà du fait de conférer à leur texte un « air étranger » qui relève de l'élocution, à donner au dit texte, du point de vue de la réception, un peu de ce qu'un chansonnier camerounais a appelé « la couleur locale ». Il s'agit, ni plus ni moins, d'une dé-territorialisation de leur production qui lui fait quitter le « centre », suivie d'une re-territorialisation dans la « périphérie.” (qtd in Lawson-Hellu 91)¹²⁷

Heterolingualism then, as can be inferred from this brief overview, is commonly carried out through the processes of xenism and peregrinism. However, by itself, the concept of heterolingualism is not enough to account for all the modalities of inscription of hybridity in the literary text. Indeed, if the latter takes care of the readily “recognizable” linguistic variations, then how about the ones carried out without any obvious “markers” where the

¹²⁷ For people who resort to the technique, peregrinism, beyond the fact that it provides a “foreign feel” to a text—from a writer’s point of view—endows the latter, and more specifically its readers, with what a singer from Cameroon called “ a local colour.” It is simply about delocalizing a work, taking it off a “center” to relocate it at the “periphery” (translation mine).

énoncé is a most recognizable French or English but where the actual meaning is to be found in a different language?

6) On Transpolingualism and Toward a Comprehensive Formula of

Plurilingualism

Research on plurilingualism is still ongoing. Since Grutman, scholars from the Francophone world particularly have discovered a new interest in the concept. African literature is widely known to exist within a very diverse and heterogeneous environment where multiple languages and literary traditions are in continuous contact. In “Norme, éthique sociale et hétérolinguisme dans les écritures africaines,” Lawson-Hellu, studying the mechanisms of how transposition works, especially in the domains of mathematics and translation studies, proposes a theorization of the concept of transposition in literature. Transpolingualism is particularly relevant when it comes to studying the different languages of the characters within the fiction. As we have mentioned earlier, not all characters speak the same languages with the same levels of command. In the specific context of the African novel written in French and English, the majority of the discourses are reported in the authorial language of the writer. Even if some characters are presented as clearly illiterate people with no understanding of the Western languages, it remains nonetheless that their speeches are often reported in French or English. Lawson-Hellu then, through his newer paradigm of transpolingualism, argues that such reported speeches—done with or without mention—be also recognized as integral aspects of plurilingualism. Linguistic transposition then emerges as a complementary paradigm to

heterolingualism particularly to account for the different languages of the characters; languages that are not necessarily to be equated with that of the author and which also deserve critics' attention. Transpolingualism, argues Lawson-Hellu, gives a mirror reflection in the main authorial language of the indigenous ones. Here is the definition of the concept he provides in "Textualité et transposition hétérolinguistique dans le roman francophone. Pour une théorie générale du plurilinguisme:"

[...] le principe de la *transposition* désigne, tout comme en traduction, le « processus d'expression du contenu énonciatif d'une langue d'origine, langue-source, dans une langue d'arrivée, langue-cible ». Elle se distinguerait ainsi par exemple, de la « transcription, » du fait du principe d'identité-forme et contenu qui la caractérise et accompagne le passage de la réalité transposée [...]. (7)¹²⁸

Here is a final and comprehensive theorization of the concept we have borrowed from Lawson-Hellu:

Tout texte de fiction fonctionne sur une base plurilinguistique (Pl), par la combinaison d'une langue principale (Lx) qui s'adjoint par degrés visibles (hétérolinguisme; HI) ou non-visibles (transposition; THI) dans la matérialité du texte, des langues autres (Lnon-x) que la langue principale, le résultat de cette combinaison étant réparti à degré variable entre les instances énonciatives dans la

¹²⁸ Just like in translation, transposition means "the process by which the énoncé from a source language is expressed into another language, a target language." Unlike transcription, transposition carried within itself notions of identity and genre and pays close attention to the very content of the énoncé being "transposed" (translation mine).

fiction, le narrateur et les personnages.

Cette loi générale se formulera comme suit :

$$PI = Lx + L_{non-x} + Lx (L_{non-x}). (12)^{129}$$

B- On Enunciation: Text and Context

Theories of enunciation play an important role not only to the thing uttered, *the énoncé* but also to the extra-linguistic elements surrounding that production. Indeed, after revisiting among other schools of thought, the Formalist and to some degree the Structuralist,¹³⁰ current theories of enunciation determine that a context is at least as important as what is actually said in the overall production of meaning. *L'énoncé*, the thing uttered, constitutes only one aspect of the enunciation to which it belongs. For the longest time, theorists have dismissed the contribution and importance of any element surrounding the production of the speech act itself, but with the pioneering of Emile Benveniste and Mikhail Bakhtin mainly, a newer and more comprehensive approach towards language study is brought forth; an approach that acknowledges more and more

¹²⁹All fictions are essentially plurilingual (PI). They are written in a main language (Lx) to which is juxtaposed other languages (L_{non-x}) either through “visible” (heterolingualism; HI) or “non-visible” (transposition; THI) mechanisms. These languages other than the main one (L_{non-x}) transpire through the narrative itself, the narrator as well as the characters

Here is how the theory is articulated:

$$PI = Lx + L_{non-x} + Lx(L_{non-x}) \text{ (translation mine).}$$

¹³⁰ Here we need to acknowledge the particular contribution of Ferdinand de Saussure, who could be said to have championed this new concept of enunciation with his early distinction between “langue” and “parole.”

the social and historical dimensions of language. With enunciation theories, we will pay attention not just to the énoncé, but also to all the markers or shifters¹³¹ leading up to the discourse itself. Indeed, by establishing a difference between the “énoncé,” and the “enunciation,” Benveniste (and to a degree Bakhtin) sees language itself as a discourse the analysis of which needs to take into account all aspects surrounding that production. The study of enunciation therefore is the study of non-linguistic elements underlying the utterance itself. It looks at the various markers of discourse and particularly at the “situatedness” of the enunciator to determine what his/her intentions are and from which position he/she is speaking, among other questions. In his work entitled *Bakhtin le principe dialogique*, revisiting the scholar’s “Théorie de l’énoncé,” Tzvetan Todorov accurately observes “la matière linguistique ne constitue qu’une partie de l’énoncé; il existe aussi une autre partie, non verbale, qui correspond au contexte d’énonciation” (67).¹³²

Theories of enunciation are not just aimed at studying language as a system or set of practices between speaking subjects. For the longest time, critics have approached language as nothing more than an instrument of communication, an object of knowledge thus making the enunciator an all-powerful subject capable of objectively mastering his object. With Ferdinand de Saussure, especially with his *Course in General linguistics*, the viewpoint that considered language as a mere communication tool started to shift. Indeed,

¹³¹ In French we will talk about “embrayeurs” of discourse.

¹³² Linguistics is only one aspect of the thing uttered. There is another component—non verbal—that corresponds to the enunciation context.—Translation mine.

to the structuralists, for example, for whom meaning was to be found within a crystalline logical structure, Saussure opposed a difference between “langue” and “parole” therefore questioning the relevance and accuracy of analyzes that put the emphasis solely on the text, dismissing the relevance of the text’s history, biographical or even cultural context. Saussure, as a consequence, paved the way for a more comprehensive theorization of enunciation under the lead of Emile Benveniste.

Enunciation theories, we will contend along with Julia Kristeva, “open up the field of signification beyond linguistics, towards sociology and psychology” (211). For Kristeva “the conditions surrounding the production of a system of meaning are none other than socio-historical and intersubjective” (211). By focusing on the concept of enunciation, this study will pay close attention to the speaking subject, not just on what is being said, but also on the situation in which that speaking subject exists; it will answer among other specific and important questions, who is speaking? From where and what position is he/she is speaking? In fact, Stuart Hall accurately observes in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” “We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific.” Further, Hall adds that “What we say is always ‘in context,’ *positioned*” (392).

Even though Hall was primarily concerned with questions of identity, particularly for the new post-colonial subject, his observations and conclusions on enunciation theories can effortlessly be applied to this thesis. Indeed, next to the identification of the various languages and registers of languages, this study will also take a deep look at the enunciating context so as to gauge and address the relevance of the different languages’

“mise-en-texte.”

This newfound importance of the enunciation context does not eliminate or invalidate whatever message is contained in the *énoncé* itself, rather it is about an integrated approach whereby the context is called forth to provide some essential additional information to the overall communication. The *énoncé* remains just as important as any other elements in the sense that it contains all the shifters the analysis of the enunciation context will look at. It—*the énoncé*—constitutes the starting point of all analyses since, as we have stressed so far, this study is about letting the text speak first and foremost. This being said, one can reasonably contend that the *énoncé* has a dual function in the sense that it can be considered as embodying both the form and the content of the speech act.

When it comes to the enunciation context itself, as we have observed earlier, Mikhail Bakhtin and Emile Benveniste stand as two of the most influential critics and theorists in the field. While Bakhtin insists on the concept of dialogism or the necessary dialogue among all elements surrounding the production of the “*énoncé*,” Benveniste on the other hand, painstakingly and yet in the most accessible language, makes an argument for the necessary distinction between the subject of the “*énoncé*” and the subject of the enunciation. Both critics, though writing at different times, acknowledge the importance of recognizing who is speaking, to whom and the positionality of the reader.

Maurizio Lazzarato, revisiting Bakhtin’s theory on utterance, speaks to the important question of positionality for any locutor. Lazzarato writes

All speech acts are addressed to someone or something, respond to someone or

something and through this addressing or this response they express values, points of view, emotions, affects, sympathy and antipathy, agreement and disagreement in relation to the situation, in relation to the other and to one's own utterance, in relation to other utterances and also in relation to the utterances that circulate in the public space [...]. (Lazzarato on Bakhtin)

While Bakhtin shows an understanding of the interconnectedness conditional to the coherence and overall meaning of the discourse, that is the interrelation between the utterance itself and the extra-linguistic elements that permeate the discourse, he does not however offer the tools and mechanisms by which to recognize and gauge dialogism. Works by Benveniste would come in to fill that gap as they offer a detailed guide towards a practical analysis of enunciation.

The analyses I propose in the next chapter take a deep look at how a text can be said to signify and generate meaning by focusing on varied markers of discourse. With a special look at the dynamic process involved in the act of signification, I address the processes by which meaning is created from a collaborative effort between the speaker and the listener to whom a message is destined not forgetting the role of the reader. In *Les genres du discours*, Tzvetan Todorov, discussing narrative analysis, revisits Bakhtin's dialogism and reiterates the necessity to go beyond the "énoncé" and take into account all the other aspects of the enunciation itself. Consequently then, in this analysis, I will strip down the texts of the corpus to their basic codes of signification often concealed by seemingly uniform stories. Language then will be treated as a process and not an end product.

Last but not least, as we can see throughout this chapter, most of the theories on both plurilingualism and enunciation have mostly been conceptualized by Francophone critics; but interestingly enough, their applications are primarily carried out within English-speaking spaces or institutions. This study will then allow for a dialogue between Francophone studies and the more general discipline of postcolonial literature where English is the dominant language. Indeed, regardless of any linguistic rivalry between French and English, and independently of some competing interests that exist between La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, this analysis will show that the aesthetics and content of the African novel are generally similar across the continent; that in spite of differences in colonial histories or even differences in their choice of authorial languages, plurilingualism functions as a strategy through which the African author seems to reclaim and reaffirm all the dimensions of his/her heterogeneous being.

Chapter Five: Linguistic Cartographies

All four novels selected for this study of enunciation and plurilingualism in the Francophone and Anglophone African novel, are, by definition, written in a recognizable French and English language. But as argued in the previous chapters however, behind the visible (Western) languages of the narration, all four authors foreground the other languages spoken in their respective enunciation contexts. At times, the (other) languages in question are easily identifiable; at others, they are knowable only through the overall intelligibility of the texts. Using the paradigms of heterolingualism and transpolingualism, I here offer a glimpse into what those languages are along with a determination of the people (characters) who use them.

A- Une si longue lettre

The novel is obviously written in a most recognizable French. However, from the narrator to the characters (educated or otherwise), the other languages in the referential context where the fiction is set are also represented. It is indeed through a combination of French, Arabic, Wolof (and likely Sereer) énoncés, that the narrator addresses a variety of topics ranging anywhere from religion, politics, history, to social issues. Here is a glance at the linguistic cartography of *Une si longue lettre*.

1) Énoncés in French, the main language of the text

The entire novel can be assumed to have been written in French because of the overall epistolary format of the text with the recognizable heading and ending typical of

letter-writing. As the omniscient narrator she is, Ramatoulaye speaks the French of the narration; a language she uses to conduct reflections on topics like the place of women in the newly independent Senegal and the need for more equality between men and women. The narrator also uses French to describe her characters and their personalities. Her commentaries and information on social, religious and cultural backgrounds are also conducted in French. The French of the narration also serves to make extensive descriptions—of places (Dakar, Diakhao...), spaces (hospital, journeys...) as well as important events (mourning) in the novel. Last but not least, even though the chronology of *Une si longue lettre* follows the important landmarks of the Islamic mourning process, information pertaining to chronology and the overall advancement of the narrative is also expressed in French.

Beside Ramatoulaye, the narrator, other characters also use the French language. Among them, those who, just like the main narrator, also chose, at some point in their lives, to use the letter format for communication purposes. Because the intelligibility of writing is conditional upon the act of reading,¹³³ letters in *Une si longue lettre* can safely and easily be assumed to have been written in the original French of the énoncé. The letters in question are that of Aissatou to her husband Mawdo informing him she will not stay in a polygamist marriage, Modou's letter to Ramatoulaye reiterating his love while a student in France, and Ramatoulaye's letter to Daouda Dieng in which she turns down his marriage proposal.

Next to these noticeably recognizable French utterances, there also are the

¹³³ And in this particular context, French is the only language the characters are able to read and write.

énoncés from Jacqueline's doctor. Indeed, because Jacqueline is from Ivory Coast and has not quite integrated into the Senegalese culture—she refused to convert to the dominant Islamic religion for example—the reader can safely assume that her doctor spoke to her in the only language they have in common, the French language.

2) Languages known through heterolingualism

Under this paradigm of heterolingualism, I will essentially make the distinction between peregrinisms and xenisms. By peregrinism, I mean indigenized French expressions spoken by the narrator and any other character with knowledge of the French of the narration. Under xenisms will fall all verbatim foreign lexicons directly integrated into the narrative. With Mariama Ba, xenisms come with explanatory glosses and are inscribed in italics.

a) Instances of peregrinism

As I mentioned in the previous chapter on plurilingualism and enunciation, because of the heavy markers of orality in the text, *Une si longue lettre* is a novel where Wolof expressions, syntax as well as rhythms are largely represented. Most of the time, the narrator as well as the characters do nothing more but translate Wolof into French; and the process results in awkward, sometimes grammatically faulty French renditions. Recalling her grandmother's words of wisdom, the narrator, reports, in a direct speech, "[o]n a beau nourrir un ventre, il se garnit quand même à votre insu" (151).¹³⁴ This

¹³⁴ "[Y]ou can feel your stomach as well as you please; it will still provide for itself without your knowing" (77).

example is in many ways similar to translingualism without mention. Judging by the overall intelligibility of the novel however, by the fact that some characters are known not to have been able to express themselves in the original French of the narration, evidence of peregrinisms, I contend, is fairly limited in this novel. Beside instances where the narrator adopts a localized language to address directly her local readers (by speaking in proverbs and riddles), all other utterances, especially those from people with no knowledge of French, are best understood to be the result of a linguistic transposition from original Wolof énoncés.

b) Evidence of xenisms

By far the most recognizable instances of non-French énoncés are the uses of Wolof and Arabic xenisms. Just like the majority of the characters, the narrator uses an abundant foreign lexicon in *Une si longue lettre*. Ramatoulaye, the narrator, uses original Wolof names to foreground the cultural and traditional background against which the novel is set. From the food people eat to the types of clothing through the castes people belong to, Ramatoulaye's (Ba's) language is directly borrowed from her native Wolof. The narrator also uses original Wolof expressions to talk about the different religions in place in the novel; a situation where ancestral religious practices cohabit right alongside a very dogmatic Islam. Examples of Wolof occurrences are shown here: "siguil ndigale" (5): Wolof word to express one's condolences; "lakh" (5): Senegalese type of porridge eaten with curdled milk; "boubou" (6): ample garment worn by men and women alike (with different fits and designs); "thiakry" (7): another type of food, mainly used as dessert made with sugared curdled milk mixed with kneaded flour. (7) "griot": one among

the many castes in the country usually made of singers; “laobes” (7): another caste, this time made of people in charge of professions related to wood, iron, or any kind of metals for that matter; “gongo” (8): name of a type of incense mostly used by middle-aged women; “mirasse” (9): Taking care of a deceased person’s inheritance according to Islamic laws; “Toucouleur,” “Guelewar,” “Dioufene” (17): names designating the tribes (or simply the origins) of some people. One can usually tell to which tribe a person belongs just by their last name; “djou-djouns” (28): musical instrument; “tours” (28): like the djinns, they are invisible living creatures; “gnac” (42): demeaning term used to qualify nationals of other sub-Saharan African countries; “safara” (43): potion deemed to have healing attributes; “marabouts” (48): term to designate usually men with superior knowledge of the Koran; “Siam” (51): a high brand of rice much loved by Senegalese; “Timiss” (62): dusk; but could also refer to the fourth daily prayer required of each Muslim at sunset; “guer” (67): a caste usually made of the most noble people, the highest level in the hierarchy of class; “wolere” (69): Old friendship¹³⁵; and “samba linguere” (69): a man of noble decent.

Xenisms are not limited to Wolof terms only. The narrator also uses borrowings from Arabic to further address the weight of the Islamic religion in *Une si longue lettre*. The Arabic lexicon in question consists mostly of common nouns and titles so well known to populations that they have passed into the other languages which make the linguistic landscape of the novel. These Arabic words are known to everybody in the fiction who all use them irrespective of gender or education. The fairly important number

¹³⁵ Explanation copied verbatim from the end Notes.

of Arabic xenisms however is not a measure of the populations' fluency in the language. No character, not even the narrator, actually ever uses the language for communication purposes. Examples of Arabic occurrences in the novel are as follows: "Zem-Zem" (3): miracle water from the Holy place of Islam; it is a highly sought after item by anybody who has had the chance to accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Imam" (9): a person leading prayers at the mosque; "Alhaja, Alhaji" (10): titles taken by women and men respectively who have accomplished the Holy pilgrimage to Mecca; "djinns" (18): noun designating non-human living spirits capable of good as well as bad actions; "Allah" (36): the literal Arabic meaning of God; "Bissimilai! Bissimilai!" (69): beginning of the first sourate of the Koran, which has passed into general speech: the expression (with the embedded repetition) denotes surprise and, to some extent, fear.

3) Languages known through transpolingualism

With explicit mention or only by pre-supposition, the paradigm of transpolingualism provides the reader with the tool by which to identify "less visible" linguistic variations within the fiction.

a) With mention

As argued under the peregrinism section, most of the énoncés in *Une si longue lettre* consist of plain literal translation from Wolof to French. Contrary to Dangarembga or Chinua Achebe, Mariama Ba does not mention explicitly which languages her characters use. Despite the strong presence of Arabic and Wolof xenisms, readers would have to pay close attention to the enunciation context of each character so as to determine whether or not they could have expressed themselves in the French of the narration. Some

characteristics we identified as indicative of oral discourse—consequently of Wolof original expressions—are the use of proverbs, or repetitions, not to mention a language filled with imagery. The only close cases of transpolingualism with mention in *Une si longue lettre* are the instances where the narrator alludes to Koranic verses being played.

b) By pre-supposition

The differentiating element between peregrinism and transpolingualism by pre-supposition is whether or not the locutors in question had access to the knowledge of the French language. In *Une si longue lettre*, Wolof in transpolingualism is used to carry daily routine conversations between characters of all genders irrespective of their levels of education. In their majority, proverbs and riddles are typical or original Wolof utterances even if the narrator does not specifically name the language in question. When Aissatou announces her intention to file for divorce, the language she uses becomes very metaphoric and the content of the message finds its relevance only in the Wolof culture. She states, “Je me dépouille de ton amour, de ton nom. Vêtue du seul habit valable de la dignité, je poursuis ma route” (62).¹³⁶ Likewise, when the Fall family griot uses a proverb to magnify and celebrate the fact that Mawdo finally married and had offspring with the Young Nabou, a woman who belongs to the same caste as he does, the language is rightly so pre-supposed to have been in an original Wolof; “le sang est retourné à sa source” (61).¹³⁷

¹³⁶ “I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way” (32).

¹³⁷ “Blood has returned to its source” (30).

In the same vein, when Farmata, another griot, addresses Ramatoulaye about her refusal to marry Daouda Dieng, the pre-supposed language is Wolof. She yelled, “Bissimilai! Bissimilai! [...] Pour qui te prends-tu? A cinquante ans! tu as osé casser le *wollore*” (134).¹³⁸ Her discourse is not only filled with Wolof xenisms, but most of what she says finds its meaning in Wolof tradition and culture. The form of her language is grammatically faulty and the content makes reference to a special kind of friendship anchored in Wolof culture.

When Tamsir, Mawdo Ba and the Imam visited Ramatoulaye to inform her that her husband had taken a second wife, the pre-supposed language is also Wolof; not only because is it the common language to everyone that was involved in the conversation, but their speeches bear most of the markers of oral discourse we identified with Walter Ong. Here is part of their exchanges:

“Quand Allah tout puissant met côte-à côte deux etres, personne n’y peut rien.”

“Oui, oui, appuyèrent les autres.”

“Dans ce monde, rien n’est nouveau.”

“Oui, oui, renchérent encore les autres.” (71)¹³⁹

¹³⁸ “Bissimilai! Bissimilai! [...] Who do you take yourself for? At fifty, you have dared to break the *wolere*” (69).

¹³⁹ “There is nothing one can do when Allah the almighty puts two people side by side.”

“True, true,” said the other two in support.

“[...] There is nothing new in this world”

“True, true,” Tamsir and Mawdo chimed in again. (36)

A cautionary note however would be not to reduce original Wolof utterances exclusively to énoncés from people who have not frequented the French school. The conversation between Ramatoulaye and Daouda Dieng, two obviously educated people,¹⁴⁰ is here argued to have been carried out in Wolof because of the number of repetitions contained therein. With his additive speech inquiring about her and her children's health, Daouda Dieng speaks to Ramatoulaye in a way very reminiscent of Wolof rhythm ("Comment vas-tu? Et les enfants, ton Assemblée? Et Ousmane?")(125).¹⁴¹ Likewise, the exchange on the conditions of women in a newly independent country with a budding democracy which struggles to give women the place they deserve, is assumed to have been done in an original (exclusively or partially) Wolof énoncés.

As far as Arabic is concerned, it is mostly through prayers and recordings that the language is represented in the novel. From the narrator to the characters, Arabic is indeed used only sporadically, in a very isolated fashion that does not allow meaningful exchanges.

B- *Nervous Conditions*

All throughout *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga uses both English and Shona to address a wide range of topics. With a variety of narrator-characters, the fiction addresses issues as diverse as agriculture and herding, history, religion and politics; not to forget gender inequalities within the Shona culture.

¹⁴⁰ A teacher and a Member of Parliament respectively.

¹⁴¹ "How are you? And the children, and your Assembly? And what about Ousmane?"(64)

1) English utterances in *Nervous Conditions*

The narrator of course speaks all the languages represented in the novel; and among them is the obvious English of the narration. English is actually used to provide information on the rural setting of the fiction by emphasizing the all importance of agriculture and herding among the Shona. The narrator also uses English to address the colonial past of Zimbabwe as she provides information on the missionaries, the implementation of Christianity as well as insights into formal (colonial) education in the country.

On more general terms, aside from the narrator, English is used in the novel by metropolitan British citizens as well as local populations who have been exposed to formal British schooling. Not all locutors however have the same command of the language, nor do they use it in the same fashion. A close reading of the novel brings to light different registers of the language: familiar, broken, and a more regular (sustained) level of English.

Endearing and familiar English terms are mainly spoken by people with a high command of the language; people who consider English their first language. They consist of members of Babamukuru's household, Doris, as well as the English passer-by at the place where Tambu was selling her mealies.¹⁴² Distinguishing further between familiar and endearing, at first glance, it looks like only women—Maiguru and Nyasha—use the

¹⁴² Doris talking to Mr Matimba "...to make the poor mite work..." (28)

Passer-by (beefy youth) addressing Doris in English "...The munt being cheeky?" (28)

endearing register. “Lovey-dove” (75), “Sugar-pie” (77), “Honey-bunch” (93) are examples of endearing terms used by Maiguru to address her daughter. She also uses expressions like “Daddy-pie” and “Daddy-dear” (81) to tenderly call her husband Babamukuru.

Going a step further than anybody else, Nyasha is the only character who truly swears in the English language. To qualify history as written by the colonizers, she (Nyasha) uses expressions like “fucking liars,” and “bloody lies” (205). With Netsai, Rambanai, Anna as well as the younger Tambu and Nhamo, the reader meets characters who use a “broken” form of English as they attempt to communicate in a foreign language they have not yet assimilated.

