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Sociolinguistic Legacies in West Africa: the Politics of Linguistic Imperialism and Resistance in Senegal (2017)

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Sociolinguistic Legacies in West Africa: the Politics of Linguistic Imperialism and Resistance in Senegal

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Abstract

This research paper is for the completion of the International Studies Honors Program at Seattle University. This research traces the social and political legacies of French colonial linguistic assimilation policies in West Africa since the late 19th century to present, with a case study examining the sociolinguistic history, trends and tensions in Senegal. The research explores colonial policies' implications on education, ideological movements, and cultural-national identity. This research relies on history of colonialism to understand how linguistic policies were used as part of a broader imperial project, and to what extent those policies reshaped social classes, political organization and public education, which were modeled after French systems. An examination of Senegal's historical and current cultural, national, and linguistic identities is necessary in order to discern how French colonization shaped those identities and movements. Ultimately, the language of all European colonial powers undermined the legitimacy of indigenous African languages.

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Introduction

Language is the central feature of culture. It relates to all areas of the social, economic and political lives of the people. Through language, the genius of a people is ultimately registered at both the individual and collective expression of a people and societies. Therefore, a people, society, or nation-state cannot develop if its language is the monopoly of a small, restricted minority whose orientation is directed outside. The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment (Prah, 2002; García, 2015). Language, an inherent facet and index of a people and their society, has been at the heart of contending social forces in the African continent of the 20th century. Colonialism introduced a number of linguistic problems in Africa, including ethnocide and linguicism in the name of inferiority, which often resulted in the disruption of the use of local languages and the development of a linguistically alienated elite.

Thesis and Roadmap

Ultimately, the languages of European colonial powers undermined the legitimacy and supremacy of indigenous African languages in those populations (Ngugi, 1986). However, linguistic diversity remained in Senegal, despite the permeation of the French language on Senegalese schools, society, culture and economy throughout the nation’s history. I argue that when the object of regulation, in this case language (suppression and imposition), is controlled by or integrated into the state, that object of regulation will not be totally annihilated. Instead, the object of regulation would paradoxically be proliferated or maintained in that society or context. This is evident in many formerly colonized nation-states, like Senegal, where language

policiesattempted to suppress the use of local languages and controlled the use of the colonizer's language. Although the legacies of the colonizer's language remain in Senegal and did concrete, legitimate harm to the Senegalese population, the use of indigenous languages like Wolof or Serer continues to be employed and expanded throughout its history.

An examination of Senegambian political, social, religious movements such as the early Muslim clergy anti-slaving and anti-colonial organizing, the intellectual and philosophical *Negritude* movement of the post-colonial global order, and the more recent academic and literary trend called *Wolofisation*, will be necessary to understand sociolinguistic politics in this country and how to learn how Senegal continues to protect, reclaim and expand the legitimacy of its mother tongues. Scholars like O'Brien (2004) cited in this research claim that in multi-lingual contexts, language policies are needed to bridge the gap between the national languages and the country's official language, in this case French, but would also foster the use of the national languages in all areas of communication and all fields of development, including political discourse on education policies. An examination of Senegal's cultural, national and linguistic identities is necessary in order to discern how French colonization shaped social and public institutions, as well as identity and communication. My research is informed by some testimonies of Senegambian children who attended French colonial schools as well as an interview with Ken Bugul, a contemporary Senegalese author and human rights activist who grew up and was educated in the French colonial state.

Linguistic imperial policies, a feature of the French Republic's colonizing project abroad, shaped current linguistic trends in Senegal's government administration, schools, and in literary-cultural movements. Senegal's post-independence government made efforts to preserve indigenous West African languages, despite the fact that French became the official language of

the state and the economy. These language policies not only affected way public administration, schools, and literary movements functioned and developed over time, but also shaped distinct socioeconomic classes within the colonies, creating a politically and linguistically alienated elite. This indigenous elite acculturated the cultures of western colonial powers, including the Portuguese, Spanish, and English and ultimately absorbed the French language after forcible subjugation.