2) Languages known through heterolingualism

Throughout *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga inserts a lot of Shona words directly into her narrative. These xenisms address different areas of life; from talking about the food people eat to describing the homestead through referring to aspects of their traditions, direct lexical transfers from Shona are used throughout the text. Here are a few examples of Shona xenisms in the novel: “magrosa” (2): market; “msasa,” “Acacia,” “Lantana,” “Mopani,” “matamba,” “matunduru” (2-3): names of trees and/or fruits/vegetables; “mhunga,” “rukweza” (6): types of grains; “covo,” “derere” (8): types of vegetables; “masese,” “sadza” (40); “matamba,” “nhengeni” (122): names of fruits; “mazoe” (74), “mahevu” (41): names of drinks; “roora” (4): dowry, bride price; “nhodo” (8), “pada” (22): names of games; “dara” (11): place where to dry kitchen items and other various grains; “baba” (16) father; “shumba” (29): lion; “Mbodza” (59): raw or

undercooked *sadza*; “dagga,” “tsapi,” “hozi” (61): designate different rooms in the homestead versus proper English terminologies to describe rooms in the mission; “koya” (62): mattress; “mukwambo” (123): son-in-law; “dare” (138): meeting/council; “muroora” (141): daughter-in-law; “hari” (152): type of pottery.

Unlike Mariama Ba or Chinua Achebe for example, Dangarembga does not provide translations or even marginal notes to explain the meaning and signification of these terms. The English translations and/or equivalences offered above stem from close readings of the text which were, in turn, checked by a Shona native speaker.¹⁴³ Because of this strong presence of local (Shona) lexicon, Dangarembga is said to have written her book for a primarily local audience with whom she can communicate without translation. Speaking in the first person, Tambu recounts her story to an undisclosed recipient who, judging by the heterogeneity of the language used throughout the novel, could be guessed to be someone who either belongs to the Shona community or someone who is—or willing to be—deeply steeped into the local culture.

Most of the titles in the novel—if not all of them—are in Shona; and as Kwame Anthony Appiah remarked, “None of this comes with an explanatory gloss” (x). In many cases, endearing forms of address also function as forms of greetings. Oftentimes, they are in original Shona; and there are no differences as far as who does use a particular form of greeting. Everybody, men and women, younger or older can use any form of address. It is when someone has to greet or simply deal with a large group of people that difficulties may arise as it becomes paramount to be able to distinguish between

¹⁴³ Remedzai Kawadza, a Shona native speaker from Zimbabwe, graciously checked the accuracy of the

everybody's statuses so as to make sure that the highest in titles and ranks are addressed first. Here are a few examples of the vocabulary in question: "Mukoma" (5): an equivalent of the English "Mr;" a title used for (older) men only. "Sisi" (9): a word borrowed from the English "sister." It is used for younger women only, independently of their economic status. Even Anna, the maid is sometimes referred to (by Maiguru, her boss) as Sisi. "Mbuya" (17): grandmother. "Tete" (36): father's sister. The title is used only for Gladys; the woman with patriarchal status. Other older women who are not related by birth to the males of the household are called differently; "Mainini" seems to be their title. "Babamunini" (45) a title used for uncles younger than one's father. It seems to be the female form of Mainini. "Babawa Chido" (117): another name for Babamukuru (uncle older than one's father); "Ma'Chido" (124): another name for Maiguru; "Mwaramu" (126): term used by Lucie to address Babamukuru. "Mainini" (124): a title used for women (aunts younger than one's mother) regardless of marital status (even Lucia is called Mainini). The word could be the female equivalent of Babamunini. And "Chirandu" (186): totem, a term used by Tambu's father to address Babamukuru.

Still under the category of Shona xenisms, we have the use of onomatopoeias. These are words that are mostly used by people from the homestead; people who do not generally speak English. Gender or age does not seem to play any difference as far as who uses these terms; both men and women alike resort to them to express various emotions. Often, they are markers that the discourses in which they are used are originally

in Shona. This being said, even Nyasha, the most anglicized of all (at least by external standards) does sometimes use some onomatopoeias, mostly to show her exasperation. When used by people from the homestead on the other hand, onomatopoeias do express deeper feelings such as surprise, happiness, gratitude, sorrow etc.... Here are a few examples of Shona onomatopoeias from the text: I-i-h; h-a-a (5); Aiwa! (16); ts-ts-ts-ts; Yuwi! (18); Tsha-a!, Ts-hm-m!;¹⁴⁴ Vakomana, vakomana (31); hezvo! (36): expressing disappointment; purururu (36): used only by women to express thanks or joy; Er- (44); Bo-bo-bo-bo (47); Pthu (54); Ho-o-re! (55); Ts! (67); Aiwa-wo (143): subtly demeaning someone's performances, possessions or status; Babawanguwe (173): expressing disappointment.

The final category under the xenism section is the inscription of songs in their original Shona. Just as she did when talking about the types of food people ate at the homestead, or the different titles within the Sigauke clan, Dangarembga does not offer translations for the Shona songs in question; nor does she even hint at their significance. Here are a few of the songs contained in the novel: "Mauya, mauya. Mauya, mauya. Mauya, Babamukuru" (35): a song executed to welcome Babamukuru, the older uncle; "da-a-i (bow) ndi-i-ne (bow) ma-pa-aa-piro (bow), Nda-a-i (bow) bhu-u-ru (bow) ru-ka (bow)!"(42): a song to the tempo of "Amazing Grace," under the leadership of Gladys, still in celebration of Babamukuru's homecoming. "Du-du-muduri, kache! Rwavi muduri Kache! Tambu muduri, kache" (49): Nhamo singing to mock her sister and boast about being the chosen one to go to school at the mission, at Babamukuru's. Last but not least,

¹⁴⁴ Whenever specific translation is not provided, it means that the onomatopoeia express general feeling of

“Makorokoto, makorokoto” (158): a congratulatory song sung, by Lucia, at the birth of Ma’Shigayi’s latest baby.

3) Languages known through transpolingualism

a) With mention

More than any other author in this analysis, Dangarembga specifies which languages her characters use. When Mr Matimba addresses Doris, the old White woman about the mealies Tambu was selling, the narrator explicitly mentions the English language as his medium of expression. And emphasizing how “clumsy” and “labored” the conversation between the early Tambu and her cousin who had freshly arrived from England, the narrator provides the reader with additional information by stressing that the former spoke in Shona while the latter responded in English. Another instance where Dangarembga mentions the specific languages of her characters is the evening prayer ritual at Babamukuru’s (81) and the exchanges that followed. After saying their prayers in English, Maiguru greeted her husband in Shona, her daughter in English and a confused Tambu in both languages. Interestingly, in the remainder of the conversation, the locutors switched languages, with Maiguru asking how her husband’s day went in English and Nyasha in Shona.

Another instance of transpolingualism with mention is when the narrator talks about the strange missionaries who liked to speak in Shona (106). What the missionaries in question said is never spelled out for the reader however; but the fact that they enjoyed speaking in the local language is worth noting.

surprise.

Other people who the narrator also explicitly names as speaking Shona are Babamukuru and Maiguru (117). They did so in an effort to express deep emotions—with Maiguru, at times, squarely resorting to xenism as well as ululations. This being said, the majority of Shona énoncés in *Nervous Conditions* are uttered by characters who have little to no knowledge of the English language. The large majority of the Shona with Dangaremba is indeed only knowable through pre-supposition.

b) By pre-supposition

In *Nervous Conditions*, Shona xenisms are limited to the uses of isolated words and expressions. Even when they have no working knowledge of English, most of the “natives” énoncés are still rendered into English. Tambu’s father, Jeremiah, a man who has never attended the British school, has his discourse transposed from Shona into English. Talking about the difference between Babamukuru and himself, he admits: “But Mukoma was lucky. He got the chance. He went to the mission at an early age...” (5). Not only that, but Jeremiah’s language is punctuated by the use of proverbs, of repetitions, and of ululations; all of the above, as we have seen in the previous chapters, are markers of oral speech, and consequently of original Shona utterances.

Just like Jeremiah, the other people at the homestead (with the exception of the later Nhamo and Tambu who had frequented the English school), because of a lack of access to the English language, all have their discourses transposed from Shona. In a direct discourse, Ma’Shingayi, addressing Tambu, discusses the double burdens of poverty and blackness that constitute the plight of the Shona woman (16).

With a language filled with repetitions and proverbs, not to mention ululations,

Gladys's discourse bears most of the markers of orality. In a reported speech, she maintains, "Do you hear? [...] what Jeremiah is saying?" If you have not heard, listen well. It is the truth he is speaking! Truly our prince has returned today! Full of knowledge. Knowledge that will benefit all of us! Purururu!" (36). Gladys's excitement at Babamukuru's return from England is safely pre-supposed to have been uttered in original Shona. When Babamukuru addressed his clan to argue in favor of educating, at least, one member of each family for simple economic reasons, his language is also pre-supposed to be Shona because of his audience which is primarily made of people with no access to the English language (44).

Later in the narrative, within her first days at the mission, the exchanges between Babamukuru, Maiguru and Tambu can also be pre-supposed to have taken place in Shona as it was the language Tambu was most comfortable with (87-88). Tambu indeed had not settled into her new anglicized environment. On repeated occasions, she talks about how inadequate she was; "wallowing in [her] imagined inadequacy...succumbing so flabbily to the strangeness of [her] new circumstances" (91).

On a general note, besides people who the reader knows for a fact had access to the English language (Babamukuru and his family, the later Nhamo and Tambu and the missionaries), readers of *Nervous Conditions* can safely assume that everybody else has expressed him/herself in an original Shona. Lucia's rebellion at the dare and Mbuya's account of history are both carried out in the two women's native Shona.

C- Things Fall Apart

1) Utterances in the English of the narrative

In *Things Fall Apart*, a very limited number of people have access to the English language. The reader is indeed witness to the arrival of the White Man in Iboland; and prior to that landmark, the colonizers and their language were totally unknown to Okonkwo and his peers. While differentiating between original English and Ibo énoncés might be a challenge as far as the narrator is concerned, a positive identification of the languages used by the characters is more straightforward. As an omniscient narrator, he knows all the languages present in the fiction, among which is English. The narrator indeed uses the English language to give the reader insight knowledge into the Ibo culture. Information pertaining to chronology and the description of the geographical settings is also conveyed in English.

As far as the characters are concerned, only the missionaries and the interpreters are capable of expressing themselves in the English of the narration. With the missionaries, especially the District Commissioner, Mr Brown and Sir Reverend James, the story touches on topics like politics, history, religion and law.

2) Languages known through heterolingualism

a) Peregrinisms

Elements pertaining to peregrinism in *Things Fall Apart* essentially consist of the narrator adopting a “localized” language reminiscent of Ibo rhythm. The two noticeable isolated examples are “kotma” (150) and “tie-tie” (49) (respective deformations of court messenger and rope). On a more general note however, typically, peregrinisms consist of

translations of local proverbs, idioms and riddles into English. Next to the narrator, the other group of people who use a language that could be likened to peregrinism, are the interpreters. The interpreters (Mr Kiaga and Mr Okeke) indeed speak a language all to their own; they are in what Jean-Marc Moura calls the “interlangue” with expressions like “Yes, sah” (179). It is not their Ibo only which is not up to standard; their English is not either. Their utterances are visibly different from Standard English even if they pose no semantic problems to the reader.

b) Xenisms

Of all four authors, Chinua Achebe is uncontestedly the one who allocates the largest room to his local language and tradition in his narrative. Indeed, convinced as he is that an unaltered English language cannot be stretched far enough to deal with local ideologies and subject matters, Achebe more often than not brings his palm oil with which he contends that words should be eaten. Most, if not all the foreign lexicons in *Things Fall Apart* is made of Ibo words. They provide insight into the Ibo religion, traditions and customs with emphasis on the state of their polytheist belief, the importance of the supernatural and the importance of drums, songs and dances. But contrary to Cheikh Hamidou Kane or even Tsitsi Dangarembga, Achebe—like Mariama Ba—does provide a glossary of terms explaining the meaning associated with each local word. Here is the list of the xenisms in question. They are divided up into common words, onomatopoeias and songs/dances.

Common Ibo words:

“Egwugwu” (2): ancestral spirit; “ekwe,” “udu,” “ogene” (4): all musical instruments; “agadi-nwayi” (9): old woman or medicine; “ndichie” (10): elders; “*agbala*” (11): an effeminate man, another name for a woman—this time the word is not in italics and is capitalized; “obi”(11): hut; “chi” (14): personal god; “Foo-foo” (31): a dish; “ilo” (36): village playground; “uli” (62): a dying agent; “jigida” (62): waist beads; “iba” (67): sickness, a disease; “Nne” (67): mother; “ogbanje” (68): evil spirit that keeps revisiting his/her mother and provokes stillbirth; “iyi-uwa” (70): a relic ogbanje bury that needs to be destroyed for a child to stay alive; “uri” (97): part of the wedding process; “umunna” (97): a wide group of kinsmen; “ochu” (112): murder; “isa-ifi” (140): a traditional ceremony; “efulefu” (124): worthless, empty men; “osu” (136): an outcast; “Nno” (170): welcome

Onomatopoeias

“Gome, gome, gome, gome” (7): language of the drums, the *ogene*; “Umuofia kwenu,” “Yaa!” (4); “Oye” (69); “Oho” (77); “Aru oyim de de de dei!” (78); “Ee-e-e!” (103); “Diim! Diim! Diim!” (106); “E-u-u” (107).

Songs, Dances and Incantations

In the novel, songs and dances particularly are presented both in Ibo and in English. The following consists of lyrics that have been expressed in Shona solely. Achebe does not provide any translations and their intelligibility might also pose some problems to non-Ibo readers.

(52) A song in Ibo with Ikemefuna trying to find out whether or not his mother was still alive.

Eze elina, elina!

Sala

Eze ilikwa ya

Ikwaba akwa oligholi

Ebe Danda nete egwu

Sala

(88) Chielo, the priestess of Agbala chanting and voicing out incantation in local language:

'Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o'

[...] 'Okonkwo! Agbala ekene gio-o-o-o! Agbala cholu ifu ada ya

Ezinmao-o-o-o!

(106) The "Ekwe" speaking an esoteric language: *Umuofia obodo dike*

3) Language known through transpolingualism

a) With mention

Just like his Anglophone counterpart, Chinua Achebe does, at times, specifically name the original language of his characters. As a witness to the implementation of the White man, his religion as well as his school in Iboland, the reader knows for a fact that non-British characters (to the exception of the interpreters) did not have access to the authorial English. Evidence of transpolingualism with mention is when the narrator comments on Okoye's language. He writes: "Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs

are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (4). Another piece of evidence is in reference to Okonkwo’s reaction when he was separated from his mother at a young age. The narrator indeed mentions Okonkwo crying the traditional farewell to his mother in Ibo (112).

Other instances of tranpolingualism with mention are whenever an interpreter is called upon to facilitate conversation between the missionaries and the Ibo. Indeed, all the exchanges between the White man and the Ibo are in transpolingualism. The missionaries’ English utterances are rendered in Ibo and the Ibos’ are translated into English to allow intelligibility between the two groups (125). On many occasions indeed, the narrator mentions that the White man speaks to the Ibo people through translation. And if this was not enough, we have Okonkwo (and his fellow countrymen) wonder how the White man could make a negative judgement about their culture if he does not speak their language in the first place (151).

b) By pre-supposition

With the exception of the narrator, the interpreters and the White missionaries, everybody else in *Things Fall Apart* expresses themselves in an original Ibo. It is in the native Ibo of his characters that information related to daily life in Umuofia is presented. It is indeed through the interactions between characters that the reader experiences in detail how politics, law and religion are carried out with the Ibo. With the “ndichie,” a council of elders is presented as a valid and respected form of government; with the “egwuwu,” the reader experiences a unique justice system; and with polytheism and the belief in the supernatural, Achebe reinforces the validity of ancestral “religious” beliefs

deeply rooted in the Ibo culture.

D- *L'Aventure ambiguë*.

Contrary to the other three authors in our corpus, Cheikh Hamidou Kane does not use nearly as many foreign words. With the exception of a handful of Wolof words, the entire text seems to have been written not only in French, but in a high standard of the language. And this, despite the fact that we know for sure that most, if not the majority of the characters could not have spoken in the authorial French of the narration. Indeed, it is only a few pages into the text that we are introduced to the advent of the French school in the Country of the Diallobé; and prior to that fact, very few people had access to the language of the colonizers. In the novel, it is the narrator, foreign nationals and the Diallobés who have been to the French school who are actually able to express themselves in the French of the narration. As far as the narrator is concerned, he uses French to move the plot forward, to provide biographical information and make general commentaries. When used by the characters, French carries discussions on often abstract issues like God, death, freedom or nothingness.

1) Utterances in the original French of the narration

As we have seen with Mariama Ba, the mention of a letter more often than not implies the use of the French language. Both with Ba and Kane, the reader is aware that the novels are set in backgrounds with heavy Islamic influence. Even though Arabic is codified and has existed in writing for ages, it remains that characters of *L'Aventure ambiguë* have limited capabilities when it comes to using the language for

communication purposes. For this reason, Le Chevalier's letter to his son Samba Diallo when he was in France is assumed to have been written in the original French of the narration (chapter 7).

Whenever French nationals are involved in a conversation, the latter can be assumed to have been carried in French because of a lack of access to other local vernaculars. That's why the conversation between Samba Diallo, Jean, Le Chevalier and Jean's father at "la résidence du cercle" is here identified as an original French utterance.

Even if he was just an elementary school boy at the time, the discussion, in free indirect discourse, between Le Chevalier and Samba Diallo regarding Pascal's *Pensées*, is here identified as an original French énoncé, mainly because of the subject matter. When the conversation moves to the topics of God and work however, the identification of the language, I find, becomes inconclusive as either French or the language of the Diallobé could have been used.

The difficulty of positively identifying French dissipates when Samba Diallo moves to Paris and holds conversations with people with no knowledge of the Diallobé language. The discussion between Samba Diallo and Pierre Louie on history and politics, especially the relations between France and its African colonies, is carried out in the same French of the narration. Likewise, Samba Diallo's conversation with Lucienne on God (154), his discussion with Adele on colonization and especially the role of the French language and alphabet in the conquest, are all identified as being carried in the original French of the narration.

2) Languages known through heterolingualism

a) Peregrinisms

Peregrinisms supposes a locutor does in fact have access to the French language and had incorporated elements of other languages in his/her énoncés. *L'Aventure ambiguë* however is written in a high standard throughout and evidence of peregrinisms is very rare, not to say non-existent.

b) Xenisms

Xenisms are rarely used in *L'Aventure ambiguë*. Beside the Wolof “percale” (36) and “tabala” (181), the Peulh “Mbare” (36) or the Arabic “Chahada” (124), foreign words are kept to a minimum with Kane. Even when the narrator and characters talk about “La Nuit du Koran,” original Arabic is never actually spelled out.

3) Language known through transpolingualism

a) With mention

Unlike Achebe and Ba, Cheikh Hamidou Kane does not specifically name the languages used by his characters. However, at times, he does provide clear indication of original non-French énoncés. When the narrator addresses the reason Samba Diallo was beaten by Maitre Thierno, he talks about “cette phrase qu’il ne comprenait pas, pour laquelle il souffrait le martyre” (14). This reference to the recitation of Koranic verses is a direct acknowledgment of original Arabic énoncés. Recitations of Koranic verses indeed permeate the novel. The teacher’s short prayer (16), the reference to the twilight prayer (71) with “[...] cette voix qui parlait au crépuscule une langue que Jean ne comprenait pas,” not to mention the night of the Koran (83) when children recite sura from the Holy

Book before their parents, are all mentions of original Arabic énoncés.

Just like Achebe with the presence of the interpreter, Kane talks about the translation of the Koran from its original Arabic to the language of the Diallobé (36). Addressing La Grande Royale, Maitre Thierno confesses, “ Ce fut un chef, votre père, qui me montra, à moi qui traduis le Livre, comme il faut mourir” (37).¹⁴⁵

Unlike with Arabic, direct references to the presence of Peulh, the language of the Diallobé, are more limited. Commenting on the meeting between Le Maitre, Le Chevalier and the school director, the narrator remarks that “le mot école prononcé dans la langue du pays signifiait bois” (19); a clear indication that though rendered in French, the conversation was carried in “la langue du pays.”

b) By pre-supposition

Transpolingualism with pre-supposition is the paradigm through which the languages of the majority of the characters are known. When the teacher, in a direct discourse, says his evening prayer (16), the language is not specifically mentioned but the reader easily guesses it to be Arabic. Likewise, the litanies of Samba Diallo and his fellow students are here identified to be original Arabic utterances (23). Still among original Arabic énoncés, we have the words from the Prophet reported by Demba in a direct discourse (134), Le Chevalier’s prayer judged as “étrange” (strange, weird) by Lacroix (93), not to forget Le chef’s letter to Maitre Thierno (135).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ “[...] That was a chief, your father, who showed to me—to me the interpreter of the Book—how a man should die” (25).

¹⁴⁶ Generally speaking, as we have seen in *Une si longue lettre*, letter writing is usually a sign of original

But by far, the language that is the most “represented” underneath the French of the narration is Peulh, the language of the Diallobé. Among other instances of tranpolingualism by pre-supposition are La Grande Royale’s speech to the general assembly to discuss the inevitability of sending the Diallobé to the French school (31) and Le Maitre’s interior monologue voicing out loud his concerns with the new White school (48). Before Samba Diallo started school, the reader can make the case that Peulh, his native tongue, was the only language he could use for communication. Consequently, all his utterances prior to that landmark are in original Peulh.

On many occasions, the narrator provides direct insights into the psyche of his characters. Le Maitre’s personal thoughts (ch8), Samba Diallo’s interior monologue (106-07-08), his memories of Le Maitre (115), all in direct discourse, are uttered in the original Peulh of the Country of the Diallobé. But by far the single most debated Peulh utterance in transpolingualism is La Grande Royale’s discourse on the French school in front of her people.

In the coming chapter, I offer a detailed analysis of these linguistic cartographies to see how my selected authors represent, at the level of language, issues they deem important enough to be told. We will see how plurilingualism, specially the blends

French énoncés because of the non-codification of native languages. But in *L’Aventure ambiguë*, one must not forget that some people, though the clear minority, do have access to a level of Arabic that enables them to use the language for communication purposes. The letter in question is from Le chef to Maitre Thierno, the two people involved in the translation of the Koran from its original Arabic to the language of the Diallobé.

between the authorial French and English and the other languages spoken in the referential contexts of the authors, allow for a social and historical criticism of their societies.

Chapter Six: Plurilingualism and Socio-Historical Criticism

In Francophone and Anglophone texts from the continent, writers’ “natural”¹⁴⁷—or their first—languages are often relegated to the background to the benefits of French or English used as authorial ones. A closer look however reveals not only the actual presence of these traditional vernaculars, but most importantly, the pertinence of the cultural spaces to which these languages point. Be it Wolof and Arabic with Mariama Ba and Cheikh Hamidou Kane, or Shona with Tsitsi Dangarembga, or even Ibo with Chinua Achebe, writers’ atavic languages always seem to make their ways into the fiction; and with them, the reader is introduced to a whole new worldview fostered by the beliefs, traditions, and realities often channelled through these languages. Regardless of gender or colonial histories, authors—in this case Francophone and Anglophone,—by resorting to more than the obvious language of the narration, indeed make their fictions all the richer as they open their texts up to more than one single referential context. As a consequence, the analysis proposed here goes beyond a literary observation of plurilingualism to study the socio-historical impact of the presence of various languages in my selected fictions.

All four novels are set against backgrounds where traditional ways of living are met by new cultures and languages brought about by the European colonizers. The issue of colonization indeed constitutes a recurring theme, and authors as a consequence,

¹⁴⁷ Here I chose to qualify authors’ mother tongues as “natural” because they often are the first languages they are introduced to; the first languages they come to understand and speak naturally. More often than not, these writers are introduced to the French or English language when they start school—around the age

regardless of the languages of the narration or times of publications, have the White man settling in Africa at the heart of their problematics. From Achebe to Dangarembga, male and female authors alike write to denounce the effects of colonization in their respective countries; and in the process, they cast an unsentimental look into their own cultures as they position themselves as objective (inside) critics of their local traditions. Ba and Dangarembga, as could be expected from what was then a minority of educated women, in addition to the common enterprise of reinforcing the relevance of their atavistic cultures, have an added mission of being the voices of oppressed women in their respective communities. Denouncing such issues as patriarchy, sexism and polygamy, Ba and Dangarembga, in fact, carry the voices of women in very complex settings where race, class, sex, and gender intersect.

In the analysis that follows, we will see just how Dangarembga astutely manages to talk about the cultural encounter between the British and the Shona in terms of linguistic alienation; how Achebe's authorial English is in more ways than not a linguistic transposition of his native Ibo, and finally how Ba and Kane manage to realistically represent religious syncretism in Senegal to show how Islam, particularly, stands as an artefact to be contended with when discussing issues pertaining to everyday lives. All four writers, through their linguistic plurilingualism, demonstrate how each of their cultures is composed of so many overlapping (hi)stories. But before I get into the detailed analysis of each novel, especially of the novels by Ba and Dangarembga, a quick overview of the newer kind of women's writing more typical of African (Black) authors

of 6 or 7—and even then, they often do not use it on a regular basis or for everyday conversation.

is in order. How are women writers from the continent different from their Western counterparts in terms of subject matters, narrative styles, or even cultural approaches is the topic of this coming section.¹⁴⁸

A- Black African Women Writing and Resistance

When talking about the issues of women writing, affirmation and resistance, one of the first things that comes to mind is the concept of feminism. Indeed, feminism, regardless of where it has been theorized, is generally thought of as an ideology that gives women their voices back, a philosophy that sets out to demonstrate that “the woman matters.” The concept however has different shades and connotations depending on the specific histories and cultures that define a woman’s existence. To help make the point about the manifold nature of feminism and the need for a plural understanding of the concept, we will agree with Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said who contend that:

...feminism is based on historically and culturally specific realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. This means that feminism meant one thing in the seventeenth century (when the word was first used) and that it means

¹⁴⁸ Far from reinforcing a Western/African duality, the discussion of the differences between Western feminism and African womanisms serves the greater purpose of emphasizing the level of agency and independent thinking required from the African woman. She does not just follow existing trends; she defines for herself the different boundaries her gender faces in the specific historical and cultural settings in which she evolves. Moreover, because the African woman is prejudiced by both womanhood and blackness (with blackness existing in direct opposition to whiteness), an overview of western feminism is in order to show the cultural evolution of the concept.

something quite different in the 1980's. It can also be articulated differently in different parts of the world and within a country, differently by different women depending on their class, background, levels of education, consciousness ... (qtd in Kolawole 15)

This remark by Bhasin and Said about the ever-evolving definition of the concept and the need to be mindful of the specific realities surrounding each and every woman, directly speaks to the condition of the African woman. In *Une si longue lettre* and *Nervous Conditions*, female agency is confronted with additional hurdles such as patriarchal and (post)colonial structures, issues that are deeply rooted in culture and history. As Mary Kolawole writes in *Womanism and African Consciousness*, “none of the Euro-American schools of feminism is adequate for expressing the yearnings of all women at all times” (11). It is with this layered understanding of the concept of feminism, which goes beyond plain traditional gender issues, that the situations of women in the texts here under study are to be understood, particularly, in the texts written by women themselves.¹⁴⁹

Ba and Dangarembga belong to a newer category of feminist writers that Alice Walker calls “womanist.”¹⁵⁰ Womanism complicates mainstream feminist theory by

¹⁴⁹ Because of its non-African origins, some readers might assimilate the meaning of feminism exclusively with how it has been defined in the West. This reference to the west in the discussion of African womanisms helps readers, who might not be familiar with the particularities of “feminisms” in Africa, to have a better grasp of how the concept evolved from its Western origins to the specific conditions of the post-colonial, Black African woman.

¹⁵⁰ Walker first coined this word in her book entitled *In Search Of Our Mother's Garden* where she

invoking the multiple levels on which women are indeed oppressed. Men alone do not actually account for the (prejudiced) conditions of women; especially in sub-Saharan Africa where traditions, class systems and race all converge to define the role and place of women. In *Une si longue lettre* and *Nervous Conditions*, all of the above-mentioned issues are dealt with, at length, in a highly heterogeneous language reflective of their authors' plurilingual nature. In both novels, plurilingualism does not just participate in elevating the aesthetic aspect of the narratives; it speaks to much deeper issues of resistance and protest. In the following pages, we will see, among other topics, how Ba and Dangarembga write feminism and resistance in the postcolonial, male-dominated contexts of Senegal and Zimbabwe by resorting to multiple registers of language.

B- Writing in the first person

By definition, in the first person narrative, the narrator is in charge of more than just telling a story. Not only does he/she recount the events; he/she also is also the hero, the protagonist of the narrative. The genre however, as Mineke Schipper argues in “‘Who I am?’ Fact and Fiction in African First Person Narrative,” is relatively new to African literature, which, for the longest time, remained essentially oral. Quoting Georges Gusdorf, Schipper goes as far as maintaining that: “If others than Europeans write an autobiography, then it is because they have been annexed by a mentality which was not

contends that “Womanist is to feminist what purple is to lavender.” Even though, it should be noted, that Walker did not address the specific context of African feminism, it remains that her theorization of womanism, particularly in the nuances she brings to traditional Western (White) feminism applies to our discussion.

theirs” (53). If, by Schipper’s own account, defining “European mentality” could be elusive, it remains nonetheless that Gusdorf rightly situates writing, in this particular case, writing in the first person, as a result of the European’s influence in African literature.

While Schipper is right in identifying writing as a phenomenon that does not have its roots in Africa, it still remains that the use of the first person was widespread in Africa, particularly with the story-telling genre. In her article entitled “From Orality to Writing: African Women Writing and the (Re)Inscription of Womanhood,” Obioma Nnaemeka traces back female voices to a time preceding the advent of the written word. Nnaemeka argues that not only were women at the forefront of storytelling in oral (African) societies, but the use of the first person was equally commonplace. Basing her analysis on the works of Ruth Finnegan (1970), G.P. Lestrade (1935), J.H.K Nketia (1963), and Henry Owuor (1961), Nnaemeka reiterates the important role played by women in producing as well as propagating knowledge. She writes:

In African oral tradition, women were very visible not only as performers but as producers of knowledge, especially in view of oral literature's didactic relevance, moral(izing) imperatives and pedagogical foundations. Researchers in the field of African oral tradition have documented the active participation of women, at professional and nonprofessional levels, in the crafting, preservation, and transmission of most forms of oral literature. (139)

With oral traditions, the narrator—in this case women—did not just tell common stories; more often than not, because of their live audiences and the need for interaction, they were compelled to add a personal dimension to their narratives. Oral narratives, we

learn from Walter Ong, usually follow a set of fixed formulaic patterns, but in their executions, they bear a very personal tone. With the level of creativity in their delivery, storytellers somewhat reclaimed personal ownership of what started out as communal and collective stories. In the narrative, this addition of the personal into the storytelling translated with the use of the singular, first-person pronoun, the “I.” As this brief overview shows, telling stories in the first person, as Ba and Dangarembga do, appears as not entirely new in African literature, if critics know where to look in their attempts at uncovering these voices (Kolawole 9).

In Africa particularly, the move from orature to writing, in literature, implied more than just a shift in authors’ medium of communication. With the advent of the written word were also introduced Western languages and Western education. In the Francophone and Anglophone parts of the continent, the knowledge of the colonizers’ languages became a prerequisite, an all-necessary initial step to someone being able to write (not just tell) stories. And as I have shown in the previous paragraphs, both during and after colonization, there was a large gender gap when it came to who among the natives frequented the new schools. More often than not, men were given an opportunity more so than women, and this resulted in a gendered linguistic imbalance which in turn translated into more male authors, and even more narratives written from men’s points of views.

This brief look back at the location of female voices in African literature enables us to better situate that of Ramatoulaye (Ba) and Tambu (Dangarembga) within the larger historical and cultural contexts of their respective countries. By inscribing themselves into

the narrative, by writing their stories in the first person, Ba and Dangarembga do more than just offer stories from women's points of views; they more importantly show resilience and "resistance" to the predominantly male hegemonic discourse which has for a long time defined African literature.

In the cases of Mariama Ba and Tsitsi Dangarembga, writing in the first person with a character who happens to be a female allows the narrative to present a story from a female point of view. Neither *Une si longue lettre*, nor *Nervous Conditions* is considered a true autobiography (Ann McElaney-Johnson 1999; Bardolph 1990), but both novels undeniably contain elements of their authors' personal lives that cannot be missed. By having a female narrator doubling as the main protagonist, Ba and Dangarembga make sure that they tell stories their audiences will find believable and with which they can identify. This female-focused lens on life allows readers to know first-hand, from the women who live through them, what their life experiences are. It provides a departure from narratives where women were spoken for, mainly because of the late critical recognition of women on the literary scene.

More than Dangarembga, Ba, in addition to telling the stories of her characters in the first person, also uses the epistolary format. But unlike a traditional letter, Ba appeals to more than one "narrator" to address an equally diverse audience. After tracing its origins back in 17th century French literature with Madame de Sevigne's "posthumously published letters" (68) in his study of the origins and impacts of the epistolary novel in African literature, Schipper could not help but wonder at how the genre was almost non-existent in the Anglophone world (69). For Ba, using a letter format written in a first

person narrative with a main character who, in many regards, parallels her own life, is a way for her not only to tell the stories she believes are important enough to be told, but it also enables her to express her subjective mind as well as make criticisms of the social and political lives of her time.¹⁵¹

By having a woman write a letter to address a fellow woman, Ba steers away from discourses where women were not just victims but also spoken for. With Ba (Ramatoulaye), the (African) Senegalese woman is in a situation to tell her own stories, stories that have often been told improperly by men and by the colonial discourse. Indeed, expressing a need for a new female discourse in African literature, Ba contends:

... [L]a femme-écrivain a une mission particulière. Elle doit, plus que ses pairs masculins, dresser un tableau de la condition de la femme africaine. . . . C'est à nous, femmes, de prendre notre destin en mains pour bouleverser l'ordre établi à notre détriment et ne point le subir. Nous devons user comme les hommes de cette arme, pacifique certes mais sûre, qu'est l'écriture. . . . Les chants nostalgiques dédiés à la mère africaine confondue dans les angoisses d'homme à la Mère Afrique ne nous suffisent plus. . . .

[T]he [African] woman writer has a special mission. More than her male counterparts, she has to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects.

¹⁵¹ Ramatoulaye does not just reflect on her life, she does so in front of an outside audience. Aissatou, we know is the addressee of the letter, but judging from the many elements of Aissatou's own life that Ramatoulaye incorporates in her narrative, one can make the point of a larger and more relevant audience in general.

As women, we must take the future in our own hands in order to overthrow the status quo which harms us and to which we must no longer submit.... Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. . . . We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother, who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa. (qtd in McElaney-Johnson 119)

By writing in the first person and having female protagonists at the center of their narrative, female authors like Ba and Dangarembga not only “[take] positions as mouthpiece for their gender,” they also “force their voices into existing male and Western feminist discourse” (Kolawole 6). With Ba and Dangarembga, female protagonists make themselves heard as they interject their voices in communities where patriarchy and colonialism have long stood as huge barriers to women’s agency.

Ba and Dangarembga however, along with their female characters, do not point to men alone as the unique source of gender inequality. They cast an inquisitive eye at traditional Western feminist discourse,¹⁵² which, oftentimes, does not take into account specific cultural and social realities at play in Africa. As a consequence, the use of plurilingualism in the novels here under study—particularly the ones written by women—goes beyond a mere aesthetic project, it speaks to deeper issues of affirmation and protest. In *Une si longue lettre* and *Nervous Conditions*, French and English exist right alongside the other languages in the authors’ referential contexts, namely Shona, Wolof and Arabic. With Dangarembga, the cohabitation between the foreign British and the local Shona bears some pathological accents and the characters’ dilemma, and sometimes their

¹⁵² See Marilley 1996; Newmann 1999; Beauvoir 1953.

inability to cope with the situations at hand, is depicted in terms of linguistic alienation. In Ba's case, the coexistence of French alongside Wolof and Arabic seems to take place in a much smoother manner as a cultural and religious syncretism made of the various languages and traditions at play emerges.

C- Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre* (1979)

Plurilingualism in *Une si longue lettre* is not simply defined as a juxtaposition of different languages; it is also, and foremost, a blend of various, often opposite literary traditions. On one level, Mariama Ba tastefully mixes up oral modes of communication with a more literate medium inherited from the French as attested in the overall format of the book, a novel. On a second level, Ba circulates in the background of her authorial French the different languages, mainly Wolof and Arabic, spoken in the actual referential context where her characters evolve. The need for this blend is a direct consequence of the continent's colonial heritage, a heritage that Ba seems to accept as part of the cultural hybridity that has come with colonization.

Une si longue lettre is set against a linguistically composite background where the French language and culture join in an already hybrid environment in which local vernaculars have been cohabiting with Arabic since the Middle Ages. Contrary to popular belief, Europeans, and more exactly the French, were not the first foreign power to have a strong influence on the Senegalese people, their languages and their ways of life. Around the 1400's, Arabs from Northern Africa and the Middle East, in their religious quest, introduced Islam and the Arabic language in Senegal (Kritzeck and Lewis 1969; Hunwick 2006). Unlike the French with their "civilizing mission" and the paramount importance

they placed on language, the Arabs were more concerned with spreading their religion, and getting local pagan populations to convert to their faith, to become Muslims. As we shall see in more detail later, with the analysis of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's novel, the Arabs succeeded in implanting Islam as the dominant religion in Senegal without necessarily having local populations master their language.¹⁵³ More often than not, precepts of Islam were and are still taught through populations' local vernaculars, not in the original Arabic of the Koran. As a consequence, even though most Senegalese are somehow familiar with Arabic,¹⁵⁴ the language still remains fairly hermetic, only truly knowable to a select few who are able to use it for communication purposes. In *Une si longue lettre*, while Arabic xenisms permeate the novel, no character whatsoever expresses him/herself in that language. Arabic borrowings in the novel consist of titles (Alhadji, Alhadja, Imam) and common names (Allah, Djinns, Zem-Zem) that have actually passed into the lexicons of most local languages, among which Wolof. The only true Arabic énoncés in the novel consist of Koranic verses alluded to by the narrator but which are never spelled out, not even in transposition. This lack of command of Arabic among Ba's characters mirrors the larger unintelligibility of the language, at the level of the country, discussed earlier. Interestingly enough however, this limitation on Arabic

¹⁵³ About 90 percent of Senegalese belong to the Muslim faith.

¹⁵⁴ For example, Muslims are required to say their prayers five times a day. And these prayers are tightly structured and are to be conducted in the original Arabic of the Koran. This is how Senegalese Muslims in their majority are able to recite entire verses from the Koran (in Arabic) without necessarily understanding the meanings they contained.

language competency does not necessarily translate into a lack of religious (Islamic) knowledge. In Ba's novel, the blend of Arabic, Wolof and French mirrors the larger linguistic syncretism at play in the country and the use of plurilingualism, along with references to diverse cultural and religious practices, is not lost on the reader.

In *Une si longue lettre*, Mariama Ba answers the long-debated question regarding the authorial language of African writers by choosing French, a French language in communion with Arabic and her native Wolof tongue with heavy markers of orality. Ba also carefully chooses her medium of expression: a novel rather than any other genre more typical of orature—such as poetry or recording—which would have been more suitable to carry the heavy oral tradition that characterizes her work. In choosing a novel, a written work, Ba not only enlarges the range of topics she can address, she also responds to attacks which view African literature as a copy of Western production lacking cultural specificity and originality (Larson 1972; Moore 1962).

In 1980, at a symposium on “La Fonction des littératures modernes d’Afrique noire,” Ba declared, “Written African literature could not be neutral in the face of the denial of the cultural identity of the African, the absurd and scornful colonialist assertions that the African ‘has no history,’ ‘is incapable of rational thinking,’ ‘needs to be civilized’” (“The Political...” 412). This call for action implies not only the investigation of challenging and interesting subject matters, but the media selected to convey such messages should equally be original and reflective of an African identity: “Form is part and parcel of content. And form enhances thoughts” (412). Given Ba's point of view on both the form and the function of written African literatures, one understands better the original

language blend in *Une si longue lettre* and the complexity of the issues the novel addresses. For Ba, an original and effective form results in a more efficient medium to criticize her society.

Une si longue lettre is set against a background heavily influenced by Ba's native Wolof language and traditional culture.¹⁵⁵ Evidence of Ba's use of her native Wolof language is the presence, in the French text, of the different markers of orality. Even though the protagonist and author of the letter, Ramatoulaye, expresses herself in French because of her use of the epistolary genre particularly, not everybody else in the novel does. When the group of men, back from Modou's burial, talk about the deceased in a language filled with repetitions and reduplication, one can assume that the énoncé presented in a recognizable French was however uttered in an original Wolof:

'Modou, ami des jeunes et des vieux...'

'Modou, cœur de lion, défenseur de l'opprimé...'

'Modou, aussi à l'aise dans un costume que dans un caftan...'

'Modou, bon frère, bon mari, bon musulman...' (14)¹⁵⁶

Here the language of the funeral visitors is knowable only by pre-supposition; the

¹⁵⁵ Wolof, I showed earlier on, is very much an oral language; it wasn't until after Senegal's independence in 1960 that it was codified and could finally exist in written format.

¹⁵⁶ 'Modou, friend of the young as the old. . .'

'Modou, the lion-hearted, champion of the oppressed. . .'

'Modou, at ease as much in a suit as in a caftan. . .'

'Modou, good brother, good husband, good Muslim. . .' (4)

narrator never specifically mentions the Wolof origins of their speech. In a direct discourse, their utterances are put in quotation marks, in a language that violates proper French syntax and grammar rules. Further in the text, the narrator uses the xenism “Siguil ndigale” (5), the expression used by people of the Wolof tribe, to present their condolences. Praising Modou for being “at ease as much in a suit as in a caftan” and also for his quality for being a “good Muslim,” this énoncé, in the image of its transposition into French from Wolof, speaks about the syncretic environment in which the fiction is set. The “suit,” imported from the West speaks to Modou’s westernized ways while the “caftan,” the traditional male robe in Senegal, points to the deceased’s attachment to his Wolof roots.

This “silent” linguistic transposition, which comes with no explicit warning or mention, as Lawson-Hellu puts it, is a way for Ba to catch the attention of her local readership by resorting to a language they can identify with, the same language they would use in their everyday lives.

The repetitive (oral) nature of *Une si longue lettre* reveals itself not only in redundant expressions—like the one above—but also in the overall structure of the novel itself. Ramatoulaye decides to write a letter in response to Aissatou’s; she opens her narrative with: “I have received your letter. By way of reply, I am beginning this diary, my prop in my distress” (1). What is striking, however, is that Ramatoulaye not only recounts her own story, she also includes events her addressee already knows, with statements like, “Aissatou, my friend, perhaps I am boring you by relating what you already know” (9), and “I have related at one go your story as well as mine” (55).

Recounting their common experiences from their childhood to their adult lives, Ramatoulaye's letter is at times redundant, always calling for the addressee's memory. This frequent invitation to memory punctuates the entire novel with expressions such as, "Let us recall. . . let us relive" (15), "Do you remember. . ." (13-22).

More forcefully than any examples given so far, the inclusion of Aissatou's own break-up letter to her husband Mawdo (after he took a second wife)—in the letter of which she is the recipient—constitutes an ultimate Wolof borrowing highlighting, if need still be, the heavy presence of orature indicative of an original Wolof *énoncé* in Ba's novel.

Even more obvious than the somewhat subtler expressions of orality, like the repetitions and reduplication mentioned above, are the incorporations of Wolof and Arabic xenisms directly into the narrative. Ba uses original Wolof lexicon to talk about the hierarchized nature of her society and its traditional belief systems. Likewise, when she discusses the influence of Islam on her characters' lives, the register is borrowed from the Koran's original Arabic. Indeed, terminologies like "Laobes" (7), "Guelewar" (17), "guers" (67), and "samba linguere" (69) provide information about the unique system of caste at play in Senegal; and because these concepts do not have readily available equivalents in French, they are left in Ba's native Wolof at the risk of causing semantic problems for non-Wolof speakers. In the same vein, "zem-zem" (3), "imam" (9), "Alhaja" (10), "Allah" (36), and "bissimilai! Bissimilai," find their semantic meanings in Arabic and tell about the influence of Islam in Ba's community.

Original Wolof utterances are more widespread than what the French authorial

language leads the reader to believe. Transpoligualism takes place every time traditional lexical expressions are directly transferred into French. But because the trope is often achieved “without mention,” not only is this level of linguistic heterogeneity sometimes missed by critics, but again, the meaning—in the target language—often sounds awkward and not readily intelligible to a non-Senegalese audience, who in their reading process, might equally miss the relevance of the Wolof language “mise-en-texte.”¹⁵⁷ An example of transpoligualism in *Une si longue lettre* is found when Farba Diouf, Aunt Nabou’s brother, gives away his daughter to her sister. Farba Diouf lives in Diakhao, a place away from Dakar, where the “survival of traditions” is most preserved (27). Just like her elder sister Aunt Nabou, Farba Diouf could not have expressed himself in the French of the narration. Diakhao indeed, the “royal cradle” of the Sereer tribe where “antiquated rites” are still in usage, is described as a place that is putatively fixed in the past. And in the image of the geographical state of Diakhao, its inhabitants show no signs of influence from the French colonizers. When addressing her sister, Farba Diouf maintains, “take young Nabou, your namesake. She is yours. I ask only for her bones” (29). Diouf’s original language is not explicitly stated. The narrator shows no indication as to whether or not it was the narrator’s (Ramatoulaye’s) Wolof, or Diouf’s native Sereer. But in light of the enunciation context, one fact remains uncontested; it could not have been the authorial French of the narration. Farba Diouf does not want his daughter back alive, and yet, nowhere is death mentioned in his speech. However, the reader makes the connection

¹⁵⁷ This might be one of the reasons which led John Champagne to say that “at times, *So Long a Letter* is virtually unintelligible to a Western audience unfamiliar with both the history of Senegal and Islam” (34).

between young Nabou's "bones" and her remains. Here again, instead of talking about Farba Diouf's wish in a more standard French, Ba literally translates the original Wolof (or Sereer) expression into French at the risk of potentially losing part of her audience.

Beyond Farba Diouf's utterance in what was likely an original Sereer (or Wolof) *énoncé*, it is all the relevance of a historical, political and social pre-colonial organization that the narrator uncovers. After the independence of Senegal in 1960, the country became a republic, thus turning the page of centuries of traditional systems of tribal kingships. "Bour-Sine" (28), a Wolof xenism literally meaning the "king of the Sine region," is a direct nod to the Sereer kingdom located on the banks of the Saloum river in the present-day Senegal (Klein, 1968). The Sereer, as their traditions and customs indicate, were primarily an atheistic population. In Aunt Nabou's thoughts, "antiquated rites and religion" (28) go hand in hand. With Aunt Nabou indeed, the recitation of religious (Islamic) verses is immediately followed by a pagan practise consisting of "[pouring] milk...into the Sine to appease the invisible spirits" (28).

Ba's choice to convey pre-Islamic religion through the voice of Aunt Nabou is not random. The Sereer indeed constitute the largest tribe in Senegal, only second to the Wolof. But more important than their representativity, it is their resistance to the monotheistic religions brought along by the successive Arab and French foreign powers and their attachment to ancestral beliefs that make them stand out (Hesseling, 1985).

Transpolingualism in *Une si longue lettre* takes place whenever Ba reproduces, in French, expressions and idioms people took a long time to carve to perfection and pass down from one generation to another. These expressions are mostly proverbs that Ba uses

to “sustain a stated idea, to give authority and add weight to argumentation” (Kasanga and Kalume 61). This might be the reason why, even when Ba did translate these proverbs from Wolof to French, she did it in a way that kept them as close to their original source as possible. In her interview with Harell-Bond—in 1979, before the novel was translated into English—when asked “do you think your book will do well in either the English version or its French original elsewhere in Africa,” Ba voiced the hope that *Une si longue lettre* would retain its African flavour regardless of whatever language it is translated into. She replied:

I believe so. . . I have read the translation of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. . . And, to my great surprise, I find the same mentality that is here, the same traditions, the same problems, the same way of doing things, the same reticence, etc. So, I believe that if my book is translated into English it will be possible for every African to understand it very well. (Harell-Bond 397)

So Ba’s use of expressions embedded in Senegalese, and African cultures in general, in her narrative is a totally deliberate gesture to establish a special connection with her local public even though it seems to be done at the expense of her Western readers. Actually, while proverbs like “you can feel your stomach as well as you please; it will still provide for itself without your knowing” (77) sound very familiar to a Senegalese, a person who speaks both Wolof and English cannot help wondering how Ba arrived at this translation. Given Ba’s level of education, one might rightly assume that she could have come up with more understandable expressions instead of just literally translating Wolof énoncés into French. By simply finding corresponding Wolof words in French, Ba

implicitly determines how these expressions will later be translated in other languages—including English—and thereby ensures that regardless of the effects of translation, her novel will retain its Senegalese flavour.

The interest of *Une si longue lettre* goes well beyond the language of the narration; the topics Ba deals with are equally as important and need attention. The main issues Ba addresses in the novel are the place and roles of women in a traditional Muslim environment. While the origins of Aissatou's miseries lie in the low social class she belongs to, Ramatoulaye faces a religious double standard which justifies polygamy.

1) On Senegalese Islamic Culture

Generally speaking, in Africa, discussions of religion and colonization go hand in hand. Christianity, the main religion of Britain and France, was widely introduced in the continent, especially with the mission schools (Carey 2011; Riviere 1997). In Senegal however, the French were not very successful in converting the local population; the majority of Senegalese in fact remained Muslims, a religion they came in contact with as early as the 9th century (Westerlund and Svanberg 1999; Gellar 1982, Harisson 1988). This being said, as Lucy Creevey remarks, despite 90% of its population being Muslims, “the impact of Catholic and Christian ideas would be far greater than the numbers of Christians in the country” (277). Much of Senegal's constitution and laws are modelled after the French system. With its Civil Code largely inspired by the French Napoleonic Code, Senegal indeed is a republic with a government structure and law system that (theoretically) promulgates the separation between the state and religion. For the majority of Senegalese however, there was a need for the law to accommodate Muslims, who

wanted it, to have recourse to “a version of Islamic law in regard to marriage, divorce, family authority, child custody and inheritance“(Creevey 268). This is how the Civil Code came to be modified to allow polygamy for Muslim men who wanted to marry more than one wife, as permitted by their religion.¹⁵⁸ Another way the Senegalese Civil Code adapted Islamic laws to accommodate the majority of its population is with the notion of “paternal authority.” Indeed, up until 2012, men (husbands) were considered the sole legal heads of the household. A fact that goes to say that, in Senegal, especially at the times Ba and Kane were published, women were discriminated against, both by the state and religion.¹⁵⁹

The Muslim majority in Senegal, despite a strong belief in the theology of the Koran, are not Arab and neither do they adopt an Arab culture. The narrator in *Une si longue lettre* specifically mentions the “marabout” (48) and “Tidjanism” (27), two concepts that find their relevance in the specific organization of Islam in Senegal. Islam in Senegal is divided into brotherhoods, one of which being “Tidjanism” with the “marabouts” acting as spiritual and religious leaders. By depicting a version of Islam different from the kinds found in typical Arab countries where Sharia,¹⁶⁰ the Islamic laws,

¹⁵⁸ Here, it is worth noting that women do not have a say in what type of matrimonial contract they enter upon marriage. Men and men only make the decision as to whether or not their marriages will be monogamous or polygamous.