Definition, terms and framework

According to Finnocehiaro (1964), *language* is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, which enable all in a given culture to communicate or interact. Language has various definitions, but it ultimately is what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. Etymologically, language is derived from the Latin word “langue” which means, “tongue” (Buku, 2016). The term *colonization* refers to the establishment of control over a region including its inhabitants by an outside group. This may involve the total destruction of local governing institutions and the disempowerment of their members. The most striking examples of this are the European expansionist movements of the last five centuries. However, all types of colonialism have directly or indirectly given rise to linguistic changes. For the purpose of this paper, I restrict attention to the linguistic effects of European colonialism of the last five centuries. *Linguicism* is to consider French, for example, as the language of the civilized world, while other languages are not suitable for literature, knowledge or societal functions. Linguicism attempts to stigmatize, down grade, or make another language invisible and prevails because it is supposed by what is called *linguistic imperialism*

Linguistic imperialism is a sub-type of cultural imperialism, that permeates all other types of imperialism simply because language is the means used to mediate and express the other

types of oppression (Phillipson, 1992). *Acculturation* and *assimilation* have various and important effects on identity formation during and after colonization. It is done through a process of borrowing and adaptation (Getz, Streets-Salter, 2016). According to Kenyan scholar Fallou Ngom (2003), *multilingualism* is the natural order of things; *monolingualism* corresponds to a construction imposed for political and educational reasons as the linguistic ideal. Countries are multilingual but policies are, in many cases, monolingual. Monolingualism is prejudicial to the languages of the majority of people. Linguistic and cultural imperialism take place in overarching structure of colonial and neocolonial systems of power, where the dominating language connects other dimensions like cultural economic and political. Linguistic and cultural imperialism take place in overarching structures of colonial and neocolonial systems of power, where the dominating language connects other dimensions like the cultural economic and political (Phillipson, 1992). A *lingua franca* is a regional language or trade language – one that speakers of different local languages use to communicate with each other, and which is spoken more widely than a local or home language (Kosonen, 2005).

I have been taking an interdisciplinary approach, borrowing from political science, sociology, history, linguistics and philosophy for this paper. A postcolonial framework and analysis is critical of the discourse of cultural imperialism, which manifested in several different spheres of thinking from literary writing and criticism to historical and cultural analysis of artifacts and ideas (Lang, 1995). This paper employs a postcolonial conceptual framework to examine the social and political legacies of the former French empire's linguistic assimilation policies in West Africa, since the late 19th century to present. My framework also follows Ngugi's (1986) claims that "cultural imperialism annihilates people's belief in their names, their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and

ultimately in themselves," making it particularly difficult for colonial subject to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves: other people's languages rather than their own."

Literature Review

The literature on colonialism tends to focus on Europe's economic exploitation of many regions and peoples around the world and Europeans' use of excessive force towards the latter. While these issues are undoubtedly of great importance, it is equally important to understand the cultural and specifically the linguistic and discursive practices used during European colonial rule. Some of my evidence is based on primary sources like French colonial policies and laws, as well as secondary, peer-reviewed articles and journals that discuss the tension that has arisen from the enduring colonial legacies on education, electoral and social politics, the restructuring of social classes (Migge, Leglise 2007).

Having been the subject of much debate since the pre-independence periods of most formerly colonized regions, research into the effects of European colonialism on language issues took off in the 1970s and 1980s with the publication of several works by Césaire (1950), Fanon (1952), Spencer (1971, 1985), Whiteley (1971), Calvet (1974, 1987), Achebe (1975), Bamgbose (1976, 1991, 2000), Dumont (1986), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, 1993). The issue of linguistic imperialism that is currently being pursued by researchers are Pennycook (1994, 1998, 2001, 2002), Phillipson (1992 & 1995), Skutnabb-Kangas (1995), Diallo (2010). They explore the effect of French language on francophone communities and vice versa worldwide.