¹⁵⁹ An important remark is that both before and after independence, there was a long tradition of collaboration between Muslim leaders and secular rulers in the management of the country (See Riedl 2012, Loimeier 1996).

¹⁶⁰ See Abbas Amanat and Frank Griffel’s Shari’a: *Islamic law in the contemporary context* for a definition

regulates all aspects of life (Hallaq 2009; Hussain 2004; Grand Brilliance Sdn Bhd 2006, Trimmingham 1962, 1968), Ba's portrayal of the Senegalese Islam shows the limits of the extent to which traditional ways have been disrupted by the Arabs.

Senegal remained a secular nation where people still held on to the pre-Islamic ways despite deep-seated religious beliefs. Islam in Senegal is indeed highly syncretic with words like "Imam" (9), "Alhaja, Alhaji" (10), "Allah" (36) existing right alongside "tours" (28) and "safara" (43). While the first three words are obvious borrowings from Arabic and point to the Islamic faith, "tours" and "safara" on the other hand find their relevance in ancestral atheistic practises. By making ancestral rites cohabit right alongside Islamic precepts in the fiction, Ba makes sure to realistically convey the religious syncretism earlier touched on and which led critics—the French particularly—to theorize a particular concept of "Islam noir"¹⁶¹ (Monteil 1964, Hiskett 1984). In *Une si longue lettre*, in the image of the country, Islam transcends its original confines of religion to influence both social and political spheres. Lucy Creevey indeed contends that:

of what Sharia is and more importantly how it has been understood over the centuries.

¹⁶¹In her article entitled "La politique musulmane de la France au Sénégal (1936-64)," Helene Grandhomme provides an insight into how the French "managed" their Muslim colonies both during and after colonization. Focusing on the particular example of Senegal, Grandhomme shows how the French, very early on, understood that Islam was a force to be dealt with. In a detailed historical account, Grandhomme retraces both the theoretical rationale as well as the practical application of the former colonizing power in incorporating elements of the Koran theology into the secular laws of its Muslim colonies. This is how the forces that shape the Senegalese society and the lives of its citizen—both male and female—are to be found in a mix of traditional, Islamic, and European laws and customs.

Islam regulates all aspects of human life and does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Islam prescribes a set of beliefs, a way of worship, an integrated system of criminal and civil law, an economic, and a political system. It sets out the way to run the family, prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress, etiquette, food and personal hygiene, and the relationship between the sexes. (277-78)

With both Ba and Kane, the reader is in the presence of mostly Muslim characters, who despite not being bound to Sharia law, still largely live their lives according to the teachings of the Koran. This is the reason why Ba's advocacy for more women's rights implies a criticism of Islamic rules—or at least of their interpretations by men primarily.

2) On the Senegalese Traditional Society

In *Une si longue lettre*, Ba also denounces the restrictions imposed upon women based on their gender and social status. Aissatou, because she was born a goldsmith, will remain a goldsmith. Marrying into a higher social class does not make her a noble person. The customary laws defining people's social status make it impossible for anyone born in a lower class to work themselves up. Even if, in marrying Mawdo, Aissatou somehow joined the upper class ("Mawdo raised you up to his own level, he the son of a princess and you the child from the forge" [19]), her family-in-law continues to "look down on [her] from the height of their lost nobility" (20). In traditional Senegal, and still today, once a goldsmith, always a goldsmith. In using expressions like "lost nobility," Mariama Ba signals that this system of caste, of categorizing people according to their birth, is archaic and needs to be reformed. As an alternative to the caste system, Ba emphasizes

the role of education and the notion of “profession.”

Mariama Ba does not just advocate a shift from a system of caste to an emphasis on education. As Shaun Irlam remarks, “The emphasis on ‘profession’ points to the device for new associations and new affiliations as traditional ones are dissolved” (29). Ba also challenges the validity of knowledge imbedded in orature and carried down from generation to generation. Farmata the praise singer is a griot, which is “a role handed down from mother to daughter” (7), and Aissatou is a goldsmith’s daughter with “its code. . . transmitted from father to son” (18). Aissatou could afford to leave her marriage and raise her four sons by herself thanks to the education she received and the subsequent good position it enabled her to have.¹⁶² As Ramatoulaye rightly observes, “Books saved [her]. Having become her refuge, they sustained [her]” (32), and “what society refused [her], they granted” (32). Ba puts in direct opposition the validity of knowledge handed down from generation to generation with the knowledge writing enables. While oral knowledge produces “commonplace truths” (31), writing enables an “‘uncommon’ destiny” (15). Ramatoulaye is just one among many Senegalese women until she uses the power of writing, to dissociate her voice from the communal customary one; she claims, “My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous” (57-58).¹⁶³

¹⁶²Thanks to her education, following her divorce from Mawdo, Aissatou was able to land a position as a Translator/Interpreter at the Senegalese Embassy in New York.

¹⁶³ Ramatoulaye is not the only woman, however, who affirms her identity through writing; Aissatou, as well, wrote a letter to announce her intention to leave her marriage. As Ann McElaney-Johnson suggests in

Not all women in *Une si longue lettre* have a wish for emancipation or even view in a positive light other women's fight for self-determination. Farmata and Aunt Nabou are the embodiment of all things traditional. These two women are the custodians of oral tradition; while Farmata, through the griot social class she belongs to, is in charge of keeping and transmitting oral knowledge, Aunt Nabou, the "Dioufene," clings to her "lost nobility" and does whatever is in her power to keep the traditional order of society and prevent changes. Aunt Nabou seeks to perpetuate herself through her namesake, the Young Nabou. She trains her to carry on their traditions and customs, vowing, "I want this child to be both my legs and my right arm. I am growing old. I will make of this child another me" (28). Young Nabou has been to school and later becomes a midwife but school had little influence on her. Unlike Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, she does not have any desire to dissociate her voice from the communal one. Ramatoulaye asserts:

School had not left a strong mark on [her], preceded and dominated as it was by the strength of character of Aunty Nabou, who, in her rage for vengeance had left nothing to chance in the education she gave her niece. It was especially while telling

"Epistolary Friendship: 'La prise de parole' in Mariama Bâ's 'Une si longue lettre,'" "Although the matter in her letter is self-reflexive, she does not write solely to herself, but in the tradition of female epistolary voice, she reaches out to a confidant in what becomes an act of self-examination and affirmation which reinforces the bond between Ramatoulaye and Aissatou" (113). For further details, see Perry, 1980. The act of writing is determinant in both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou's "prise de parole." With Ba, there is an evident intersection between Western education (symbolized here by the ability to write) and the process of emancipation.

folk tales, late at night under the starlit sky, that Aunty Nabou wielded her power over young Nabou's soul. . . . And slowly but surely, through the sheer force of repetition, the virtues and greatness of a race took root in this child. (46-47)

As Young Nabou's training demonstrates, oral education perpetuates customs contrary to "school" which encourages individualism and self-determination.¹⁶⁴ Young Nabou is coached to be a continuation of her aunt, to be a traditional Senegalese woman, content and eager to maintain the status quo. Under the watchful eye of her namesake Aunt Nabou, the archetypical Sereer woman, guardian of traditions, the influence of "school" accused of "[turning] girls into devils" (17) is kept in check and counterbalanced by teachings embedded in "late folk tales."

Ramatoulaye obviously wishes for reforms that will do away with biased and unfair customs, especially toward women, but at the same time, she does not reject those customs altogether; she is "torn between the past and the present" (19). Ba's position through her main character, Ramatoulaye, is rather ambiguous; but, by denouncing restrictions based on gender and social status, Ba definitely showcases her concerns for women and as a consequence, she has been dubbed a feminist; a feminist particularly aware of the burdens of the Senegalese Black women.

3) On Womanism

The label "feminist" is often used in literary criticism to qualify writings on and/or by women; it voices an awareness of the inequitable nature of prescribed gendered social

¹⁶⁴ Ramatoulaye writes her letter using the first person. It is school and her ability to write that, in part, help her affirm and dissociate her voice from that of her society.

roles. The meaning invested in the term however is far from being stable. The understanding of the adjective, in fact, potentially differs from one user to the next. The substantive “feminism,” to talk about ideas deemed feminist, is commonly used in the plural to convey the multiplicity of voices, concerns, approaches, and values that exist in the field. In Africa, given the particular history of the continent, the terminology “African Feminisms”¹⁶⁵ has been theorized in attempts to counter an initial Western¹⁶⁶ concept of the discipline where patriarchy was seen as the main—and sometimes sole—barrier to female agency. This is how the term “womanism”¹⁶⁷ came to fruition in an effort to deal with the particular social, traditional, and gendered burdens of the African women.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ The expression African Feminisms is widely used in literary circles. For a glance of how other critics have used and theorized the concept, see Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s “African Feminist Discourse: A Review Essay,” Shereen Essof’s “African Feminisms: Histories, Applications and Prospects;” Oshadi Mangena’s “Feminism (Singular), African Feminisms (Plural) and the African Diaspora;” Evelyne Tegomoh’s “Experiencing African Feminisms” or even Desiree Lewis’s “Introduction: African Feminisms.”

¹⁶⁶ See *No permanent waves : recasting histories of U.S. feminism* edited by Nancy H. Hewitt for a collection of enlightening essays on the history of the concept and how it came to take on different battles for different people depending on the conditions at hand.

¹⁶⁷ In the particular context of African literature, “womanism” was first developed by Chikwenye Ogunyemi in the early 80’s almost at the same time as and without knowledge of Alice Walker’s “womanism.”

¹⁶⁸ Here I will retain the term “womanist” as the main African alternative to feminism, however, it should be noted that other alternative concepts (neologisms) have also been theorized. Some notable ones are “Molara Ogundipe-Leslie’s stiwanism (acronym of: Social Transformations Including Women in Africa) and Nnaemeka’s negofeminism - feminism of negotiation” (qtd in Arndt 32).

Beyond a simple male/female binary, feminism(s) in Africa indeed has the added value of “discussing gender roles in the context of other oppressive mechanisms such as racism, neocolonialism, (cultural) imperialism, socio-economic exclusion and exploitation, gerontocracy, religious fundamentalism as well as dictatorial and/or corrupt systems” (qtd in Arndt 32).

In her book entitled *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*, using the metaphorical trope of the mountain, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie identifies six hurdles to women’s emancipation,¹⁶⁹ a vision echoed by Awa Thiam who argues in one of the first Francophone essays ever coming out of sub-Saharan Africa, that:

...the Black woman of Africa suffers a threefold oppression: by virtue of her sex, she is dominated by man in a patriarchal society; by virtue of her class she is at the mercy of capitalist exploitation; by virtue of her race she suffers from the appropriation of her country by colonial or neo-colonial powers. Sexism, racism, class division; three plagues... (118).

In the realm of literature, Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, articulate the specifics of a true African feminist. According to Davies and Graves, the concerns of the African feminist have their deepest roots in colonialism; and as a consequence, the struggle for women’s liberation can hardly be separated from the struggle involving their male counterparts. As

¹⁶⁹ “The first one is oppression from outside (colonialism and neo-colonialism); the second one is from traditional structures; the third one is her backwardness; the fourth is man; the fifth is her color, her race; and the sixth is herself”

da Silva puts it, “a genuine African feminism should firstly recognize the necessity of a common struggle with African men in order to reconstruct Africa” (137).

Focusing on *Une si longue Lettre* which she uses as a case study in a broader investigation of the different facets of feminisms in the African Context, and echoing Chandra Mohanty (1988), Rizwana Habib Latha addresses the pitfalls of ahistorical readings that tend to essentialize different strands of feminisms as well as the necessity to be aware of culture and context specificity. A Black Muslim, Western-educated, elitist “guer” and nonetheless woman, Mariama Ba uses her voice to denounce the plight of women across social, political or even racial barriers. Though clearly aware of her indebtedness to her mostly White feminist precursors, Ba still equally displays an acute understanding of the specific plight of the Senegalese woman; a condition that finds its roots not just in the traditional patriarchal system, but also in the longstanding influence of Islam and associated theological Sharia laws. The plurality of African feminisms transpires in the diversity of feminine voices and points of views. From the most conservative like Aunt Nabou to Aissatou through Ramatoulaye herself, Ba offers a heterogeneous response to the plight of women.

In addition to the system of class, Ba deals with the plight of women in traditional Islamic society. Through the characters of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, she presents us with two different Muslim women evolving in an environment where Islam constitutes the main religion, where more than ninety percent of the population is Muslim. Almost everything in the novel is tied to religion. Islam, embedded within traditional customs, defines the societal role and place of the Senegalese women. Islam, however, though an

essentially literate culture (the Koran is a book), by contrast to Western education, did not inscribe itself in opposition to customary laws regardless of some fundamental differences between the two philosophies. Islam is a monotheistic religion whereas Senegal before the twelfth century was essentially polytheist. Strangely enough, however, both religious traditions have a system of class and authorize polygamy. Therefore, the society Ba criticizes in *Une si longue lettre* consists of an already hybrid culture—traditional and Islamic.

Even though the Senegalese society is influenced by two foreign cultures—Arabic and Western—right from the opening passages of the book, Ba makes it clear that we are in the presence of a Muslim society. *Une si longue lettre* is a series of reminiscences, a series of reflections of a Muslim widow, Ramatoulaye, who takes advantage of the mourning period recommended by Islam to ponder over her life. Ba's novel takes place in an Islamic setting with "the Zem-Zem, the miracle water from the holy places of Islam religiously kept by each family" (3). This is further emphasized by the narrator's treatment of time, which is not linear but rather follows the main important dates in the Islamic mourning process with emphasis put on the third, eighth, and fortieth days, during which the dead body respectively "swells," "bursts," and is "stripped away" (8). By choosing Ramatoulaye's voice to carry informative data on the most eventful days of the mourning process in Islam, and more importantly insight into what happens to the dead body after it has been buried, Ba intentionally presents her female protagonist as a religiously knowledgeable individual. With a Ramatoulaye well-versed in the theologies of the Koran, Ba endows her narrator and no less female main character with attributes

that have been traditionally reserved for men. With her excellent knowledge of the Koran¹⁷⁰ and its teachings, Ramatoulaye, in many respects, assumes the role of a female “marabout” in her relation with the novel’s readership.¹⁷¹ A situation that makes the criticisms and commentaries on the conditions of women all the more insightful and incisive as they are coming from an informed perspective.

The main constituents of the plight of the African Muslim woman which Ba identifies, and which find their logical explanations in Islam, are polygamy and the place of women in the context of a fairly young nation trying to map its way into modernity. According to Miriam Murtuza, in *Une si longue lettre*, Ba presents polygamy as an institution which undermines social and political developments as it deprives its women of agency (178).

In Ba’s novel, both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are betrayed by their respective husbands, each of whom marries a second wife. Polygamy and the impact it has on both men and women is one of the major topics Ba addresses in her novel. As far as the place and the roles of women are concerned, they consist mainly of domestic ones. Women are more often than not found in private and domestic spheres where they are mostly recognized for their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters.

¹⁷⁰ Remembering Modou’s hospitalization and her long wait times in the hospital’s hallways, Ramtoulaye already talked about “grandiose verses from the Koran” “[springing] involuntarily from her memory” (2). She also talked about “Shivers [running] through [her]” upon listening to Koranic verses (5).

¹⁷¹ Indeed, readers of the novel with little or no knowledge at all about Islam in Senegal, gain most of their religious information from Ramatoulaye.

In “Centralité excentrique: la maison comme non-lieu dans *Une Si Longue Lettre* de Mariama Ba,” George Joseph analyzes how Ramatoulaye turns this domestic confinement into action. Even though the house is an appropriate place for women, it remains that even there, they have a subordinate role, and men are considered the head of the household.¹⁷² Ramatoulaye’s regaining control of her house after the mourning visitors and Modou’s family have literally invaded her constitutes the first step in her awakening process. She moves from a stage of passivity, leaving her in-laws in charge—“our sisters-in-law undo our hair. My co-wife and myself are put inside a rough and ready tent made of a wrapper pulled taut above our heads and set up for the occasion” (4)—to a stage of more affirmation with the beginning of her letter to Aissatou.

The restrictions on what women can do and where they can be has been considered by the majority of critics, especially female critics, as something disrespectful, as not acknowledging women’s cognitive knowledge. In *Une si longue lettre*, all important female characters are wives and mothers. Their contributions to society, even if these women are educated, seem to be determined by their domestic functions, a situation very evocative of a patriarchal society.

Ba’s reaction to patriarchy, however, is, to say the least, rather ambivalent. While she obviously fights for more rights for women, she concomitantly displays reservations about the extent to which the changes in women’s conditions she is calling for should be

¹⁷² Remember the concept of Paternal Authority in the Senegalese Civil Code at the time Ba was published. It is only in 2012 that the law was changed to recognize women as men’s equal in the household. The expression paternal authority was replaced by the term parental authority.

carried out. In a society where marriage—in which the husband is seen as the only authority—is viewed as the crowning of a woman’s achievement, Ramatoulaye, who we see as Ba’s voice, declares, “I am one of those who can realize themselves and fully bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your [Aissatou’s] stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage” (56). This statement which can be assumed to have been uttered in the French of the narration in the absence of any markers of oral discourse or other indications of peregrinism, illustrates Ba’s ambivalence, the uneasiness in the face of traditions of an educated woman who has been exposed to alternative female roles. Through Ramatoulaye, Ba still clings to her traditions while at the same time she tries to call for changes. Addressing Ramatoulaye, Daouda Dieng rightly points out, “Even you who are protesting; you preferred your husband, your class, your children to public life” (62). Consequently, Ba’s denunciation of patriarchy does not necessarily mean an all out rejection of a male-dominated society and a fight to reverse gender roles and establish a female-dominated environment; rather, she strives to redefine patriarchy in a way in which both men and women could share responsibilities. She envisions a society in which men and women could have complementary roles, a place where unions with men stop being the crowning of women’s achievements. In a nutshell, through Ramatoulaye mainly, Ba carries her womanistic agenda. She positions herself as a voice of protest not only against the obvious patriarchy in the way of women’s emancipation, but also a voice of protest to radical feminism which strives for a female-led society.

In *Une si longue lettre*, the extent to which women’s freedom is restricted appears in

how negatively the Senegalese society views single women. After her husband abandoned her for his new bride, Ramatoulaye, recounting her experience of going alone to the movie theatre, confesses, “I survived. I overcame my shyness at going alone to the cinemas; I would take a seat with less and less embarrassment as the months went by. People stared at the middle-aged lady without a partner. . . From the surprised looks, I gauged the slender liberty granted to women” (51). This statement emphasizes the subordinate place women hold in a society which considers them only in relation to the male figures in their lives: women as mothers, wives, and daughters. They are almost always expected to be under some kind of male authority regardless of their age. The traditional and Muslim Senegalese society is not just patriarchal, but intolerant toward and inquisitive about these single women who venture outside the domestic sphere. By making Ramatoulaye no longer mind the “[stares] at the middle-aged lady without a partner” (51), Ba resists a patriarchal association of the public space with a predominantly male environment. The same logic applies to her views on the “working woman” and the “widow,” both of whom exist without the watchful eye of a husband or male authority. By having these single women affirm themselves in the narrative, Ba moves away from the Islamic concept of “fitna” which sees women as temptations to men, a rationale that justifies gender segregation in the first place. The seemingly innocent mention of the single woman venturing alone in public places conceals a double level of resistance (albeit timid) from Ba: resistance to both traditional and Islamic views on women.

While Ramatoulaye struggles to find a way to reconcile the past and the present, to find the right balance between her place as defined by her traditions and religion and her

aspirations to more freedom, she confesses, “I hope to carry out my duties fully. My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since my childhood on their strict precepts, I expect not to fail” (8); by contrast, Aissatou defiantly makes the choice to resolutely move forward, asserting, “Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. ‘Others’ bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them. Thus briefly put, is the internal ordering of our society, with its absurd divisions. I will not yield to it” (31). She refuses to be the “other,” she refuses to be a subordinate being.

Yet, patriarchy and polygamy are not the only constituents of the plight of women in *Une si longue lettre*. Women are also victimized on social and sexual grounds. Even if one might argue that the problem of class is not exclusive to women, but instead extends to the whole Senegalese society, men and women alike, it remains nonetheless that in Ba’s novel, the main two characters who belong to lower classes are women. Aissatou belongs to the goldsmith caste, one of the lowest social classes in the Senegalese society, whereas Farmata is a praise singer, a griot whose social ranking comes right above the goldsmith. While Ba depicts Farmata in the traditional role of a griot, a person living off her “guers” of the noble class, Aissatou in contrast is nothing like the customary goldsmith; she does not work in the forge. Instead, she made her way through education. Here again, in depicting Aissatou, a woman who not only stands against polygamy but becomes a successful interpreter in the U.S. and eventually helps her lifelong friend Ramatoulaye out of the difficult situation she and her children were in, Ba subverts one more time these received ideas which try to keep the lower classes down. Ramatoulaye emphasizes the importance of Aissatou’s action when she says, “I shall never forget your

response, you, my sister, nor my joy and my surprise when I was called to the Fiat agency and was told to choose a car which you had paid for, in full. . . You, the goldsmith's daughter, gave me your help while depriving yourself" (54). By having a goldsmith morally and financially rescue a noble person, a "guer," Ba inverts the customary rules governing the Senegalese society. She, as a matter of fact, rejects the validity of a tradition deeply rooted in her society, a custom passed down from generation to generation.

With Jacqueline, the Ivory Coast woman who only speaks French and whom the narrator tells us is Christian as she refuses to convert to Islam even after marrying Samba Diack, Ba enlarges her scope of criticism well beyond traditional, Islamic confines. Ba's work goes well beyond denouncing the restrictions religion and tradition impose on women. It also denounces on a broader scale the boundaries determined on a sexual basis that women encounter when they want to be active and play a role in public life.

Similar to and to some extent a consequence of a patriarchal society, sexism is very much present in *Une si longue lettre*. Men and women are treated differently depending on their gender. Women are considered somewhat as second-class citizens because their sex justifies the unfair treatment of which they are often victims. An example is how the young Aissatou and her lover Ibrahima Sall face different situations for an act they are equally responsible for. After Aissatou becomes pregnant, the consequences each faces reflect the bias and sexist characteristic of the Senegalese society. Even though it takes a man and a woman to make a pregnancy happen, only women bear the consequences of such an act. While Ibrahima Sall has nothing to fear, Aissatou on the contrary has

everything to lose. As a teenage girl pregnant outside of wedlock, the societal sanction is that she should be expelled from school, because her “swollen belly” (85) would betray her. When informed about her daughter’s condition, Ramatoulaye voices out loud the thought of many women about this unfair and sexist treatment imposed on “erring” schoolgirls when they get pregnant: “What was to be done to prevent my daughter’s expulsion from school” (85). This cry for equal treatment between men and women echoes an even louder yearning for equal access to opportunity, to the decision making spheres in the Senegalese society.

Ba also dreams of a time when children will be given an education based on their talents and not their sexes (61). Daouda Dieng, addressing Ramatoulaye, points out:

Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nation’s primary, fundamental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. (62)

By selecting a male voice, Daouda Dieng’s, to carry her demands of more recognition toward women and a need to better integrate them in the making of their newly independent country, Ba confirms once again her womanist approach to feminism. She distances herself from radical feminists (McFadden 1991) who see in the African male the worst enemy of the emancipation of the African woman. Even though Ba revolts against male domination, she still makes a realistic picture of her society. Not all men seek to bring women down; neither do all women wish the best to one another (both Aissatou’s and Ramatoulaye’s miseries involved the active and direct implications of

other women: Lady Mother in law and Aunt Nabou). Therefore, the struggle for women's rights in *Une si longue lettre* is not to be read in terms of an opposition between the two sexes. Ba's theory of feminism is a womanist one calling for a society founded on the idea of complementarity between men and women.

Thus, Ba's work combines autobiography, gender criticism, and history in a French language featuring Wolof and Arabic (and maybe also Sereer), the other languages known to both the author of *Une si longue lettre* and the fictional characters of the novel. More than the plain inscription of local vernaculars in the narrative, it is their discursive relevance within the fiction which is of importance. By making the French authorial language of the narrative cohabit with Wolof and Arabic, Ba makes it clear to her readers that her novel, though written in French and consequently presumably falling under the label "Francophone," is nonetheless a local, Senegalese production as both the subject matter and the enunciation context are located within the post-independent, syncretically Islamic, Senegalese culture. Plurilingualism in *Une si longue lettre*, particularly, the characters' linguistic competences, results in a dialogue of languages which, in turn, results in a renewed creative medium from Ba. In *Une si longue lettre*, Mariama Ba positions herself not so much as a story-teller but rather as a "history-teller." A historian who does not align herself with the imperatives of her linguistic Francophone community; but rather, a historian who chooses to tell the stories—often overlooked—of her Senegalese people. She does so in a language that transcends the authorial French of the narrative as she inspires reflection on Senegal's transitional phase, both in the country's evolution and in women's and men's conditions. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi

Dangarembga conducts reflections much along the same lines as Mariama Ba. In the upcoming section, I will analyze how Dangarembga talks about cultural deracination in terms of language and colour.

D- Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Plurilingualism is a tangible reality in *Nervous Conditions*, the question of language is at the center of discussions. More than any other author in this thesis, Dangarembga makes and addresses the connections between linguistic competency and cultural identification. She shows an acute awareness of the different languages and registers present in her environment; a fact she also reflects in the linguistic capabilities of her characters. From the opening pages, the reader quickly notices that in addition to the English language of the narrative, Shona, her characters' native language, is also largely represented. *Nervous Conditions* is not simply a novel about the "battle" between English and Shona, it is also and foremost a shock of culture, a clash between different languages and the worldviews associated with each of them. Additionally, in the background of this linguistic makeup, Dangarembga circulates various informative (jargon) registers that contribute to shining a brighter light not only on the characters' ways of life, but on the lives of pre-independent Zimbabweans as well. At first glance, English and Shona stand as artefacts of opposite cultures. Indeed, in the presence of a new English language and culture brought about by colonization, characters in *Nervous Conditions* need to navigate their ways through two radical and opposing views vis-a-vis the presence of the foreign English. In the novel, Dangarembga presents her readers with themes of destruction and rejuvenation with an eclectic range of characters—especially women—who struggle to

find their voices in a very patrilineal society still undergoing the effect of colonization.

1) Colonization

The stories in *Nervous Conditions* indeed take place at a time following the colonization of the country in the 1960's.¹⁷³ Formerly known as Southern Rhodesia, then simply Rhodesia¹⁷⁴, Zimbabwe had been under British domination from 1923 to 1964, but it was not until 1980, after a long guerilla war between White settlers and the indigenous populations led by the freedom fighters, that the country was officially recognized as an independent nation-state. References to Zimbabwe's historical (colonial) past are many in the novel. Right from the opening page of the book, the narrator mentions the "school at the mission" (1) where Nhamo, Tambu's older brother, was in attendance. The history of the mission schools is in fact tightly linked to the arrival of Catholic missionaries in Africa. In the 19th century, under the pretence of civilization and out of a wish to disseminate the words of the Bible, missionaries made their entrance in Africa (Omoleva 2006; Mungazi 1991; Robert 2008; Njoku 2007). As Tambu ironically puts it, missionaries were about spreading "God's business in darkest Africa" (105). God however was not the only reason that justified the presence of the White man in Africa and in Rhodesia in particular. In the footsteps of the missionaries who claimed to bring enlightenment and salvation in uncivilized Africa, came the colonizers (Raftopoulos and

¹⁷³ Speaking in the first person, Tambu the narrator writes "I was thirteen when my brother died. It happened in 1968" (1).

¹⁷⁴ The name came from Cecil John Rhodes from the British South Africa Company who first entered the Zambesi region around the 1880's.

Mlambo 2009; Gann 1965). The latter had less lofty motivations; they were primarily concerned with acquiring wealth and resources.

Although both groups were about asserting some degree of superiority—the former religious and the latter military and economic—missionaries and colonizers are not to be equated with each other. In chapter six, the narrator depicts the former as “a special kind of white people” (105) who took interest in the local populations, their culture and their language. Tambu writes:

These missionaries, the strange ones, liked to speak Shona much more than they liked to speak English. And you wanting to practise your English, spoke to them in English, they always answered in Shona. It was disappointing, and confusing too for people like me who were bilingual, since we had developed a kind of reflex which made us speak English when we spoke to white skins and reserved our own language for talking to each other . . . Most of the missionaries' children, the children of the strange ones, did not speak English at all until they learnt it at school . . . I often wondered how they would manage when they went back home and had to stop behaving like Africans. (106)

Here, it is interesting to note how Dangarembga talks about the idea of “Africanity” in terms of languages. Indeed, speaking Shona, not English, serves a double purpose for the missionaries; not only does it allow them to communicate more effectively with local populations, but it also presents them as people with seemingly no personal interests in the eyes of the Shona. By Tambu and Mbuya’s accounts, missionaries were “superior not only to [Shona] but to those other Whites as well who were [there] for adventure and to

help themselves to [the country's] emeralds" (105). The ability and the willingness to express themselves in Shona made the missionaries approachable. The command of Shona and the intermingling with local populations undoubtedly contributed to the effective spread of the missionaries' "brotherly love" (105).

"Brotherly love" however is not an expression that can be used to describe the relationships between the Shona and the other group of White settlers, the colonizers. Unlike some of the missionaries, the British colonizers came to Rhodesia for material gains. They exploited and controlled the country's natural resources, often at the expense of local populations. One thing for which the British in Southern Africa were known was the establishment of Communal Land and an uneven distribution between White settlers and the local Black populations. In Rhodesia, while Whites constituted a minority population (2%), they nonetheless controlled over 75% of the country's best arable lands leaving 98% of the Black populations with just over 24% of the remaining lands.¹⁷⁵ In *Nervous Conditions*, Mbuya, Tambu's grandmother, recalls just how the "White wizards" came to confiscate their lands and displace her family from "where the soil [was] ripe" to a place where the land was "grey . . . stony and barren" (18). Dangarembga tells of the gravity of the land distribution in Rhodesia through the voice of someone who has lived through it. Recalling the arrival of the White man with precision, Mbuya's speaks from an informed and authoritative point of view as she provides a detailed historical account of how the land came to be confiscated. As early as the opening pages of the novel, Tambu

¹⁷⁵ For more information on the issue of the Land in Zimbabwe, see *Zimbabwe's agricultural development* edited by M. Rukini and C K Eicher.

informs the reader that the homestead was in “the communal lands surrounding Umtali” (2), but it is not until we meet Mbuya, that we learn how that came to be. Mbuya recounts:

Your family did not always live here ... We lived up in Chipinge, where the soil was ripe and your great-grandfather was a rich man in the currency of those days, having many fat herd of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests [...]

Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land. On donkey, on foot, on horse, on ox-cart, the people looked for a place to live. But the wizards were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for the people. At last the people came upon the grey, sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren that the wizards would not use it. (18)

The stories Mbuya tells her granddaughter are, by the narrator’s own admission, “history that could not be found in the textbooks” (16). The stories the narrator reports took place at a time when Tambu “was too small to be anything more than a hindrance in the family fields” (17). Beside the quotation marks around her speech, no mention is explicitly made about the language used by Mbuya. However, her account can safely be assumed to have been originally uttered in Shona given that neither she nor her addressee, the younger Tambu, had been exposed to the English language. Here, Tambu’s grandmother’s language is knowable only by pre-supposition in the absence of any formal narratorial mention. More than the original Shona of the narrative, it is the relevance of the information provided by this “mise-en-texte” that needs attention. Mbuya did not just tell

any stories, she “gave [Tambu] history lessons...History that could not be found in the textbooks” (17). Through Mbuya’s voice, Dangarembga provides a counter discourse to the rationale of colonialism. She provides an insight into the lives of the Shona prior to the arrival of the British colonizers. Indeed, generally speaking, little to no room is allocated to pre-colonial African history; and the particular history of the Shona was no exception. From Mbuya’s narrative however, the reader learns about the ways of life of the Shona, and of Shona women in particular during the pre-colonial period. Mbuya indeed, far from being a passive, idle woman of the kinds depicted in colonial narratives, was “an inexorable cultivator” with her own “plot of land” she refers to as “her garden” (17). She describes a prosperous time prior to the arrival of the “Wizards” where her Shona family was “rich” by the standards of the time. Mbuya’s discourse, in Shona, runs counter to the official colonial discourse from the metropole. Far from rescuing savage Africans and providing them tools for a better life as colonization claimed, the Shona, Mbuya tells the reader, were far better off before the advent of the White man whom she sees as the destroyer of an already functioning local order

Another important issue Dangarembga addresses through the plurilingual abilities of her characters is the concept of segregation. The education system in colonial Rhodesia was indeed divided up along racial lines (Shizha and Kariwo 2011; Summers 1994, 2002). Blacks and Whites attended separate schools as expectations were placed on students according to their races. The colonial government considered it a threat to the stability of the country to provide high education standards to local populations. Reflecting on the differences between various types of missionaries, Tambu argues, “The

other sort, and this was the majority, were somewhat more normal. They spoke English more freely and sent their children to the Government school in town, where they would be among their own kind” (106). Segregation between Whites and Blacks was, as it were, more of the norm in Rhodesia in the 1960’s. Speaking to Nyasha, Tambu remarks “in spite of all our talks we knew that we would never attend a multiracial school” (107). If indeed the British managed to forcibly settle in Rhodesia and confiscate what the country had best to offer thanks to their military domination, it was their language and culture that would bring about the most pervasive side of colonization yet, namely, the erosion and corruption of local identities. Dangarembga deals, at length, with westernization and its impact on the local population, both in terms of language and colour.

2) On Social Issues

With colonization came a new language, a new worldview and generally speaking, new ways of life. While some White people made the effort to learn local languages,¹⁷⁶ the reverse was more commonplace; mainly indigenous populations learning English and being schooled at formal institutions. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga portrays the process of westernization and its impact on a number of characters. Within the Sigauke family clan, the English language, along with the possibilities it allowed, provided a way out of the hardships of life. For Tambu, for example, the pursuit of a British education is her only hope of escaping both poverty and her subaltern role as a woman; but as she matures, and in the contact of her cousin

¹⁷⁶ We mentioned the examples of the “strange” missionaries above. They often went to great length to translate the Bible in the local vernaculars; a fact that speaks to their command of indigenous languages.

Nyasha, she gradually becomes aware of the danger of assimilation, of “Englishness.”

Long before Tambu started to realize the dangers of assimilation, Ma’Shingayi blamed Englishness as the cause of her son’s death¹⁷⁷ Tambu’s mother indeed, one of the five women¹⁷⁸ who has had the least contact with the English school and the English language shows a total distrust of anything “English.” She believes that English has killed her son Nhamo and “will kill them all if they are not careful” (202). By sounding the alert about the dangers of assimilation, of “Englishness,” through an uneducated woman’s voice, in a language most likely to have been an original Shona *énoncé*, Dangarembga resists stereotypical and often faulty representations of Africans, and the African woman particularly, as naïve. Nhamo, indeed, since he started school at his uncle’s mission, has changed both in how he looks and how he thinks. But by far the most important change is the one in relation to language; Nhamo “had forgotten how to speak Shona” (53). After a year at the mission, Nhamo deliberately chose to express himself primarily in English¹⁷⁹ as a sign of this newfound status at Babamukuru’s. In fact, in the diglossic context of Rhodesia where local vernaculars were labelled “low,” speaking in the “high” English

¹⁷⁷ Ever since Nhamo, Tambu’s brother, left to live at his uncle’s house (and attend the mission school), he grew distant from his family back in Umtali and progressively became ashamed of his Shona language and culture, which he gladly and quickly exchanged for the English language and more Western manners.

¹⁷⁸ In the opening page of the novel, the narrator, Tambu, specifically names the five women whose stories *Nervous Conditions* is about. She writes: “...[the] story is not all about death, but about my escape and Lucia’s; about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion...” (1).

¹⁷⁹ The narrator does mention that his Shona “would miraculously return” when important issues needed to be debated thoroughly (53).

was a way for Nhamo to elevate himself above the clan, a fact with which his father Jeremiah seems to concur. The narrator writes: “Father was pleased with Nhamo’s command of the English language. He said it was the first step in the family’s emancipation” (53). Here, Jeremiah’s blindness is put in direct opposition to Ma’Shingayi’s wit and clairvoyance. By elevating her female character over her male counterpart, Dangarembga comes through as a feminist with a mission of emphasizing women’s cognitive capabilities.

If the command of English did actually make it possible for local populations to move up both socially and economically, it also came at a price; usually the erosion of an initial Shona culture that ultimately gets supplanted by “Britishness.”¹⁸⁰ In *Nervous Conditions*, the potential dangers of Englishness are articulated mainly by Ma’Shingayi and Nyasha, two radically different women; the former older and with “no education”—formal British education that is—and the latter younger and steeped in the British culture to the extent that she has forgotten her Shona. Though speaking from different positions, the two women share the same distrust for the colonizer’s language and culture. Unlike Ma’Shingayi who shows a true awareness yet remains “trapped” in the face of the disruptions brought about by Englishness, Nyasha on the other hand, acts on her beliefs as she speaks in defiance of the psychological damages of British domination. Talking to Tambu, she remarks, “It’s bad enough when a country gets colonized, but when the

¹⁸⁰ Here, we will remember the ongoing debate among African (authors) on whether or not the command and use of colonizers’ languages are indeed the first steps toward the loss of traditional languages and cultures.

people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (150). Nyasha, an educated woman and very much a product of British culture, as reflected in her mannerisms and linguistic competencies, is yet the most vocal voice through which the dangers of colonization are articulated. Nyasha's mindset is a liberated one; and in this regard, she is comparable to White British women. She is most at ease when she speaks English, the only language she truly masters. She and her mother¹⁸¹ are in fact the only Shona-born characters who use an endearing register of English. For Nyasha particularly, English is more than just a utilitarian language; it is a window into a worldview which does not always fit well with her local culture. Confirming her awkward position within her native tribe, Nyasha unsentimentally remarks, "They do not like my language, my English because it is authentic, and my Shona because it is not" (196). Well beyond Nyasha's linguistic competencies, it is her relationships with the respective cultures, namely British and Shona, which are in question.

All through *Nervous Conditions*, language indeed functions as more than a mere communication tool. Meaningful information is gleaned from which languages the characters use as well as the levels of command they have of the languages in question. A good command of Shona seems to be a prerequisite for some sense of authenticity with Dangarembga. From the "strange" missionaries who came off as friendly, in part, because they spoke Shona fluently, to Nhamo who pretended he forgot his native tongue, through Nyasha who lost most of her Shona, Dangarembga in fact shows an understanding of the tight relationships between language and culture. Inversely, when English is used,

¹⁸¹ And to a lesser degree Chido and Babamukuru as well.

particularly by characters who are competent in both English and Shona, the reader gets some sense of accomplishment being conveyed. The young Tambu vows to learn English when she gets to school as she realizes the limitations Shona only speaking poses.

In time however, and in closer contact with Nyasha, the older Tambu embarks on a process of demystification of the English language and culture. Nyasha presents Tambu with more complex interpretations of the dynamics of language and culture than what conventional textbooks had provided her. To Tambu's fascination with the missionaries' or her uncle's generosity, Nyasha opposes a lesson in history about how and why the missionaries came to be implanted in Africa. From that point on, Tambu was forced to consider history from a perspective other than the colonizers' who, traditionally, have been the ones writing history books for young students in Africa; a colonial representation of history that Nyasha qualifies as "fairy tales" (94) or even "bloody lies" (205).

Another major issue in the novel is gender, an issue made all the more apparent with the new British school. In *Nervous Conditions*, education is more than a simple tool that highlights blackness in a culturally dominant White colonial system; it also makes our characters, female characters specifically, critically aware of their condition as women (115-16). As David Aberbach rightly observes in his comparative study between *The Mare* and *Nervous Conditions*, "Education increased [gender and skin color] restrictions, making them harder to bear" (222). In pre-independent Zimbabwe, just like in Senegal at the time *Une si longue lettre* was published, the knowledge of the colonizers' language necessitated a prior attendance at the English school. And more boys than girls were sent to school. From the opening pages of *Nervous Conditions*, we learn

that Tambu's new "successful" life was made possible because of her brother's death. The logic that kept Tambu, a girl, at home, away from the colonizer's school was actually widespread in Africa in general. When families, due to monetary constraints mainly, had to make choices about who among the children to send to school, more often than not, the decisions would be in favour of boys. Indeed, because of the patrilineal structure among the Shona, education was viewed as an investment for the advancement of men, of the patriarchy. The ever-increasing costs to educate local Black people in Rhodesia (Mungazi 1985)¹⁸² often meant that more boys than girls were sent to school. Girls in fact are often seen as entities not worth "investing" in. In the Sigauke family clan, as Ma'Shingayi reminds Tambu, the two main expectations placed on women are marriage and motherhood.

Throughout *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga uses language and jargon that foreground symptoms of gender inequity. The narrator almost exclusively uses Shona xenisms when it comes to titles or terms of endearment to refer to her characters. Shona, we learned from the linguistic cartography we addressed in the previous chapter, addresses men and women differently according to not just gender, but also marital status. Indeed, while the term "Babamunini" or "Mukoma" is used by the narrator to refer to male family members, women are addressed as "Sisi" or "Mainini." But not all women are equal. A further discrimination is made depending on the lineage of the female in

¹⁸² In his article entitled "Education Educational Innovation in Zimbabwe: Possibilities and Problems,"

Mungazi describes in minute detail the different educational policies adopted by the colonial government in Rhodesia to increasingly put the burden/cost of education on the native.

question. Gladys, in fact, Babamukuru and Jeremiah's older sister, has a denomination all her own. She is referred to as "tete," an acknowledgement of her patriarchal status within the family which makes her more respectable and respected than other women. Another distinction worth noting and which also speaks to sexism and gender imbalance within the Shona are the terms "Babawa Chido" (117) and "Ma' Chido" (124). Though they have both a girl and a boy, Maiguru and Babamukuru refer to each other as the parents of only Chido, their male child, thus confirming one more time the patrilineal structure of the Shona culture.

Another xenism used by Dangarembga which also carries significant information on gender relationships within the Sigaukee Shona clan is the word "dare" (138). The "dare" by itself is nothing but a council, a family meeting where important issues are debated. In *Nervous Conditions*, the "dare" is called up by Babamukuru to discuss the relationships between Takesure and Lucia. The "dare," the reader learns, does not allow the participation of women even when they happened to be the very subject of the discussion. The narrator writes, "An issue of immediate concern was the case of Takesure and Lucia [...] Babamukuru summoned a kind of family "dare" which consisted of the patriarchy—the three brothers...and their sister—and the male accused" (138). Women's contributions, we notice, are not considered valuable within the Sigaukee clan. The participation of men only—with the exception of "tete" Gladys considered as belonging to the patriarchy—is necessary when it comes to discussing and making recommendation on important issues.

Much like blackness, womanhood constitutes a condition to be dealt with in

Nervous Conditions. Being a female, our protagonist Tambu laments the lack of consideration, not just for herself, but for her entire gender. She maintains, "The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (12). Very early on, Tambu realizes that there are restrictions on what she can do and achieve. Her brother Nhamo was the first person to open her eyes to her condition as a woman. We recall their discussion after Tambu voiced her desire to attend school:

‘But I (Tambudzai) want to go to school’

‘Wanting won't help’

‘Why not?’

‘[...] It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl.’ (21)

The unfair treatment of women by men is, according to Nhamo, universal. Some women within the Sigauke clan have indeed internalized and long accepted their traditional roles. Ma'shingayi's confidences to Tambu are telling. She says:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden [...] Aren't we the ones who bear children? [...] When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. [...] And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength. (16)

Ma'Shingayi summarizes the plight and expectations placed on the Black woman in Zimbabwe and in Africa in general. From the highly educated Maiguru to Lucia, through

Tambu, women from all walks of life, regardless of whether or not they are educated, each carries her own battle. If at first glance, only Nyasha and Tambu seem to navigate and try to understand the inconsistencies of their Shona traditions in the light of the new perspectives made available by the English culture, all female characters, to varying degrees, are resolutely aware of the limitations imposed on them as a result of their gender. The low and typical expectations placed on women are indeed carried through the voice of Maiguru, the most educated of all women. She fatally admits: “when [a woman has] a good man and lovely children, it makes it all worth while” (103). Despite her high level of education, Maiguru—and the Shona in general—considers the essential duties of a woman to be a wife and a mother. “Englishness” alone then is not to be blamed for the plight of women. In *Nervous Conditions* patriarchy shapes a woman’s life as much as the tensions brought about by colonization. Tambu insightfully remarks:

The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn’t depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere they go...And that was the problem. (118)

Dangarembga’s characters are constantly engaged in a process of self-discovery and self-definition. For those who have been at the colonizers’ school, there is a gradual realization that “emancipated” English ways are actually no escape from Shona, and from Shona sexism in particular. They constantly negotiate their ways between traditional customs and a growing need for self-redefinition in their new culturally and linguistically hybrid community. Sally McWilliams tastefully articulates the relationships between plurilingualism and self-definition. In fact, addressing Tambu’s linguistic psychosis at

Babamukuru where she displayed great confusion about which language to use,¹⁸³ McWilliams writes, “Tambu's struggle for self-identity evolves into an awareness of her heteroglot complexity [...] a composite of shifting selves” (105).

In this inner battle towards self-discovery, Dangarembga does not side either with English or Shona. Her position remains an ambivalent one. English is not always synonymous with progress and Shona expression and culture are not presented as backward, in need of a “saving grace.” The women’s rebellion during the “dare” for example is carried through the voices of the uneducated women. Lucia’s agency was put in opposition to Maiguru’s idleness. One would think that Maiguru, the most educated of all women would take a leadership role in confronting the patriarchy and advocating for women, but instead it was Lucia and her sister (Ma’Shingayi), the poorest and among the least educated who did, thereby confirming one more time Dangarembga’s rejection of facile solutions. By speaking up at the “dare” where she was not welcome, by refusing to comply with traditional cultural codes, Lucia did not speak up for herself, she defied the reality of a Shona culture which has no room for women’s expression (146). By uncovering the many levels upon which women are oppressed within the (already hybrid)

¹⁸³ Here is how the reported conversation went:

Babamukuru came through the back door as we finished saying grace.

'Good evening, Baba,' Maiguru greeted him in Shona.

'Good evening, Daddy,' Nyasha said in English.

'Good evening, Babamukuru,' I said, mixing the two languages because I was not sure which was most appropriate (80).

Shona culture, Dangarembga once again, positions herself as a womanist.

Another sign of Dangarembga's ambivalence is the irony with which the narrator talks about Babamukuru's wedding plans for Tambu's parents. The logic behind the church wedding is to be found in the same rationale that justified colonialism in the first place. Christianity, we recall, was brought into darkest Africa in the name of salvation and grace. By having Babamukuru, the fervent guardian of Shona traditions, favour a wedding over a more traditional cleansing, Dangarembga shows how far reaching the dangers of alienation can go. Babamukuru, the patriarch, is indeed presented as someone who has actually internalized and assimilated the colonizers' discourse which presents Africans and their traditions as backward.¹⁸⁴ He does not just make a joke of his traditions by denying the validity of Shona culture, he presents himself as an unsuspecting tool that participates in furthering British cultural domination; a culture he views as the only legitimate one. By valuing a wedding over a traditional cleansing, Babamukuru fails to challenge the received knowledge that has come with English, especially the English religion.

The explanation of Babamukuru's state of mind is carried through his daughter's voice. Talking to Tambu, in an unusual Rhodesian accent, Nyasha maintains, "He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good Kaffir" (204). Beside the familiar level of the language, indicative of an English original *énoncé*, the word Kaffir carries within itself valuable information regarding race relations particularly in the Southern part of the continent. "Kaffir" indeed originally comes from an Arabic xenism "kafir" used to

¹⁸⁴ Nyasha actually qualifies her father as a "historical artefact" (162).

designate an infidel, a person who does not believe in the precepts of Islam. But in the context of *Nervous Conditions*, especially in its usage by Nyasha to talk about her father and her attempt at rationalizing his “Christian” ways, “Kaffir” bears derogatory connotations and was used to talk about Black people in colonial Rhodesia. Used to qualify Babamukuru, especially his recommendation of a church wedding over a traditional cleansing, “kaffir” carries all the weight of the psychological alienation of Black local populations. By having Nyasha, a young girl and yet the most acculturated of the Shona characters—at least by external standards—utter this énoncé, in a local accent, Dangarembga shows that the history of Rhodesia, particularly of the psychological impact of colonization, could be critically assessed by the natives, by the native woman particularly. Babamukuru indeed, despite apparently promoting traditional ways over British mannerisms within the Sigauke clan, does not seem to fully grasp his role in the perpetuation of a British cultural imperialism. Nyasha’s statement does not just show an acute understanding of the role of the colonizers whom she only refers to as “they;” it also provides a window into the unequal, unbalanced relations between Whites and Blacks in colonial Rhodesia. With expressions like “good boy” and “good munt,” Nyasha’s énoncé imitates the White colonizers’ down to the patronizing language of the time. Dangarembga’s critique in *Nervous Conditions* transcends the issue of colonization and its consequences; it also casts a critical eye on gender relations within her Shona culture.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu, aware of the possibilities of emancipation and self assertion—especially for women—that the English language and culture enables, unsentimentally points to the incoherencies of her native culture. Neither she nor

Dangarembga, however, call for sweeping changes that would completely do away with the English culture. Neither woman, in their advocacy for reforms to alleviate the burden of Shona patriarchy on women, fails to reject an ideology imbedded in the English language that makes a mockery of their traditional culture. Dangarembga accurately retraces the roots of women's oppression not just to the patriarchal system but also to the long colonial history—of inequality—that created and perpetuates conditions of poverty. By making the fictions share the literary spaces between dominant and minority languages, plurilingualism in the postcolonial African novel reinforces the validity of indigenous culture. As Paul Bandia remarks in his review of *Fictionalising Translation and Multiculturalism*, “each language contains within itself the culture that originally or eventually created it.” With the use of extensive xenisms, Shona distinctive greetings, not to forget songs and onomatopoeias indicative of an original oral culture and of local énoncés, Dangarembga reinforces the validity of parts of her Shona language and traditions. By making English and Shona share not only the literary space, but also the minds of her characters, the narrator recognizes “the prices liberation through biculturalism demands” (Gorle 180). Though the reader is clearly in the presence of an impoverished patriarchal environment still undergoing the effects of colonization, Dangarembga still manages, in *Nervous Conditions*, to challenge the dominant discourses from the West. Like Ba, Dangarembga belongs to a long tradition of authors who use the written word to affirm and validate their African selves (Lazarus 1990). And in the literary world, there is no arguing the place Chinua Achebe holds when it comes to showcasing African traditional languages and cultures. With *Things Fall Apart*, some

thirty years before Ba or Dangarembga did, Achebe already turned to writing to oppose colonialism and its political, cultural and social agendas. But more than the issues dealt with in the novel, it was the author's non-traditional language that caught international attention. In the upcoming paragraphs, I will discuss Achebe's use of plurilingualism to denounce British imperialism and his "fight" to reinforce the validity of his Ibo traditions.

E- Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

In response to skewed representations of Africa and Africans in narratives by Western missionaries and colonialists,¹⁸⁵ Chinua Achebe resolved to write a novel, on the continent, from an insider's point of view. Achebe undertook to deconstruct views of the colonized subject as barbaric; a rationale that justified the imperial ideology of the British and French civilizing missions. *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's first novel, chronicles the early encounter between people from Umuofia and the British colonizers as they settle in present day Nigeria around the turn of the 19th century. Following the lives of Okonkwo and his fellow Ibo community members as they navigate their ways through the advent of a new language, a new religion, and new ways of life, *Things Fall Apart* received praises both on its content and on the original language of the narration.

More often than not, when discussing the form of *Things Fall Apart*, it is the different methods by which Achebe indigenizes the English language that are studied. A

¹⁸⁵ See the majority of travel literature on Africa. In French literature we will remember Pierre Loti (1881) and Gerard de Nerval (1851) among others; and in British literature, Daniel Defoe (1719) or Joseph Conrad (1899).

closer look however at the linguistic cartography of the novel reveals that Achebe's fiction, though written in a recognizable English language with a strong presence of Ibo xenisms, is actually better understood as an original Ibo production. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, it is not until chapter 15 (out of 25), more than half way through the narrative, that the reader is introduced to the first set of characters who actually use the English language in their original speech. The different languages as well as the various registers used by Achebe's characters mirror the way actual people in the author's environment, at the time the narrative took place, spoke.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe moves past the controversial language debate in African literature.¹⁸⁶ In accordance with his belief that “language is a weapon [...] and there is no point in fighting it” (qtd in Gallagher 260), he took a stance in favour of the English language and against advocates of native vernaculars in African literature.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, contrary to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o or even his fellow Nigerian Obi Wali,¹⁸⁸ Achebe had faith in the ability of the English language to carry his narrative, the themes of which are deeply rooted in his African experience. By writing a novel about his native culture, in English, yet an English filled with Ibo xenisms, proverbs as well as attributes of his native oral culture, Achebe uses language in a way that enables him to successfully engage his Western “outside” audience at the same time not alienating his primary local readership. Achebe writes to his fellow Africans, but he chose English as

¹⁸⁶ Cf chapter 1.

¹⁸⁷ For more information on the debate regarding the authorial language in African literature, cf chapter 2.

¹⁸⁸ See “The Dead End of African Literature.”

his authorial medium so as to export his subject matter beyond the Ibo community and allow the world to take part in the local narrative.

Achebe writes *Things Fall Apart* with deliberate linguistic intents. A multi-faceted scholar,¹⁸⁹ his command of the English language suffered from no doubts. His incorporation of a non-English lexicon and obvious markers of orality participate in an overt wish to produce a work of fiction that is representative of his African culture. On the content, he manages to capture the experiences of the Ibo both before and after the implantation of the British in Nigeria. In a writing style that captures the rhythm of his people, Achebe depicts the unique ways in which the Ibo view their world. By making the Ibo vernacular and its associated culture the focal points of his narrative, he rehabilitates and validates the African man as an intelligent human being. Achebe saw himself as an African writer who used the English language for the enhancement of African art hence his painstaking efforts to represent, right alongside the English of the narration, his native local Ibo language, highly oral in nature. With an unsentimental omniscient narrator, the reader is provided with an inside look into the linguistic, social, judicial and religious changes that Okonkwo and his peers go through as a result of imperialism.

1) References to Nigeria's Colonial Past

Things Fall Apart, as John Povey rightly summarizes, “describes the effect of British missionaries and administrators on a typical village tribal society; the dislocation that change, religious and educational, brings to historic certainties” (258). Imperialism and the advent of missionaries—as we have seen in all four novels under study in this

¹⁸⁹ Cf chapter one where I offered a portrait of the author.

thesis—constitute a focal point for Achebe; and references to Nigeria’s colonial past are plentiful in the novel.

In *Things Fall Apart*, it is through the voice of the District Commissioner that the colonial status of the nine Ibo villages is conveyed. Emphasizing the new law in effect in Umuofia to the group of men who destroyed the Church, the local British administrator argues: “That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world” (167). Nigeria, we know, was a colony of Britain; the dominion status alluded to in this quote refers to the political structure in effect in the Northern part of the country preceding the official birth of Nigeria in 1914.¹⁹⁰ This seemingly straightforward statement, beyond the historical piece of information it carries, speaks to Achebe’s deeper political concerns. In setting his fiction in a “dominion,” not the “colony” Nigeria is known to have been, Achebe locates his narrative at a time preceding the formal birth of the federation of Nigeria as it is known today. The name Nigeria is actually never mentioned by either the narrator or any other characters; the novel is set in the nine villages surrounding Umuofia. By entertaining a (intentional) factual blurring over the actual colonial status of Nigeria, Achebe challenges the historical legacy of colonization.

One thing however that suffers from no doubt in the District Commissioner’s statement is the position of Britain as the leading world power of the time. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the British Empire ruled and administered, at its height, about one fifth of the world’s population (Johnston 1969; Christopher 1988). And Nigeria (whether

¹⁹⁰ For an in-depth study of the colonial history of Nigeria, see Charles Lindsay Temple’s article entitled “Northern Nigeria.”

a colony or a dominion) was just a small part of that large Empire.

In *Things Fall Apart*, more than the alienating effects of the English language studied in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, it is the introduction of a new religion, and a new overall social order among his fellow Ibo that Chinua Achebe deals with.

2) Umuofia: a Traditional Ibo Community

To a Western eye, life in Umuofia appears problematic in many respects. Nothing in how the village operates is reminiscent of typical Western order. From an economic, social, judicial or even religious point of view, the various modus operandi of Umuofia find their relevance in Ibo's traditions and culture. What the British in *Things Fall Apart* perceive as unorthodox and chaotic, is in fact a well thought out organization that suits the Ibo on many levels. The stories of Okonkwo and his fellow countrymen are told from an insider's point of view with an omniscient narrator able to fill the reader in on every aspect of the Ibo culture.

Umuofia is a rural village where people live mainly on agriculture and hunting. Achebe repeatedly writes about the importance of yams, something that is only understood in reference to the Ibo culture. Considered the "the king of crops" (21), yams indeed constitute for the Ibo not only a source of income, but a measure of a person's manhood and respectability to a large extent. For the Ibo's youth, the art of preparing yams is considered a rite of passage; Nwoye and Ikemefuna learn it the hard way when they failed to accomplish the task according to Okonkwo's high expectations (28). The ability to plant and harvest extended amounts of crops, of yams principally, loudly speaks

to a man's worth. Okonkwo, we remember, lacked respect for his father Unoka, not just because he had no titles, but because of his laziness and his inability to grow a good crop of yams and properly feed his family. In the novel, the narrator affirms: "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed" (28). With Okonkwo and his peers, the "king of crops" is not only a measure of greatness; it represents the very symbol of life. Recounting Ikemefuna's smooth integration into Okonkwo's family, the narrator compares him to a piece of yam. He writes, "Ikemefuna grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life" (32).

The importance of agriculture in *Things Fall Apart*, beyond its informative value about the rural nature of the Ibo, is a way for Achebe to highlight strong work ethics in his community. The Ibo indeed are a society which values hard work. The greatness of a person is measured in direct ratio with how hard he/she is willing to work. Greatness among the Ibo is not a matter of class and is not passed down from one generation to another; rather it is a personal achievement. By allowing his protagonist to be judged solely on the basis of his own deeds and merits, Achebe deconstructs slanted stereotypical representations of Africans as lazy. Speaking to the differences between Okonkwo and his father, the narrator argues that among the Ibo, "a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (7).

On a different register, but still emphasizing the all-important role of farming within the Ibo, the narrator talks about how people in Umuofia resort to agriculture for purposes they do not have proper tools for. Important events in *Things Fall Apart* are

never accurately dated. The narrator, regardless of his omniscience and his strong grasp of all events past and present, only provides approximate dates, even for the most important events in the novel. For example, Ikemefuna, we read, “came to Umuofia at the end of the care-free season between harvest and planting” (24). The reader cannot tell exactly when Ikemefuna actually joined Umuofia, but he/she gains an inside knowledge of the activities the Ibo consider of importance. This rather unorthodox way of situating important events in relation to farming seasons is very indicative of a community where orature is the norm. And this very uncovering of oral characteristics in the novel signals, if need still was, the presence of language(s) other than the English of the narration.

All throughout the novel, Achebe provides ample evidence attesting to the oral nature of the Ibo society. In *Things Fall Apart*, Ibo imagery, onomatopoeias, songs, proverbs as well as short stories are extensively used to capture the tone and rhythm in the village of Umuofia and to give a greater sense of authenticity to Achebe’s narrative. As early as the opening pages of the novel, the reader gauges the all-important role that drums play in this traditionally oral community. With the Ibo indeed, drums, just like humans, do speak and have a language of their own. Be it at wrestling contests (1), to convene important meetings (7), or simply to announce big events (78), the Ibo people learn how to listen to the sounding of the drums in order to interpret messages and respond to calls for community meetings. While expressions like “Gome, gome, gome, gome” (7), and “Diim! Diim! Diim!” (106) obviously imitate the sounds of drums, phrases like “Aru oyim de de de dei!” (78), “Oji odu achu ijiji-o-o!” (100) and “Umuofia obodo dike” (106), for which Achebe provides no translation or definition, capture the

esoteric language of the spirits English could not capture, but Ibo could.

With drums and other musical instruments like “ekwe,” “udu,” or “ogene” (4), Achebe describes a community for whom hearing is of paramount importance. With phrases such as “the story was told,” (23) Achebe makes an overt nod to his African oral traditions and reaffirms the importance of storytelling in Iboland. On various instances, animal images are used not only to tell stories, but also to teach important lessons to audiences in attendance.¹⁹¹ Throughout *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe saturates his narrative voice with characteristics of spoken discourse indicative of an initial Ibo utterance in a deliberate gesture to reinforce the validity of his native culture. More than just characteristics of orature, Achebe also incorporates songs, litanies and incantations to speak to his people’s religious beliefs.

The populations of Umuofia, the reader learns from Achebe’s language, are deeply rooted in their traditions and culture. Throughout the novel, the narrator recounts in detail how the spirits and deities of this polytheist society influence the lives of people in Umuofia. Extensive descriptions of sacrifices and rituals to appease and please supernatural entities are provided (91). Ani, the Goddess of the Earth, principally, is the object of much veneration for the land needs to be blessed, in part, because of the all importance of agriculture mentioned earlier. The Ibo, we remember, allotted the evil forest, a haunted piece of land to the White man, to build their church on. People from Umuofia did not take any concrete action to prevent the British from settling in their village. They had faith in the spirits and left it up to the power of their gods to drive the

¹⁹¹ We remember the stories of the tortoise shell as well as the alleged killing of the python (85).

White man out.

The Ibo are also depicted as a very superstitious community who believe in supernatural powers. The existence of the “chi” (14) attests more than anything else to the “irrational” belief system in Umuofia. The “chi” is thought of as some kind of personal spirit that everyone carries about him/herself and which requires appeasement in order to avoid causing ill fortune. One among many examples provided by Achebe, and which speaks to the reality of “irrational” belief among the Ibo, is the phenomenon of the “Ogbanje” (68). The narrator goes into detail to explain not only what an “Ogbanje” means, but also how to stop its vicious cycle. While these pieces of information might sound surreal or even laughable to a Western (rationale) audience, they remain nonetheless an essential aspect of the social fabric of people in Umuofia; a system of belief that cannot be understood within Western paradigms.

Another characteristic of the Ibo society that is also difficult to comprehend for a Western audience is the traditional system of kinship and a strong emphasis on community. In Umuofia, indeed, community was the rule. The political organization in place in the village prior to the arrival of the British finds its relevance in the Ibo notions of kinship, a concept at the opposite of more typical organizations like the government the British would later import. Though lacking what is commonly considered a more traditional political system, the people in Umuofia still have structure as they obey authority and are very respectful of their traditional ruling body. Umuofia is run not by a typical Western government, but by a council of elders called “ndichie” (10) who are

assisted in their tasks by an eclectic number of priestesses and deities. As early as the opening scene of the novel, the narrator depicts the tight relations between the individual and the rest of the community he belongs to. By defeating Amalinze the Cat, Okonkwo does not just achieve a personal prowess; he makes the whole community proud. With a concept like the “*egwewu*,” Achebe demonstrates the validity of the local political system in place prior to colonization. By specifically naming these structures in their original Ibo terms, Achebe uses language to further make his point about the relevance of traditional practises.

Still in terms of the Ibo social structure, the reader also learns that Umuofians are a very patriarchal society. Not only are men allowed and expected to marry multiples wives,¹⁹² but everything in the village is depicted in terms of gender. The uneven relationship between men and women is communicated in the language Achebe uses. The symbolism of male domination in Umuofia is reflected in all aspects of life, from agriculture where “*yams*” constitute the “*king of crops*” (19) to the judicial system where a female “*ochu*” is considered less sinful and reprehensible, and consequently less severely punished than a male “*ochu*.” Okonkwo’s father, we also remember, was described using female characteristics. Unoka was a physically able man and did not look feminine by all external standards; but he took pleasure in activities traditionally reserved of women. Unoka liked to play instruments, especially the flute, an activity that is

¹⁹² The number of wives is in fact a good sign of a person’s manhood and wealth. We remember that Okonkwo took an additional wife before his return from exile to give a strong signal of how well he did while he was away.

customarily reserved to women. Still on the subject of Achebe's use of language in relation to gender problematics, the xenism "agabala" is used to address both women and weak men who hold no titles.¹⁹³ This duality of meanings here is not random. With the Ibo, more often than not, weakness is infused with female attributes; "efulefus" (124) are criticized not so much for failing to be manly enough, but mostly for embodying characteristics similar to ones expected in women.¹⁹⁴

Throughout the novel, Achebe consistently and repetitively uses local xenisms and phrases in lieu of more common and readily understandable English words in a wish to bring more exposure to his native language and have the audience garner respect for the Ibo culture as he/she becomes an active reader. Achebe's language for example, when talking about food and people's daily lives, tends to be in verbatim Ibo. The Western audience thus achieves through the novel a greater awareness of Ibo's customs. Achebe depicts the Ibo's reaction to the British, not just by validating their pre-colonial structures, but also by immersing non-Ibo speakers into the community's local language. Because *Things Fall Apart* is first and foremost a narrative about the Ibo traditions, Achebe did not hesitate to saturate his narrative with local xenisms, pidgin vocabularies, or even attributes of his oral culture. With his writing style, it is the whole narrative that comes alive with vivid descriptions that encapsulate the life in Africa, and of the Ibo in

¹⁹³ "Agbala" referring to the female Oracle is spelled with a capital "A" whereas the derogatory male substantive is spelled with a lower case "a."

¹⁹⁴ Unoka, because he was perceived as lazy, was called an "agbala," a woman; and Nwoye's lack of masculinity is put in direct opposition with his closeness to his mother and the stories he was told (46).

particular, prior to the arrival of the missionaries.

Sometime into the narrative, with the arrival of the first missionaries in Umuofia, the narrator's extensive descriptions of precolonial social structures subside in favour of a more overt linguistic parallelism. In fact, prior to the encounter between the Ibo and the British, Achebe never bothered to specify which language any of his characters spoke. While the reader might have known all along that Okonkwo and his peers did not express themselves in the English of the narration, he/she is given a confirmation only with the advent of the interpreters. It is in fact only with the interpreters, located in the "interlangue," that Achebe namely addresses the linguistic competences of his characters. The interpreters as well as the "mixed" tongue they speak, by definition, signal the presence of at least two mutually unintelligible languages.¹⁹⁵ Ibo and British were foreigners to each other despite the Europeans' alleged knowledge of Africa and Africans. Achebe specifically uses the symbolism of language to address the lack of mutual understanding between the two people. The British did not just look different to the Ibo who associated the whiteness of their skin with leprosy; they spoke a different language and were unable to comprehend their culture (151).

Things Fall Apart, as argued earlier, is a novel in response to stereotypical, often negative representations of Africa and Africans. To supposedly self-proclaimed European specialists of Africa, Achebe responds with a much more realistic, though fictionalized,

¹⁹⁵ The linguistic makeup of nine villages surrounding Umuofia was already plural prior to the advent of the British. We remember for example that Okonkwo's mother is from Mbanta, a village where people do not

account of Ibo life. With a very detailed narrative, he offered an insight into the different social, political, judicial and even religious structures of his people. If need still be, Achebe reinforced to his public the worth of his Ibo culture. More recently however, in the light of his new memoirs published in 2012 entitled, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, one cannot help but wonder if there was not a second level of resistance to *Things Fall Apart*; a reading of the novel that presents the Ibos and Iboland as a potentially autonomous and a self-reliant entity altogether.

The relationships between the Ibo and the other tribes in Nigeria, especially the Yorubas, have historically been through some rocky times, the worst of which being the Biafran War,¹⁹⁶ a war Achebe qualified in his long-awaited memoirs as a “genocide” against the Ibo. Back in his 1968 interview, talking about his newly seceded Ibo state, and his life in Lagos prior to the war, Achebe confessed he had been living in a “strange place,” a place he did not consider home (32). All through his interview, very consistently, Achebe put in direct opposition Nigeria and Nigerians with the Ibo and Biafrans, two entities he could only see as “two states living side by side” (35). And looking back at *Things Fall Apart*, one notices that the name Nigeria is never specifically mentioned in the novel even when the narrator talked about the distant lands that have

speak Ibo.

¹⁹⁶ This is also referred to as the Nigerian Civil war that opposed the Nigerian government to the Southeastern provinces of the country mainly inhabited by Ibo. The war spanned between July 1967 to January 1970. For more information see, Okpaku 1972; Cronjé 1972; Achebe 2012.

been visited and won over by the colonizers (166).¹⁹⁷ Without going as far as calling Achebe a tribalist¹⁹⁸ or a nationalist, *Things Fall Apart*, the reader remarks, is primarily a novel about all things Ibo. With the stories of Okonkwo and his fellow countrymen, it is the Ibo identity and culture that is presented. For these reasons, Achebe's novel could be read, not just as a narrative of resistance to Europeans' misrepresentation of Africans and Africa, but also as a reaffirmation of an ethnic group that has somehow always felt persecuted.¹⁹⁹

On the strictly aesthetic aspects of the novel, Achebe's understanding of the relationship between language and culture is a complex one. Contrary to linguistic purists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) who believe in a fatal subjugation of African literature if written in English, Achebe not only recognized, but claimed a more utilitarian aspect of the language. In *Things Fall Apart*, he did more than add palm oil to the English language to help it carry his subject matter; he takes advantage of his plurilingual capability to represent within his fiction the various languages spoken in the referential context of his characters. By making the English of the narration share the literary space with both Ibo and the Pidgin of the interpreters, Achebe provides a realistic portrayal of the plurilingual

¹⁹⁷ One can make the argument of the novel being a fiction to justify these "omissions," but it remains nonetheless, that for the most part, the novel provides historical information.

¹⁹⁸ Critics like Mwongera Kioga did in his review entitled: "Achebe Got It All Wrong on Tribalism (In Nigeria and Africa)—A Review."

¹⁹⁹ Without clear determination of their origins, the Ibo have been referred to as the "lost tribe of Israel" (Nwafor-Ejelinma 5); a comparison to Israel and the conditions of the Jews which speaks to the issue of persecution earlier mentioned.

nature of his society. In response to self-proclaimed, Western specialists who were quick to label the African as savage and in need of redemption and salvation (Conrad, 1899), Achebe offers valuable information on his native tribe, both at the levels of language and culture. With *Things Fall Apart*, the animal, at last, seizes the opportunity to tell his story; for, as the saying goes among the Ibo: “Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter” (Achebe, *Home and Exile* 73). With plurilingualism, understood both as a hermeneutic and an object of study, readers become better equipped to tell hunting stories from an animal perspective.

At about the same period as Achebe was writing (1960’s), this time in a country ruled by the British archrivals of the day, the French, Cheikh Hamidou Kane was telling a different story. How to reconcile a God-centered Islamic faith with a Western philosophy that had decided on God’s death is the dilemma Kane exposes in *L’Aventure ambiguë*.

F- Plurilingualism in *L’Aventure ambiguë*

Like Mariama Ba, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Chinua Achebe, colonization constitutes for Cheikh Hamidou Kane the anchoring point of his narrative. The novel follows the trajectory of Samba Diallo, a young aristocratic, Peulh and Muslim prodigy, as he goes through his journey of education. From the Foyer ardent to the French school, and later La Sorbonne where he studied philosophy, Samba Diallo experiences different languages, different cultures and equally different outlooks on life. In a highly sustained French language all throughout the novel, Kane talks about the opposition between a traditional Muslim philosophy that places God at the beginning and end of all, and a more pragmatic and a more rational school of thought that places man at the center of

existence. Kane talks about faith and materialism, and the doomed attempt at reconciling respective philosophies that spring from these opposite values. And because the journey of Samba Diallo is a serious one, the language Kane adopts is measured and sober so as to achieve a harmonious balance between form and content. More than the encounter between Arabic and French, plurilingualism in *L'Aventure ambiguë* appears most clearly in the realm of ideas.

L'Aventure ambiguë starts with life in the Country of the Diallobé prior to the arrival of the White man. The Diallobé, we learn from the opening pages of the novel, are a deeply religious population who strongly believe in God; not the God of the White missionaries however, but in Allah, the God of Islam.²⁰⁰ With Samba Diallo and his clan, Kane presents the reader with more than just an indigenous Black society; he depicts a deeply monotheistic religious people for whom everything revolves around faith. Samba Diallo as well as the rest of his community members are Peulh and belong to the Diallobé tribe, a community in the North of the present-day Senegal among the first to have adopted Islam.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Here, it might be worth noting that with both Achebe and Dangarembga, the respective disruptions of the Ibo and Shona cultures are tightly linked not to just the English language, but also to Christianity. With Kane—and also Ba—however, though Christianity was introduced in Senegal along with the French language, it did not greatly affect people's beliefs. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, less than 10% of the population in Senegal is Christian.

²⁰¹ In an interview to RFI (Radio France International), Kane, addressing his state of mind at the time he wrote *L'Aventure ambiguë*, defined himself as being primarily “musulman et Peulh, musulman et noir...” (Muslim and Peulh; muslim and black).

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Islam represents the dominant religion. The Diallobé are presented as people who profoundly believe in God. Like Samba Diallo, “[Ils font] claquer [leur] chahâda comme un étendard au vent” (124).²⁰² They live their lives following the teachings of the Koran, the Holy Book of Islam. Evidence attesting to the Islamic faith of the Diallobé is plentiful. The story starts with Samba Diallo at the Foyer ardent, a Koranic school run by Maître Thierno. With Le Maître, Samba Diallo is initiated at a very young age to “la Parole de Dieu” (15).²⁰³ There, he learns the words of God in their original Arabic as he memorizes sourates from the Koran. A young boy from the Peulh tribe, Samba Diallo is indeed Muslim as his family is and has been for generations. And it is in this heavily religious, yet hybrid community, that the hero of *L'Aventure ambiguë* evolves before the colonizers first set foot on the Country of the Diallobé. The story is about Samba Diallo and his inadequacy to successfully synthesize his Islamic faith with a Cartesian philosophy.²⁰⁴

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, the reader becomes a spectator of the tragic life of Samba Diallo as he engages in a double journey of education and self-discovery. Under the

²⁰² “[They] made [their] chahâda wave like a banner in the wind” (99).

²⁰³ “The Word of God” (5).

²⁰⁴ Cheikh Hamidou Kane is one of the rare authors who has taken a genuine interest in the philosophy of Islam and how it differs from the cultures imported in Black Africa following colonization. In the first volume of *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Albert Gerard, lamenting a lack of scholarly interest in Islamic philosophy in the African novel, writes, “[. . .] in 1961 at last a Senegalese writer, [C]heikh Hamidou Kane (b.1928), published a novel, *L'Aventure ambiguë* in which full justice was done to the philosophical depth of Muslim thought” (535).

leadership of La Grande Royale and against the will of Maître Thierno, our hero, who spent his early years learning the Koran, is sent to the White man's school to learn "comment lier le bois au bois."²⁰⁵ At the French school however, Samba Diallo would receive more than a traditional education; for the first time, he gains access to a language that would introduce him to a world of unmediated knowledge. How to reconcile two different educations, one religious, in the realm of belief, faith and subjectivity, the other Cartesian, objective and above all pragmatic, is the question Samba Diallo is confronted with.

1) Before the French: The Diallobé, an Already Heterogeneous Society

As touched on earlier, the Diallobé belong to the Peulh tribe in the Northern part of Senegal. Both Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Samba Diallo are members of that ethnicity; however, little information on the Peulh is provided in the novel. As true believers in their Chahâda, the Peulh, and the Diallobé in particular, are a deeply religious community who "bear witness that there is no god but God and that Mohammed is his prophet."²⁰⁶ This strong belief in the Islamic profession of faith leaves no room for any other belief system among the Diallobé. Islam in *L'Aventure ambiguë* is "pure," rigorously and exclusively following the teachings of the Koran. Unlike *Une si longue lettre* for example, where Mariama Ba depicts the syncretism at play in Senegal, with traditional beliefs cohabiting alongside Islam, with Kane, no mention of any pagan practices is made. From a religious point of view, the Diallobé are presented as being a strict Muslim community; but behind

²⁰⁵ "How to attach wood to wood."