Limitations & Positionality

Although political discourse and government policies have an effect on the decisions made in education, this research on language consequently has little or no effect on the formulation of language policies, anywhere. This means that the colonial status quo with respect

to language has largely remained unaltered in this context (Léglise, Migge 2007). The research on language and colonialism therefore pursues two broad goals. It aims to critically investigate and draw attention to the colonial and neo-colonial practices related to language. Although many of the formerly colonized populations have today gained what is usually called political independence, the cultural and linguistic decolonization of both European and non-European cultures are hardly complete. Particularly since the Second World War, a struggle has been ongoing that attempts to remove the stigma from non-European cultures and languages, and questions the assumed European superiority. And by questioning the colonial status quo, the formerly colonized populations can find a way to position themselves in relation to their erstwhile colonizers and other, equally threatening, forces such as globalization and neocolonialism (Léglise, Migge 2007; Calvet, 1974).

As an individual who acquired English as a second language, I understand and am aware of living in a multi-lingual context and what it is like living out multiple linguistic and social identities. Although the United States has no official language, I can relate to some of the political and social pressures to assimilate to American culture and the English language despite not identifying with whiteness and while attempting to retain my own mother tongue and cultural heritage. However, I lack understanding of what it is like to live in a post-colonial setting, since the United States is still a colony. The United States was also not colonized the same way parts of West Africa were dominated by the French. Considering these limitations and my positionality as a third generation American, who acquired English but had the privilege of studying other languages in college by choice, I hope to uncover answer to some questions about language and culture in a country I studied abroad. I wanted to learn how language

imposition affected Senegambian political discourse, history and discourse on education, communication and national/cultural identities.

Geographical, Linguistic, and Demographic Composition in Senegal

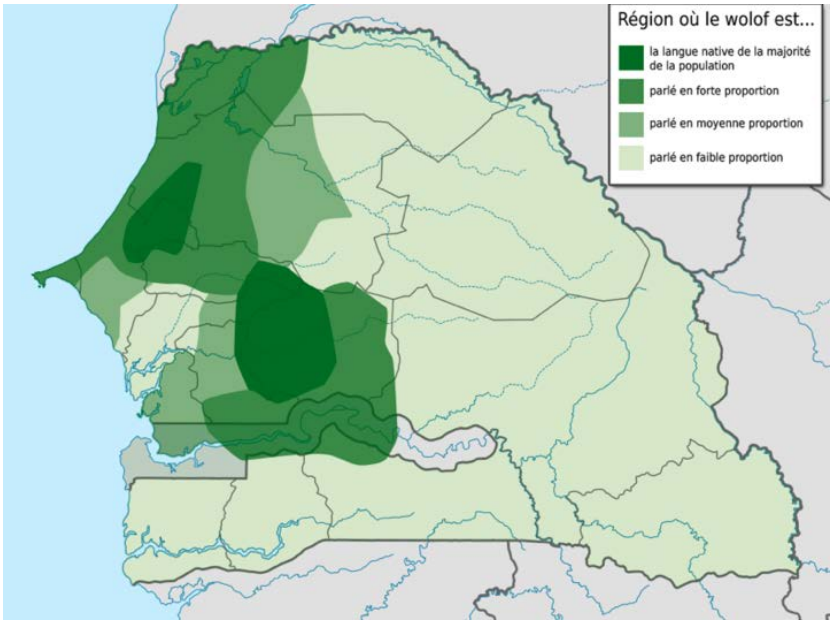
According to the World Bank, Senegal's population in 2015 was at approximately 15.3 million people, with the majority in Dakar, the capital (2.7 million). Although Wolof is the primary language spoken in the Senegalese linguistic landscape, it remains a highly multilingual nation state. Like many other African countries, Senegal has a complex sociolinguistic makeup and is characterized by its linguistic and cultural diversity, typical of the three great civilizations that have shaped most of Western Africa's history: the African civilization (*la negro-africaine*), the Arabo-Islamic civilization (*l'arabo-islamique*) and the French West African occupation (*l'occidentale française*) (Nadeau and Barlow, 2008). The Arabo-Islamic Empire contributed which expanded across the Sahel, and partly encompassed what is now Senegal during the 11th-16th centuries, introduced a language and religion of worship, with a sacred text and a codified legal system. Western French influenced first arrived with trade, and later formal colonization. The west infiltrated West Africa and Senegal with its language, religion (mainly Catholicism and some braches of Christianity), its democratic form of government and its philosophical, political and legal ideology. There are numerous ethnic groups in Senegal, and within these ethnic groups, there are often subgroups that speak variations of language and are distinct from one another (Ostler, 2006; Vigouroux, Salikoko, 2008).

The legacy of indigenous African civilization is present through the many national languages in Senegal, including Wolof, Serer, Peul, Malinke and Jola. Senegal has a complex multilingual set-up where there is interaction between 25 distinct indigenous languages. Wolof belongs the to Niger-Congolese/Sahara linguistic tradition. Other languages in the region also

belong to the same tradition, originating in the West Atlantic group, or the Mandingo group. Although Wolof is the mother tongue of nearly 40% of the population, more than 90% of the Senegalese people speak and understand Wolof, since it is the *lingua franca* and serves as a vehicle language, which is one that speakers of different local languages use to communicate with each other, and which is spoken more widely throughout most of the country (Kosonen, 2005). In urban areas, reactions to the dominance of Wolof are varied. Besides French, Wolof is the most understood language by different Senegalese ethnic groups. Across West Africa, more than 1 million speakers speak Wolof, Serer and Malinke today most of these languages have their own dialectal variations (Ostler, 2006).

The six most significant groups in Senegal (and its neighboring countries) are the Wolofs, Fulanis, Sereres, Diolas, Malinkes and Soninkes. Wolofs and Serers are located mostly in northern Senegal. Mostly Muslim, they are the two ethnic groups that have been in power since independence in 1960. The Wolofs (nearly 40% of the population) are the most numerous. Descendants of Muslim farmers, the Wolof people were successfully able to impose their language, also called Wolof, as a national language (Leclerc 2015). The Serers, who make up about 15% of the population, are the elite of the country. This group occupies the highest positions in the Senegalese government’s administration serves as the heads of large commercial enterprises. This power gives them a historically significant role in Senegal's political development. The Serers were also the first ones to form a Catholic community in Senegal, and are some of the most educated Senegalese citizens. In fact, Senegal’s first president, Leopold Senghor was Serer (Marut, 1988). The complexities of understanding the relationship between language and ethnic identity are illustrated in McLaughlin’s (1995) study from Senegal, where the spread of Wolof provokes different responses among different ethnic groups. Among the

Pulaar (24% of the population), speaking Wolof is seen as becoming Wolof (or in danger of so being), whereas Serer people see Wolof now as a necessity, and do not consider it to threaten their ethnic identity. In short language can sometimes, but not necessarily, serve as an important variable in the construction or reconfiguration of ethnicity and national identity.