²⁰⁶ This is the actual meaning of the Chahâda.

their apparent monolithic faith, a diversity of points of views emerges. La Grande Royale and Maître Thierno, though they both genuinely believe in God and in the teachings of the Holy Koran, interpret differently what it means to be a good Muslim and how best to serve and protect their religion. The former believes in a philosophy of life and an approach to religion that is less radical and more inclusive while the latter is a proponent of a total hermetism, of an immutable Islam focused on the hereafter.²⁰⁷

Another piece of information gleaned from the Diallobé is that they are a stratified community where the notion of class is very important. Samba Diallo as well as his family members are often referred to as “princes,” a recognition of their aristocratic lineage. With the Diallobé indeed, nobility is an inherited “quality” and is defined at birth. This social reality which elevates a man on grounds other than his faith and dedication to God, is, according to the radical interpreters of the religion, antithetical to Islam.²⁰⁸ For Thierno and some Muslim purists, the system of class, and nobility in particular, is nothing but the celebration of man and consequently outside of the realm of true belief. In a free indirect discourse, the narrator allows the reader into a piece of Thierno’s intimate thoughts. He writes:

Le Maître croyait profondément que l’adoration de Dieu n’était compatible avec

²⁰⁷ La Grande Royale is a proponent of “vaincre sans avoir raison.” She understands that the Diallobé cannot afford to live in autarky. She understands that the French were there to stay and could not simply be wished away.

²⁰⁸ For more an in-depth analysis of soufisme and the different levels of interpretations in Islam, see Amadou Ly’s article “Le soufisme dans le chapitre X de *L’Aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane.”

aucune exaltation de l'homme. Or, au fond de toute noblesse, il est un fond de paganisme. La noblesse est l'exaltation de l'homme, la foi est avant tout humilité, sinon humiliation. (33)²⁰⁹

With the belief that one cannot exalt both God and man at the same time, Le Maitre denounces what he considers a near-pagan practise within his community. By so doing, he inscribes himself in opposition to La Grande Royale who, by all external standards, bears proudly the markers of her noble descent. The narrator describes her with “un grand visage altier” (30)²¹⁰ in contrast with Thierno who had the most emaciated and fragile body of all (45).

But by far the most important piece of evidence attesting to the hierarchized nature of the Diallobé community is the use of the word “Mbare” (36/160) acknowledging the existence of slaves within their community. The word “Mbare” is an obvious xenism²¹¹ and the narrator falls short of providing significant information on the state of slavery within the Diallobé or within the Islam faith in general. Using a substantive that is not in French to talk about “slavery” in *L'Aventure ambiguë* could be interpreted as a way for Cheikh Hamidou Kane to retain his integrity as an author and social critic at the same time acknowledging a shameful practise at play among his own

²⁰⁹ The teacher believed profoundly that the adoration of God was not compatible with any exaltation of man. But, at the bottom of all nobility there is a basis of paganism. Nobility is the exaltation of man, faith is before all else humility (21). All English translations are from Katherine Woods (1963).

²¹⁰ “A haughty and imposing visage” (18).

²¹¹ The only one according to our linguistic cartography in the previous chapter.

people.²¹²

A final note on the Diallobé has to do with the role and place of women. La Grande Royale, more than any other character in the novel, is presented as a strong individual and a decision maker. Throughout the novel, her voice is heard clearly and loudly as she leads her people to the new and unpopular French school. She is however the only woman, the only Diallobé woman that is, who takes an active part in the narrative.²¹³ The other women from the Country of the Diallobé (like Samba Diallo's mother) are only alluded to but the reader never gets to hear their voices. So what about those women who the reader knows are present but never hear? To let *L'Aventure ambiguë* speak effectively, this analysis needs to focus, not just on the language Kane uses, but also on what he leaves unsaid. Women in the Country of the Diallobé, in the image of women in Islam in general, live in the shadow of their male counterparts. They are rarely heard, especially in public. In *Women in Islam: the Western experience*, Anne Sofie Roald discusses the particular concept of "fitna" which justifies the segregation of men and women. "Fitna," roughly translated as temptation, is defined in Roald as "part of a biological pattern in which the basic instinct is the attraction between the sexes" (286). It is therefore out of a wish to avoid a potential male attraction that women are not

²¹² For more information on Slavery and Islam, see William Gervase Clarence-Smith's book entitled *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*.

²¹³ Women outside the Country of the Diallobé, (like Adele) are fully fledged characters with opinions of their own and are actively engaged in dialogue with their male counterparts.

allowed in the same spheres as men.²¹⁴ In *L'Aventure ambiguë* indeed, it was on an exceptional basis that women were allowed to attend the meeting on whether or not to send the Diallobé children to the French school. And when they did, they were kept at a distance from their male counterparts and their voices were never heard. It is La Grande Royale, an older, asexual woman, a person nothing like the average Diallobé, who acted as their spokesperson, confirming the received idea that it is only the woman who is no longer sexually desirable to men who is permitted to take part in social matters.

La Grande Royale indeed is a sixty year-old aristocratic woman with patriarchal status (30). Contrary to the traditional gendered roles that describe women as wives and mothers, she is known to the reader as an aunt (to Samba Diallo), a sister (to Le Chevalier) and a daughter (to her late Chief father). While she might not be representative of the larger role and place of women in the Country of the Diallobé, there is no denying that by making her carry the voice of progress and outreach to the “other,” Kane makes a statement recognizing female leadership in a heavily male dominated environment while at the same time not transgressing the theological imperatives of the Koran.

2) From a Language to a Philosophy of Life

With the adoption of Islam, the Diallobé embraced more than a simple religion; they adopted a new language, a new philosophy and a new outlook on life. As devout Muslims, the Diallobé, and Samba Diallo in particular, use Arabic on a daily basis but do

²¹⁴ Here one could argue that since the rationale behind the “fitna” is the prevention of sexual attraction, logically, both male and women should equally be careful in preventing the “attraction.” But the reality is that “fitna” is feminized and the concept itself is often reduced and equated to womanhood.

not speak nor do they write the language. For Samba Diallo, Arabic constitutes an unintelligible yet paradoxically necessary language. As the medium in which the Koran was revealed, Arabic indeed is a language any practising Muslim needs as he/she copes with the mandates of Islam.²¹⁵ At the Foyer ardent, Samba Diallo learns to recite perfectly the contents of his tablets without access to the latter's semantic meanings. As a consequence, his relationship to God, though personal, is mediated by Maître Thierno. As a teacher and one of the Diallobé's spiritual leaders, Maître Thierno does not just interpret the Koran for Samba Diallo and his peers;²¹⁶ he also instills in them the values and philosophies of the Islamic faith. More than the Arabic language, Maître Thierno teaches his disciples how to live, not for material wealth, but for something holy. With Thierno, Samba Diallo learns that life on earth ought to be nothing but a rehearsal for the hereafter. By Thierno's own account "[...] ce que nous apprenons aux enfants, c'est Dieu. Ce qu'ils doivent oublier c'est eux-mêmes, c'est leur corps et cette propension futile qui durcit avec l'âge et étouffe l'esprit" (44).²¹⁷ This quote from *Le Maître* reveals the special place God holds in the lives of the Diallobé. He is at the beginning and the end of all and the journey of life itself is to be lived in celebration of this philosophy. In a nutshell, Samba Diallo

²¹⁵ At least five times a day, Muslims are required to pray. The prayers in question follow strict guidelines and are to be executed in the original Arabic of the Koran.

²¹⁶ The teachings of God are indeed filtered through Thierno in part because of language. On a different occasion, the narrator also mentions that *Le Maître* was the one who literally translated "The Book" for his people (36).

²¹⁷ "...what we teach children is God. What they forget is themselves, their bodies, and the futile dream which hardens with age and stifles the spirit" (31).

learns with Thierno, that people are but “[une] misérable moisissure de la terre.” (14)²¹⁸

This emphasis on spirit over matter influences, on one hand, the minimalist and simplicity of the lives of the Diallobé, and on another, the ways they think metaphysical concepts.²¹⁹ For Samba Diallo and his people (i.e. Maître Thierno), in an effort to repress a man’s ego as he tries to get closer to God, the ideals of death are privileged over the ideals of life; and at the Foyer ardent, there is no limit to how far Le Maître can go to ensure that children properly learn, at a very young age, the values of a good Muslim.

The first time the reader meets Samba Diallo, he is being punished by Thierno for failing to recite properly “la Parole de Dieu;” “ce jour là, Thierno l’avait encore battu ... Il avait saisi Samba Diallo à la cuisse, l’avait pincé du pouce et de l’index, longuement” (13).²²⁰ This expression of love, of genuine concern through utter violence might not be understandable to a Western audience whose conception of children’s rights prohibits any form of “physical abuse.” In the Country of the Diallobé however, a people “parmi les derniers hommes au monde à posséder Dieu tel qu’Il est véritablement dans Son Unicité...” (20),²²¹ corporeal punishments are totally acceptable. Far from being child abuse, they participate in teaching children humility and perseverance.

²¹⁸ “miserable lump of earthly mold” (4).

²¹⁹ For an extensive list of the philosophical topics covered in *L’Aventure ambiguë*, cf the previous chapter of the linguistic cartography of the novel.

²²⁰ “That day, Thierno had beaten him again...He had seized Samba Diallo by the fleshy part of his thigh and, between his thumb and his index finger, had given him a long hard pinch” (1).

²²¹ “...among the last men on earth to possess God as He veritably is in His Oneness...” (9-10)

Still in keeping with Thierno's idea of repressing the ego, Samba Diallo and his peers, clothed in rags, go door to door begging for their daily meals. By now, the reader knows that Samba Diallo belongs to an aristocratic family who could amply afford to feed him. But as Maître Thierno contends, "[...] le disciple, tant qu'il cherche Dieu, ne saurait vivre que de mendicité, quelle que soit la richesse de ses parents" (24)²²² This situation of voluntary disenfranchisement,²²³ as far as the Diallobé are concerned, participates in making children forget early about their bodies, about their egos.

The Foyer ardent is, as we have seen so far, the place where the reader is first presented with Muslim philosophy. Under the direction of Thierno, the overall teachings of the contents of texts "que [Samba Diallo] ne comprenait pas et pour [les]quels il souffrait le martyre" (14)²²⁴ are revealed. Islam, we learn from Thierno, a man who never laughed (17), is less about the celebration of life on earth than it is with the preparation of the hereafter. At a tender age, children at the Koranic school are taught the concept of death. Far from being an end in itself, death indeed is presented as the necessary passage to eternity; something not to be feared but actively expected and welcomed. We remember Samba Diallo's litanies evoking Azraël, the angel of death:

Gens de Dieu, songez à votre mort prochaine. Eveillez-vous, oh, éveillez-vous !

²²² "While seeking God, the disciples would know no other way of supporting life than by begging, whatever their parents' wealth might be" (13).

²²³ The chorus of the children during their early mornings' psalmody says "nos pères sont vivants et nous mendions comme des orphelins" (23). "Our Fathers are alive, and we beg like orphans" (13).

²²⁴ "which [Samba Diallo] did not understand, for which he was suffering martyrdom" (4).

Azraël, l'Ange de la mort, déjà fend la terre vers vous. Il va surgir à vos pieds. Gens de Dieu, la mort n'est pas cette sournoise qu'on croit, qui vient quand on ne l'attend pas, qui se dissimule si bien que lorsqu'elle est venue plus personne n'est là. (23)²²⁵

No wonder then, this God-centered community, already plural in nature, will be shaken to its core with the advent of yet another new, antagonistic philosophy that considers Nietzsche as one of its most prominent intellectuals. Evolving from the hypothesis that “God is dead,” more than the intelligibility of the French language, it is a whole new worldview anchored in René Descartes’ “Je pense, donc je suis,” which the Diallobé are introduced to.

Unlike Achebe, Ba or even Dangarembga, Kane’s language is not overtly indebted to the local vernaculars in his environment. *L’Aventure ambiguë* is indeed written in a highly sustained French with little to no room for Kane’s oral Peulh or even his scriptural Arabic. Beside the words “Tabala” (181), “Mbare” (36,160) and “Chahâda” (124,180), no other xenisms are present in the narrative. Despite the heavy religious charge of the novel, no actual Arabic terminologies are explicitly represented. On numerous occasions, the narrator does signal that his characters’ speech is being uttered in an original Arabic. With verbs like “psalmodier,” concepts like “La Nuit du Koran,” or

²²⁵ Men of God, reflect upon your approaching death. Awake, Oh, awake! Azrael, Angel of death, is already breaking the earth for you. It is about to rise up at your feet. Men of God, death is not that sly creature it is believed to be, which comes when it is not expected, and conceals itself so well that when it has come there is no longer anyone there (12).

the plain evocations of prayers, “litanies” and “Koranic verses,” the Arabic language is indeed strongly felt throughout the novel but nowhere is it actually represented. In *L’Aventure ambiguë*, Arabic is knowable mainly by inference, by pre-supposition. Kane wrote his spiritual adventure in a French language not initially his own but by which he was much fascinated. Unlike the other authors in this study who showcase the validity and worth of their traditional cultures through obvious signs of linguistic indigenization, the location of Kane’s counter discourse to colonialism is rooted in his Muslim faith, in the theological teachings of the Koran. Throughout the novel, it is obvious that Kane puts a strong emphasis on “La Parole de Dieu,” the words from God that must be repeated with care and in the exact same fashion that God himself did (15).

This almost “pathological” attention to language is not restricted to repeating God’s sacred words, it also appears in the way the characters speak and address one another. All characters indeed, with the exception of Demba who once strove after vulgarity when addressing Samba Diallo (14), are lent a sophisticated high standard of French even if the reader knows for a fact that the great majority of them could not have expressed themselves in the original French of the narration. The reader is in fact a front witness to the implementation of the White man’s school in the Country of the Diallobé. And with the exception of Le fou (who had been to Europe during the war), the school director and the later Samba Diallo,²²⁶ it is unclear how any other Diallobé could be or

²²⁶ Regardless of how gifted Samba Diallo really was, his mastery of French even as a school age child is not very realistic.

was introduced to French. A more realistic representation would have been to have indigenous characters who have never been in contact with the French language express themselves in their native language(s), in this case, Peulh. But obviously, this is not the case with Kane. In an interview with Barthélémy Kotchy back in 1974, the latter suggested that Kane's characters were not real in the light of the discrepancies between their supposed (limited) linguistic capabilities²²⁷ and the high standard of the French narration. To Kotchy and other readers who find the high standard French of the narrative beyond the characters' capabilities, I suggest a study of Kane's characters in the light of their Peulh language and culture. Using the paradigm of transpolingualism, I contend that, in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, French functions more as a mirror reflection, reverberating the way the characters would have originally expressed themselves in their native Peulh and on issues as lofty as God and death among other topics. Transpolingualism, Laté Lawson-Hellu tells us, functions in two different ways, it can be done in a most explicit manner whereby the narrator signals his intention; we then talk about transpolingualism "avec mention." Or it can be done with no warning whatsoever, in which case, we talk about transpolingualism "avec présupposition" (2011: 252). In Cheikh Hamidou Kane's case, the language *in absentia*, the one supposed to have been originally used by the majority of characters, is never named, never used or even heard. Nowhere in *L'Aventure ambiguë* did Kane overtly mention Peulh, yet most of the narrative is about the Peulh (the

²²⁷ "J'ai eu l'impression en lisant ce roman que vous avez non pas tellement décrit des personnages dans leur réalité vivante, mais vous avez voulu surtout créer des archétypes" (483) "after reading the novel, I felt like you did not describe true, realistic characters. I felt like you created archetypes" Translation mine.

Diallobé), their lives and their belief systems.

Samba Diallo, in the image of his creator, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, is primarily defined as a Peulh and as a Muslim. In his interviews, both with Lise Gauvin and Antoinette Delafin and Tirthankar Chanda from Radio France Internationale, Kane insists on his ethnic and religious lineage for a sense of place and belonging. The novel is set in the “Country of the Diallobé” with Diallobé meaning nothing but that which belongs to “Diallo.” The “-be” suffix signals the notion of belonging and readers of *L’Aventure ambiguë* with some familiarity with the Senegalese culture quickly recognize Diallo as a common Peulh patronym, often from the higher class. So the expression “Country of the Diallobé,” beyond its significance as a geographical entity, carries within itself information pertaining to ethnicity as well as class. Indeed, in Senegal, patronyms often carry within themselves both the linguistic, cultural and sometimes even the class of a person.²²⁸

Throughout the novel, the narrator provides information regarding the Peulh origins of Samba Diallo and his clan members. Not only are they of noble descent, but there are of the kind that rules their country. As a consequence, one could expect that their language would be commensurate with their social prestige. Indeed Samba Diallo’s noble origins are part and parcel of who he is. As Demba accurately remarks “[Le] prince

²²⁸ Class determination from a person’s last name is not always accurate. Traditional social codes forbid inter-class marriages, but in reality, and specially with the younger generations, the rules are not always followed. For this reason, someone might carry what is believed to be a noble last name and yet have in his/her lineage an ancestor (mostly female) who belonged to a lower class.

ne l'est pas seulement de sang ! Il lui faut tout ! Il est aussi prince de l'esprit" (28).²²⁹ And the narrator adds, "Il ne se passait pas de jour que quelqu'un ne fit de remarque sur la noblesse de son port ou sur l'élégance racée de son maintien, en dépit des haillons sordides dont il se couvrait" (27).²³⁰ If we read Samba Diallo's stubborn nobility as an indication of Kane's himself,²³¹ then we start to catch a glimpse of the reason why characters in *L'Aventure ambiguë* are so well spoken in French.

On a different level, the name "Country of the Diallobé," in the image of other names of places such as the "Town of L...", is a deliberate choice by Kane not to confine his narrative to a restricted geographical entity. The story Kane tells in *L'Aventure ambiguë* is indeed that of the Peulh community at large, a community known to exist well beyond the geographical limits of the present day Senegal. By setting his narrative in the fictitious Country of the Diallobé, Kane questions and even fails to recognize the

²²⁹ The prince is not only a prince of the blood. Nothing is lacking to him. He is also a prince of the mind and spirit (16).

²³⁰ Not a day passed that someone did not remark on the nobility of his bearing or the elegance of his deportment, in spite of the rags in which he was clothed (15).

²³¹ In this task of uncovering Samba Diallo's origins, Janet Little considers Samba Diallo as literally yet another Cheikh Hamidou Kane because of the significance of the two names. According to Little, "Diallo is the Fula equivalent of the Tukolor name Kane" while Samba represented the "conventional," the other name given to the second-born son within Tukolor families (72). Here, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of the notion of "transposition/translation" in uncovering Samba Diallo's heritage and re-establishing both his linguistic and cultural lineages beyond Kane's suggestions.

“artificial” geographical boundaries impose in the wake of colonization.²³² With the Country of the Diallobé, I argue that Kane recreates and reclaims a mythical pre-colonial space disrupted by the White man.

References to Kane’s native Peulh are kept to a minimum. On some occasions, Kane makes a hint at the existence of another language that is neither French nor Arabic in the making of *L’Aventure ambiguë*; this is the case when the narrator discusses what the word “school” meant in “la langue du pays.” On a separate instance, Maître Thierno confesses to translating The Book for his people; and who talks about translating the Koran implies another language beside Arabic (the target language) that the reader knows could not have been French. Lastly, there is the naming of the characters, specifically that of Maître Thierno. In Peulh, beyond its signification as a personal name, Thierno is also a title; a title given to spiritual and religious leaders, to people Mariama Ba called “marabouts” in *Une si longue lettre*. By referring to le maître as Thierno instead of the mostly known terminology of “marabout,” Kane not only resorts to his native Peulh language, but more importantly, he signals his primary identification with his native tribe. And more than any other novel in this study, transpolingualism is here useful in establishing Peulh as a valid and tangible language in *L’Aventure ambiguë*.

Just as he left the reader with limited information on social issues,²³³ Kane’s use of transpolingualism is often done without mention; and nowhere is the Peulh language

²³² For more information on the scramble for Africa, see Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain’s book of the same name (*The Scramble for Africa*).

²³³ We remember his evocation of slavery without going into detailed information on the topic.

specifically mentioned as “la langue du pays.” But given the strong autobiographical elements of the novel (Little 2009), the identification of Peulh as the language in question is fairly easy and straightforward. The philosophical tone of the narrative as well as what Kane wished to accomplish in this novel called for—at least, in Kane’s mind—a language that could speak to his Western audience for whom the book is primarily destined.²³⁴

3) One Language, Endless Possibilities

Unlike Arabic, French in *L’Aventure ambiguë* is presented as a language of unlimited possibilities. As mentioned earlier, it opens the doors to unmediated knowledge for our protagonist. Though considered a brilliant student, even by Thierno’s high standards, Samba Diallo’s knowledge of Arabic was very limited. He could give the most

²³⁴ During his interview with Lise Gauvin, Kane declared:

[A]u moment où j’écrivais [. . .] c’était un peu pour donner un témoignage aux Occidentaux, de l’existence d’une culture, d’une civilisation, d’une sensibilité noire, puisque les Occidentaux ne pouvaient accéder à cette culture, à la connaissance de ces valeurs, et à cette sensibilité que par le moyen de l’écriture et des livres. [. . .] Nous, nous étions déjà voués à la démonstration de l’existence de valeurs et de culture à travers l’oralité, valeurs et culture qui étaient universelles et que nous pouvions partager avec les autres.

[A]t the time of writing [. . .] it was to some extent to bear witness to Westerners of the existence of a black culture, a black civilization, a black sensibility, because Westerners could have access to that culture, to a knowledge of those values, and to that sensibility only through the medium of writing and books. [...] We ourselves were already committed to the demonstration of the existence of values and culture through the oral tradition, values and culture which were universal and which we could share with others. (qtd in Little 74)

heartfelt renditions of the Koran, but could not read or write the language nor did he have access to the contents of the messages he had learned to memorize. He states, “J’avais interrompu mes études chez le maître des Diallobé au moment précis où il allait m’initier enfin à la compréhension rationnelle de ce que, jusque-là, je n’avais fait que réciter, avec émerveillement il est vrai” (173).²³⁵ To Samba Diallo’s limited Arabic abilities, the colonizers will oppose a universe where “tout était, de prime abord, compréhension merveilleuse et communion totale” (173),²³⁶ a new universe knowable essentially through the French language. Indeed, more than the intelligibility of the French language and the limitless possibilities it allows for communication, Samba Diallo is most fascinated by the intellectual exercises of the mind he then could partake in. The narrator talks about Samba Diallo’s newfound pleasure in testing ideas:

Toujours, il éprouvait un plaisir de grande qualité à tourner dans son esprit les pensées claires, lorsqu’il les atteignait, comme pour en vérifier l’aloi. Il était assuré, quel que soit le biais par lequel il les prenait, de les retrouver identiques et stables, contraignantes. Cette dureté des idées le réjouissait. En même temps; il éprouvait son intelligence ... (115-116)²³⁷

²³⁵ I had interrupted my studies with the teacher of the Diallobé at the very moment when he was about to initiate me at last into the rational understanding of what up to then I had done no more than recite—with wonder, to be sure (143-144).

²³⁶ which was, at the very first, one of marvellous comprehension and total communion... (144).

²³⁷ Always he felt a high degree of pleasure in turning those clear thoughts over in his mind, when he caught up with them, as if to verify their fine quality. Whatever might be the slant at which he took them, he was assured of finding them identical and stable: compelling. This toughness of ideas delighted him. At the

More than a language, it is the passage from orature to literacy that also fascinated Samba Diallo; “il était assuré ... de retrouver [les pensées] identiques et stables.” Both Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Samba Diallo marvelled before the French alphabet and the simple act of writing.²³⁸ In an interview with Lise Gauvin on the topic of plurilingualism and the African author, Kane echoed Diallo’s excitement when he first realized he could, through sheer letters, not only form personal thoughts, but also effectively convey them to others (*L’écrivain francophone...*,148).

Past their initial fascination with the French language however, neither Kane nor Diallo fails to recognize that French education, just like the canons that paved the way for colonization, was also used as a “weapon” of domination. In his discussion with Adèle about his love/hate relationship with the West, Samba Diallo recognizes that it was the French alphabet which first “struck” the Country of the Diallobé. With the French school and the French alphabet particularly, Samba Diallo gains more than a language. He gains access to a vast and diversified body of literature that goes back centuries. Contrary to his Koranic education where he had first to learn the texts by heart and eventually their significances—a second part that he sadly never achieved—the French language offered immediate rewards in terms of understanding and intelligibility. As Frantz Fanon puts it in *Black Skin, White Mask*, “Mastery of language affords remarkable power” a thought he completed by hinting at the interconnection between language and culture and the dangers

same time, he was testing out his intelligence... (93).

²³⁸ The fact that Arabic is a codified language and has been for centuries is irrelevant to Kane or Diallo.

Neither of them can use the language for communication, much less as a learning tool.

of acculturation. He affirms: “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (18).

After an opinionated debate on whether or not to attend the White man’s school, Samba Diallo, under the leadership of La Grande Royale, left the Foyer ardent to start his humanities at the French school. It is in Africa, in his native Country of the Diallobé, that he faces his first spiritual dilemma. With new avenues now open to him thanks to the French alphabet, Samba Diallo quickly discovers a philosophical world that could not be reconciled with his purist Islamic faith. Samba Diallo’s choice to pursue studies in philosophy is motivated by his desire to genuinely learn the West in its essence. His people sent him off to the French school so he could learn “l’art de vaincre sans avoir raison” (47).²³⁹ He thus moves from an environment where spirituality and “Allah” were the answer to all questions²⁴⁰ to another which has been moving away from God. With Le Chevalier, Samba Diallo reviews how Western philosophy has gradually moved the “concept” of God from the center to the periphery to ultimately decide on his death (108-118). Indeed, with reference to Socrates, Saint Augustine, Pascal, Nietzsche, and later Descartes, Samba Diallo explains to the reader how Western philosophy has gradually come to be all about Man and the search for partial truths.

²³⁹ “The art of conquering without being in the right” (33).

²⁴⁰ Here it is worth noting that despite the strong Islamic belief of the Diallobé, Senegal was still a secular country. The Peulh are well known to be among the strongest and earliest believers in the Koran, but it still remains that the “answers” alluded to here are not imposed on people as it would be in a place where Sharia was the law. Rather, it is a matter of personal conviction, of a journey leading up to the discoveries of those truths.

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, the reader becomes a witness to Samba Diallo's inner transformation as he embarks on a process that will make him a hybrid man. No longer an unquestioning devout Muslim for whom God was the essence of life, Samba Diallo becomes a skeptic. His passion for philosophy, a discipline that he himself qualifies as "l'itinéraire le plus susceptible de [le] perdre" (125),²⁴¹ leads him to be full of doubts as he questions his place on earth and his identity; not just his identity as a practising Muslim, but simply, his identity as a man.²⁴²

At La Sorbonne, the second phase in his journey, Samba Diallo continues to be confronted with greater questions regarding his faith. It is in fact away from home, in Paris, where Samba Diallo is confronted first hand with the reality of what, so far, he had only learned in books, in writing, as theoretical concepts. He gets a reality check of how Western philosophy is lived, not just learned and thought of.

The West and the Diallobé have different understandings of simple concepts like work, nothingness, or death (among other topics). For Samba Diallo and his people, work is a basic need; something people do mainly for survival, for mere practical reasons. For the Diallobé, labour is a religious act just like their daily prayers. In the novel, it is Le Chevalier who best articulates the philosophical undertones in the relationships between

²⁴¹ "I have chosen the itinerary which is most likely to get me lost" (101).

²⁴² Here it is interesting to note how Kane, contrary to Achebe or Dangarembga, and to a lesser extent Ba, does not present the Diallobé as a primarily Black society. With Kane, a stronger emphasis seems to be on faith instead. Samba Diallo truly becomes aware of his colour when in Paris. Prior to leaving his native land, he was mainly identified as a Muslim.

Work and God; he states: "Lorsqu'une vie se justifie de Dieu, tout ce qui tend à la conserver— donc le travail - se justifie aussi de lui" (112).²⁴³ With organized labour, the West emphasises a materialistic approach on work, an approach that takes God out of the equation and as a consequence, turns France into a cold, uninviting place, a place where men and nature do not cross paths; a place where people are replaced by machines. And because machines, not men do the work, the latter have lost their religiosity. For the Diallobé, in proclaiming the death of God, the West had dehumanised and corrupted the very essence of work.

This analysis of plurilingualism in *L'Aventure ambiguë* shows a deep understanding from Kane that, in the context of colonization, no society, however conservative, could afford to live in autarky. By presenting the reader with a deeply Islamic Diallobé community with values of their own, Kane indeed makes a point about the validity of African cultures prior to the advent of the colonizers. Unlike his contemporaries who celebrated the beauty of Francophone literature which they considered a "bridge" between the West and Africa, Cheikh Hamidou Kane acknowledges the necessity to open up to different cultures, but also loudly voices his concerns with the newer hybridized culture that comes as a result.²⁴⁴ With the advent of

²⁴³ "everything which justifies life and gives work its meaning, in the same way and a posteriori, gives work its meaning, too" (90).

²⁴⁴ To that note, we will remember La Grande Royale's doubts about faith and faith only making for solid future foundations. She asks : "Nous refusons l'école pour demeurer nous-mêmes et pour conserver à Dieu sa place dans nos cœurs. Mais avons-nous encore suffisamment de force pour résister à l'école et de

the French language and an exposure to Cartesian philosophy, Cheikh Hamidou Kane chronicles the Diallobé's inability to either move forward to meaningful assimilation into the "dominant" culture or retreat contentedly to an uncorrupted Islamic faith.

Samba Diallo's ambiguous adventure is not just spiritual or cultural, it is also linguistic. From recitals of Koranic verses in the original Arabic to hints at the Peulh language through the much praised beauty of the French language, the evidence here presented goes against a monolithic reading of Kane's book. Contrary to criticisms which focus on the superior and supposedly homogeneous quality of the French of the narration, this analysis shows that *L'Aventure ambiguë*, just like any novel, is best understood as a fundamentally heterogeneous production. Despite Kane's strong reservations on the use of dialects, language registers or even parenthetical notes in the novel,²⁴⁵ plurilingualism is still an important feature of *L'Aventure ambiguë*. With Kane, writing resistance does not necessarily take on local or indigenized attributes; rather, it is about presenting a complex (antithetical) philosophy of life in a French language he views as universal and most able to carry his viewpoints on life. Believing, like Teilhard de Chardin, that "On empêcherait la Terre de tourner plutôt que le monde de se totaliser," (qtd in Delafin and)²⁴⁶ Kane takes full ownership of the French language to provide a window into his native Peulh culture. By resorting to French to write about Peulh, Kane settles the debate on the

substance pour demeurer nous-mêmes ?" (20).

²⁴⁵ Cf Kane's interview with Gauvin in *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues*.

²⁴⁶ "It's easier to stop the Earth from going around than to stop the world from becoming one" (translation mine).

controversial use of Western language in African literature. In yet another interview with Amadou Sanou, Kane declares, “[...] Nous étions une société de l’oralité, aujourd’hui nous avons maîtrisé l’écriture [...] Que les Africains s’approprient [cet outil] pour se retourner vers notre culture. ‘Apprendre l’art de vaincre sans avoir raison.’”²⁴⁷

With all four novels in this study, plurilingualism is used both as an aesthetic and a political project. By making their French and English authorial languages share the narrative spaces with their local languages and subject matters, Ba, Dangarembga, Kane and Achebe showcase the validity of their local culture and traditions. They show that using French or English did not necessarily translate into thinking French and English much less acting French and English. These four authors provide insights into how the Francophone and Anglophone authors, though writing within the hegemonic spaces of La Francophonie and the Commonwealth, are still to be primarily understood as local writers. From overt indigenization with Ba and Achebe to more subtle transposition with Kane, this study re-establishes plurilingualism as a critical component of the Francophone and Anglophone African novel; but more importantly, it brings to the forefront the importance and validity of the referential context these other languages point to. Anchoring this study in theories of enunciation and plurilingualism allowed for a dissection of the texts in question. It also allowed a dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone literature and theories and reinforces the validity of Francophone studies

²⁴⁷ “[...] We were an oral society, now we have mastered writing [...] Let Africans reclaim [this tool] to revisit our culture ‘The art of winning without being in the right’” Translation mine

within the larger realm of postcolonial literatures where they rightly belong.

Conclusion

Although they may be unspectacular, forms of linguistic oppression are forms of oppression no less.
(Eriksen, 313)

The African Europhone novel, as we have shown in this study, is by definition a plurilingual production. Writing in French or English means, for the African author, the adoption of both a literary code and a language that have their origins in the West. For the Francophone and Anglophone writer particularly, French and English were more than plain languages for simple communication purposes. Not only did they exist in diglossic relationships with atavic languages under colonization; but today, productions within the newer sites of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth, still continue to reflect on questions of representation and identity that arose from the imperial meeting between France and Britain and their former colonies.

With the French more so than the British, the French language was at the forefront of the colonial conquest. It was invested with humanistic attributes and held to particularly high standards, especially with the oversight of the French Academy. This attitude would later inform the relative paucity of “africanized” fictions in the Francophone world where authors have traditionally demonstrated a greater fidelity to a sustained standard of the French language. In the Anglophone world, in line with the British indirect policy which encouraged “indigenized” forms of their language, English, very early on in Africa, had been experimented with by local populations; and in literature, it translated into a highly visible degree of adaptability of African languages

into the English of the narration. With African literature written in both French and English, not only were authors forsaking their mother tongues in favor of “foreign” languages, they were also subscribing to imported literary codes, in this case, novel-writing. By using foreign languages and a foreign literary support, both the Francophone and the Anglophone African writers have been viewed, by some critics, as participating in furthering neo-colonial domination from the former French and British metropolises. But as this study shows, no serious study of the Francophone or Anglophone African novel can afford to limit itself solely to the obvious language of the narration. Because of their plurilingual abilities, Europhone African authors, whether consciously or not, foreground in their narrative the many languages in their contexts of enunciation; various languages which, in turn, carry all the ontological load of their cultural origins. Using the concepts of enunciation and plurilingualism, I offered a study of how the atavic languages foregrounded in the Francophone and Anglophone novel allow the African writers to make claims of resistance, of self-affirmation and of identity.

In all four novels, the analysis uncovers a literary and cultural subtext that speaks to their authors’ need for affirmation and articulation of local identities. Be it the Ibo with Chinua Achebe, the Shona with Tsitsi Dangarembga, the Peulh with Cheikh Hamidou Kane or the Wolof with Mariama Ba, the linguistic cartographies of the four novels in question consistently take the reader to pre-colonial structures and organizations in a sustained effort to dispel the rationale that justified colonization in the first place. With all four novelists, resistance takes on political significance; and female authors—Ba and Dangarembga—taking on additional concerns for the rights of the Black African woman.

In *Une si longue lettre*, Mariama Ba forces a woman's voice into the social, political and religious debate of her time. The novel is indeed a voice of protest against domineering (post)colonial, Islamic and even cultural practices in place during her time. The other languages in hers—and the narrator's—referential context are represented in the fiction. In *Une si longue lettre*, French indeed exists alongside Wolof and Arabic, two languages which far from simply conferring a local tone to the narrative enhance the ontological dimension of the fiction. While Ramatoulaye's story is obviously captured in French, the mourning process represented in the novel finds its relevance both in Ba's traditions and her Islamic faith. The contribution and importance of Islam is accurately translated in Ba's use of Arabic xenisms. Likewise, when she addresses the class system which is at the root of Aissatou's failed marriage, the vocabulary she uses is directly borrowed from her native Wolof with expressions like “guer,” “Guelewar,” “samba linguere” among others.

Despite her use of the epistolary format, a genre critics like Meineke Schipper consider foreign to African literature, Mariama Ba nonetheless managed to maintain a sense of “authenticity” and place in her narrative. The different languages and registers used by the characters are a fair and likely representation of how people would have normally expressed themselves. This idea is further confirmed by Ba's use of translingualism, especially in situations where her characters, who could not have expressed themselves in the original French of the narration, do so in a manner that literally does nothing more but find corresponding French terms for the original Wolof utterances. With Ba, the use of French alongside Wolof and Arabic in *Une si longue lettre*

does not simply bear witness to the multilingual environment and her plurilingual abilities; it is a deliberate effort to validate and bring exposure to the different cultural spaces each language in her narrative points to. Indeed, while Wolof emerges in *Une si longue lettre* as a dominant language with a culture essentially anchored in orality, Arabic on the other hand presents itself as an equally familiar language; but most importantly, it points to the all importance of Islam and Islamic laws, especially those regarding the place of women and the legalization of polygamy in a secular country.

As a Francophone author, when faced with the somewhat antagonistic task of expressing herself in the same hegemonic language once used for assimilation purposes, Mariama Ba turns the French language into a practical tool through which she articulates a local identity and a subject matter in all respects different from metropolitan French concerns. On one level, she decolonizes the French language by making it cope with registers far removed from standards likely to be approved by the French Academy. On another, her subject matters are understandable only within the particular Islamic Senegalese paradigm. Thus, the language of *Une si longue lettre* turns into a site of contestation where French shares the literary space with both Wolof and Arabic.

Just like Ba, Tsitsi Dangarembga also makes English cohabit with her native Shona. Right from the title of the novel, she announces a pathological reaction to the presence of English and of the colonizers. And nowhere is this reaction more evident than at the level of language.

In *Nervous Conditions*, more than in any other novel in this corpus, the characters' linguistic capabilities are tapped into by the author to address the double domination to

which women (mainly) are subjected. With Dangarembga, the characters in the novel respond to the effects of colonization and patriarchy at the level of language. In *Nervous Conditions*, indeed, language becomes one of the very sites where the “nervousness” of the native’s conditions is represented. With Nhamo and Nyasha particularly, English ways do not simply supplant their traditional customs, the English language also replaces Shona. Besides the obvious Shona xenisms, all characters, educated or not (Western-educated that is), speak in the English of the narration. At times, Dangarembga names the original language of her characters, but even when she does so, the contents of the énoncés are still rendered in English. By making the English of the narrative share the literary space with her native Shona, Dangarembga reinforces the validity of her native language. Moreover, by addressing issues like the place of women in a patriarchal and sexist society, a rural society where people still lived on agriculture and other traditional ways, Dangarembga does more than just address the consequences of colonization in Rhodesia. She gives a look into the Shona mentality and traditional ways of life; and in the process, she provides valuable information on the country’s history. Dangarembga presents an unsentimental look into the Sigauke clan’s lives. Her ambiguous relationship with both English and Shona is evident in the ways she interprets issues at hand. Dangarembga indeed claims English as her first language but considers Shona her native culture. Similarly, her characters’ dilemmas (at least those who speak both Shona and English) are reflected in their (unnatural) choices of languages.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ When the early Tambu addressed Nyashs in a last effort to make her cousin stop smoking, she used the English language, an unnatural language to that effect (86). Likewise, when Tambu felt “trapped” between

Resistance in *Nervous Conditions* is not understood in terms of opposition. Dangarembga obviously blames English and Englishness for the erosion of local Shona without being too lyrical about her native culture. She rightfully identifies patriarchy, a true Shona establishment as another root cause (in some ways equal to colonization) of discrimination against women. Another level of resistance is her depiction of women as thinking and acting subjects despite the colonial rhetoric that presents Africans as passive and idle. As Lindsay Aegerter argues, “African women are represented by such writers as Tsitsi Dangarembga as agents and actors; they engage in multiple experiences, maneuvering within and around oppression, certainly, but living their lives in spite of it” (231). Further, Aegerter maintains, “The African women of *Nervous Conditions* do not merely react; they act. And in their very action—in their refusal to live their lives only in response to oppression—lies their resistance” (231). In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga does not just stand against colonialism; she also presents a womanist critique of her native Shona culture by interrogating the root causes of the silencing of women. For Dangarembga, resistance takes on both political and social undertones.

Even more forcefully than Ba or Dangarembga, Chinua Achebe’s experimentation with language earned him critical acclaim. Contrary to critics like Ngũgĩ who advocate an exclusive use of African languages and performative arts in an effort to better communicate with local audiences, Achebe had faith in the English language and its power to convey his African experience. Right alongside the English of the narrative,

the Nyasha’s rebellious ideas and Maiguru’s conformism, her inability or unwillingness to side with either woman is reflected in her choice to use both Shona and English (81).

Achebe uses characteristics of his native Ibo language and culture. Unlike Cheikh Hamidou Kane who had been criticized for making his characters in *L'Aventure ambiguë* speak as if they all were attending a philosophy congress, Achebe shows more realism in the linguistic abilities of his characters. From Okonkwo and his fellow clansmen to the White missionaries through the interpreters, he makes all his characters speak the way they normally would in real life. The English of the narration is infused with the aesthetics of his native Ibo. The first obvious level of heterogeneity in *Things Fall Apart* is the incorporation of Ibo xenisms, proverbs, songs, or even rhythms directly into the narrative.

Achebe's use of plurilingualism is not purely aesthetic; he also presents a direct counter-narrative to colonial representation of Africans and Africa. With his plurilingual, mostly Ibo, text, the author of *Things Fall Apart* contests the cultural hegemony of the colonial British culture. More than just a showcasing of the Ibo language, it is a whole Ibo way of life that is represented in the novel. To an audience mostly used to Western methods of government, Achebe opposes a council of elders with the "egwewu." To a formal judiciary system, he responds by an emphasis on community rule. To an organized monotheistic religion, he opposes faith in a plurality of gods and goddesses and a belief in the supernatural. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe indeed provides a prime example of the new English he had, up to then, only talked about in theory. With his linguistic detour strategies that mainly consist of incorporating his Ibo oral language into his narrative, Achebe shows one of the many ways the inherited English language can be stripped of its hegemonic undertone and made able to carry local subject matters. Plurilingualism with

Achebe is a combination of both aesthetics and subject matters. It is done in a mostly visible manner with obvious markers of linguistic mentions and “transgression.” In other words, as Barber puts it, with Achebe, “the periphery now takes on the culture and language of the center and transforms it, breaking it, infusing it with local registers, and refashioning it so that it speaks with the voice of the marginalized” (6). By writing a novel in English with an obvious presence of his native Ibo, Achebe deliberately challenges a Western referential model as he reinstates the validity of a pre-colonial social order. In so doing, he challenges and puts to rest the underlying rationale that justified colonization in the first place. Achebe’s resistance is mainly political; and so is Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s. But not all models of “writing resistance” however, as this analysis of plurilingualism indicates, showcase obvious signs of indigenization much less an overt display of the other languages in the author’s referential context. With Kane for example, I have shown that writing resistance does not necessary translate into indigenized forms of English or French. It can be achieved in spite of a very high standard of language.

Reducing resistance in the study of the African Europhone novel to the obvious signs of indigenization of French or English is to oversimplify the task at hand. Not all authors, indeed, especially within the Francophone world, felt the need to “break” classical literary codes or incorporate local vernaculars in their narrative. The particularity of Cheikh Hamidou Kane is that he was able to transpose his native Peulh into a high standard of French with minimal (if any) linguistic violence. Indeed, as shown in the introductory section of this study, more often than not, when critics study the modalities

by which historically repressed vernaculars are forced into Europhone African literature, the analysis investigates the different ways in which semantic, grammatical and other aesthetic codes are broken. By all apparent external standards, Kane is not indebted to orature or local vernaculars for themes, images, characters, rhythm or expressions. Surprisingly enough, his source of inspiration, I argue, is directly drawn from his Peulh culture. Kane was a man of his time. Much like the first generation of African authors and critics Jacques Chevrier has called “les inconditionnels,” Kane unashamedly claimed his admiration and awe for the beauty and the power of the French language. While Achebe claims that Western languages—in his case English—would have to be crafted before they were suitable to carry his local narrative, Kane demonstrates that despite using the highest standard of the colonizers’ languages—in his case French—,Europhone African fictions could still effectively carry both the reality of the local languages in the enunciation contexts of their narratives and the very weight of their local experiences. For Kane indeed, French, though a foreign language with all the well-known potential dangers of acculturation that come with learning the language, is nonetheless a formidable medium capable of taking his Diallobé people as well as their worldview to places that neither his limited Arabic nor his native Peulh could have.

With plurilingualism and its two paradigms of heterolingualism and transpolingualism, linguistic considerations give way to deeper issues of cultural and identity claims. In the case of *L’Aventure ambiguë*, transpolingualism particularly helped uncover levels of linguistic heterogeneity not readily identifiable to an unsuspecting eye. It helped reinstate and reclaim, beyond the Arabic language and referential context, the

validity of Kane's native Peulh. Indeed, when asked about the reasons that led him to write *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Kane confessed:

[I] was pushed by the desire to say that our societies had in themselves a profound reality. That any desire to assimilate them was an error since they have their own basic civilization—It was to justify colonization that the Europeans pretended that we were not human beings. On this basis also they contested the validity of our cultural values. But this attitude wasn't consistent with reality. (qtd in Madubuike 346)

In light of this declaration, to still qualify Kane as “Français à la peau noire,” (3)²⁴⁹ as Moussa Daff recently did, in part, because of the flamboyant style of his narrative, is to miss a significant aspect of his novel. In my analysis of *L'Aventure ambiguë*, I was able to bring to light a less homogeneous fiction than most critics believe the novel to be. With Kane, indeed, the characters' plurilingual abilities are not fully spelled out. Everyone, in Kane's fiction, regardless of formal school education, expresses him/herself in the most pristine French. The ambiguity of the adventure is in fact at the levels of both language and ideas. Kane made the conscious choice to represent his characters' native Peulh, not in their original énoncés, but in a most polished French. The reason behind Kane's linguistic choice, especially in his sustained level of language, lies in one of La Grande Royale's iconic assertions: the necessity “to win without being in the right.” With *L'Aventure ambiguë*, we have seen that Europhone African literature, more specifically, the Francophone novel, does not necessarily have to bear obvious markers of the writers'

²⁴⁹“a Frenchman with a Black skin” (translation mine) .

native identity to qualify as a protest or resistance literature. With Kane, for example, the pristine French of the narrative is nothing but the result of a linguistic transposition from his native Peulh. Additionally, the ideology promoted and defended in the novel reflects a view of the world and of life nothing like that of the French. Just like Eileen Julien fought the ideas of an African exceptionalism with regards to oral features in literature, one should also be cautious about equating African resistance literature with literature written in indigenized languages.

While it is true that indigenized Western languages are more easily spotted, as heterolingualism bears ostentatious markers of linguistic difference, it remains nonetheless true that the other linguistic variations, done silently within the text, in the absence of any explicit mentions, equally deserve critics' attention for a more comprehensive understanding of the novel, and of African Europhone novels in particular.

This thesis emphasizes the necessity of reading beyond the obvious signs of unity and homo-lingualism. With transpolingualism especially, warnings such as Achebe's regarding the African writer who emulates the trends of European literature down to their registers of language are somehow dispelled. With plurilingualism, defined as the sum of both heterolingualism and transpolingualism, resistance and protest do not always take on an indigenized form. The authors' local languages, regardless of the level of the narratorial medium, by definition, are always present in the text and with them, the relevance of all the different spaces they point to.

Plurilingualism, with its two paradigms of heterolingualism and

transpolingualism, offers an innovative hermeneutic whereby to study the Europhone African novel. By providing readers with essential tools to help them uncover the many levels of linguistic heterogeneity as well as the semiotic relevance associated with those very languages, plurilingualism offers a way out of the controversial debate regarding the authorial languages of African writers. Instead of the rhetorical questions about writing in French or English, plurilingualism acknowledges a plurality of voices, languages, points of views and proceeds to unveiling the mechanisms by which the African writer, writing in French and English, weaves in his/her narratives, languages and referential contexts different from the French or English of the narration.

By uncovering multiple languages and equally multiple voices, especially those silenced by the dominant authorial French or English, plurilingualism helps bring to the forefront the heterogeneous nature of the Francophone and Anglophone African novel. It dispels claims of cultural homogeneity as well as those of seamless cultural integration. Lise Gauvin's "surconscience linguistique," I argue, is effortlessly applicable to the situation of the Anglophone African writer. As demonstrated in this analysis, both Francophone and Anglophone African authors are particularly aware of the various other languages in use in their environment. And in their fictions, they foreground a diversity of languages and registers representative of their multilingual contexts. Plurilingualism provides both a hermeneutic and a practical tool to study the African Europhone novel in a most comprehensive fashion.

Rejecting "authenticity" or claims of "African oral exceptionalism," two traditional avenues that have for a long time informed the study of the African Europhone

novel, plurilingualism, far from claiming to restore the actual linguistic reality in the authors' environment, nonetheless challenges the hegemony and exclusivity traditionally reserved to the French and English languages, especially in the particular contexts of La Francophonie and The Commonwealth. As Sherri Simon argues, "plurilingualism as a dialogical principle runs counter to the dictatorship of the One" (qtd in Ricard, 450). With the Francophone and Anglophone African author, the French and English languages are constantly brought into conversation with local vernaculars. And in this very linguistic cohabitation partially lies their defiance to communities which have had the spread and glorification of the French and English languages and cultures as their mission.

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2001: Licence ès Lettres (English), Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar.

Teaching Experience

June 2013 – Present: French Professor, École de langue de l'Éstrie.

September 2010 – May 2012: French Professor, Continuing Education, Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technologies.

September 2010 – April 2011: French Professor, Collège Boréal.

September 2007 – May 2010: Teaching Assistant, Department of Modern Languages and Literature, University of Western University.

September 2005 – April 2007: Course Instructor, Department of French Studies, University of Western University.

September 2003 – April 2005: Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Nebraska.

Graduate Research Profile

Comprehensive Exams:

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Academic History

Research Interests

Second Language Acquisition; Sociolinguistics; Applied Linguistics; Women's Writing; Relationships between Language and Culture; Francophonie; Translation and Literary Theory; Postcolonial Studies; African Literatures, Histories and Cultures.

Research Awards

2010 – 2011: Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund Bursary, UWO

2010 – 2011: Graduate Student Travel Grant, UWO

2007 – 2008: Mary Routledge Fellowship, UWO

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2005 – 2010: Western Graduate Research Scholarship, UWO

2003 – 2005: Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Nebraska

Scholarly Work

Refereed Publication

“Le Plurilinguisme dans *L’Aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane,” La Textualisation des Langues dans les Écritures Francophones. *Les Cahiers du GRELCEF*. 2 (2011): 283-297.

Conference Papers

« La Ville dans Une si longue lettre de Mariama Ba. » « Les Femmes dans la ville : Les Personnages Féminins et l’Espace de la Ville dans la Littérature et dans les Arts » : *Congrès des Sciences Humaines*, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, May 2011.

“Enunciation and Plurilingualism in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*.” *Annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Concordia University, Montreal, June 2010.

« Problématiques du Langage dans Une si longue lettre de Mariama Ba. » The Power of Language and the Language of Power in Literature, *Annual Graduate Students Conference*, University of Victoria, British Columbia, March 2008.

« Énonciation et Plurilinguisme dans *L’Aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane. » « Situations du Texte Francophone : Textes, Méthodes(s), Langue, Écritures,

Francophonie.» *4ème Colloque International des Jeunes Chercheurs en Francophonie*, Quebec City, May 2008.

« The topic is grade » *Composition Colloquium*, English Department, The University of Nebraska at Kearney, March 2004.

Invited Talk

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Scholarly Affiliations

Canadian Comparative Literature Association (CCLA).

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