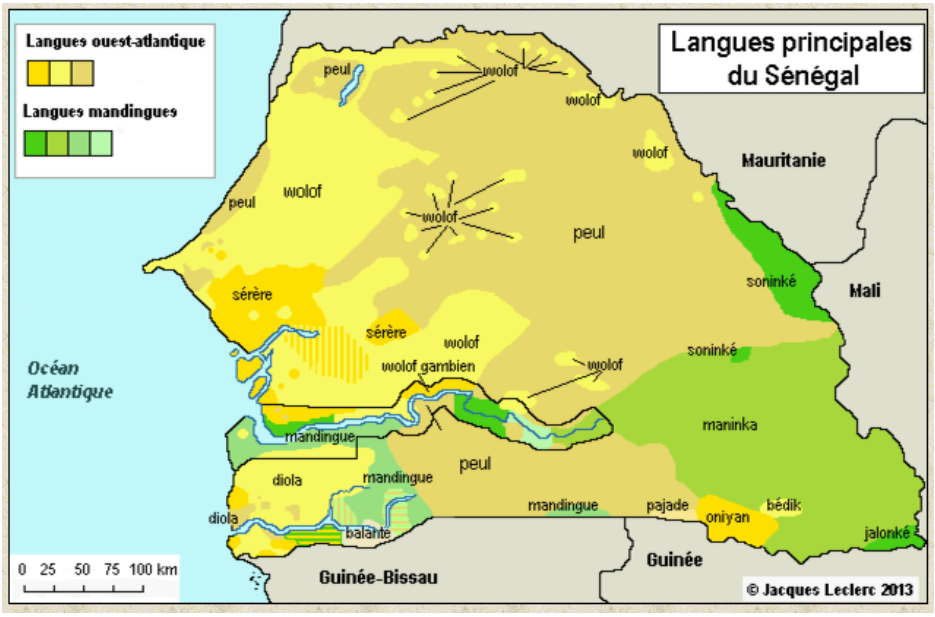


Figure 1:Speakers of Wolof in Senegal; Figure 2: The languages of Senegal

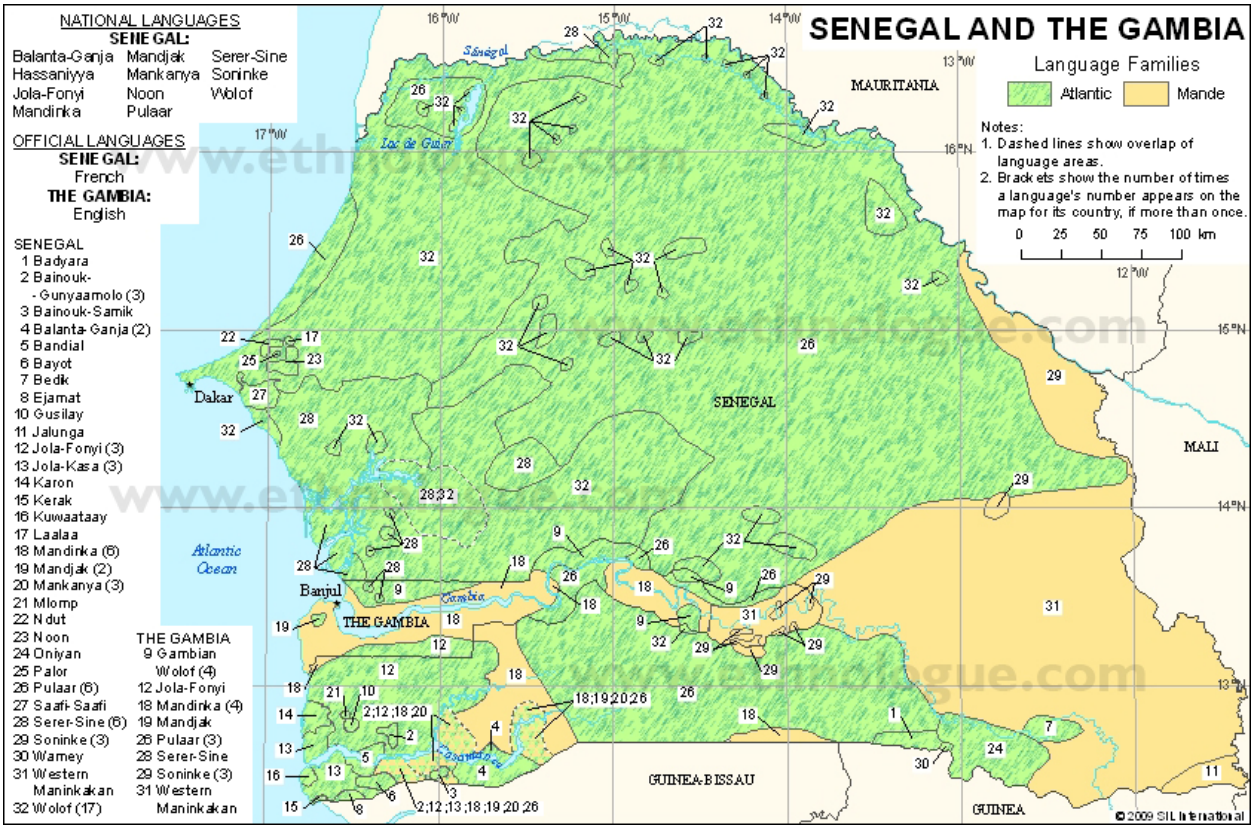


Figure 3: [Languages of Senegambia]

French is the official language of the Republic of Senegal. Although there is no survey has been conducted by the Senegalese government to track the number of French speakers, but some researchers from *L'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) (of which Senegal is one of 53 member states) estimates that 15-20% Senegalese people speak French today (1-2% being women), while a further 20-30% can be considered partial francophone (*L'Orginsation Internationale de la Francophonie,* 2011). It is also very difficult to measure and gage proficiency during these surveys. French is the mother tongue of an even smaller elite, making up about 2% of the population, most of whom reside in Dakar, the political and commercial capital. In rural areas, most of the population does not know French. 55% of Senegalese youth now live in rural areas, and often do not go to school, explaining why 80-90%

of young people do not speak French (Leclerc 2015). Arabic is also a third or fourth language for many Senegalese national, since Senegal is historically a Muslim country.

Before the advent of colonial rule, there were no apparent language policies in Senegal except in areas dominated by Islam. In Muslim areas, religious adherents were expected to acquire basic literacy in Arabic to enable them to recite and memorize the Qur'an and other important religious texts. It was during European colonial rule that Senegambians encountered emergence of definite language policies. Colonial policies forced Africans to speak foreign languages as media of communication, sources of acquiring information and languages of access and opportunity. European languages become part of the process of constructing slave and colonial states, spaces and societies. French became the language of law and administration in West Africa as a matter or state policy during the rule of Louis XIV. Early modern empires, like the French Republic, wavered between trying to bind colonial population to the state and depicting them as different from metropolitan cities (Bamgbose, 1991).

The colonial policy of the French tallied with their own policy at home, where language was developed as a means of nation-building from the sixteenth century onwards. French language policy in Africa was promoted by *L'Alliance Française* (or the French Alliance), which was originally called "The Alliance for the Propagation and the Purification of the French Language." In the belief that French was the most cultured language, and had a civilizing mission, French colonial language policy discouraged research into or development of African languages. French was to be the only official language of administration, education and culture.

Colonization gave rise to new language hierarchies in which the language of the colonizer was inscribed as the most prestigious language and came to dominate the administrative and mercantile structure of each colony. The colonial linguistic hierarchy was

enabled by and also generated or reaffirmed by dominant European conceptions of European and non-European culture and language. The Portuguese, Spanish, French and English enforced linguistic rules and norms that have cultural and political consequences, which ultimately resulted in the subjugation of the colonial subjects or native peoples. In this process, language played the role of categorizing populations, that was later dominated by race (Fanon, 1961). The French traded with and eventually colonized Senegal to continue the slave trade set up by the Dutch and the Portuguese, but formally incorporated it into the French empire from 1850s to 1960. The two men who were particularly influential in shaping colonial racial politics were William Ponty and Marty, who successfully initiated “a policy of divide and rule” along ethnic and linguistic lines (Ware, 2016). These policies had significant implications for education in Senegal since it promoted ethnic identities over broad religious identities. Ponty and Marty discouraged the use of local languages in any of the colonial public schools. The state initiated education formal and modernization or “functionalization,” which used the colonial school as a tool for naturalizing and legitimating French rule (Bouche 1975).

Although the real aim of colonialism was to control the colony and people’s wealth, by extracting its resources and settling on land, its most important area of domination to facilitate this process was within the “mental universe” of the colonized were controlled through cultural and national identity (Ngugi, 1986). This shaped how colonial subjects and socioeconomic classes within France’s colonies perceive themselves and their relationship to the world. Linguistic diversity was seen as a barrier to the hegemony of colonial powers, and facilitated the administration of their colonial possessions as well as the acclimation and collaboration of indigenous people. The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized; although the new

imposed European languages could never completely eradiate the native spoken languages (Ngugi, 1986). This means that this linguistically advanced elite is seen as the only actors in society who can navigate the political, economic and cultural spheres during and after colonization. Those who do not speak the colonizer's foreign language, continue to be systematically excluded from these aspects of national and cultural development in the post-colonial period. However, local languages such as Wolof "were kept alive by the peasantry" as there is no difference between speaking their own mother tongues and belonging to a larger national geography (Ngugi, 1986).

A History of European Contact & French Colonial Rule

The first Europeans to make contact with the West African region were the Portuguese in 1444, who reached the mouth of Senegal and the archipelago of Cape Verde. This contact commenced the beginning of trade relations with the Europeans, who sought access to the Indian Ocean market. The Portuguese eventually settled in Gorée, a small island three kilometers off Dakar, which for many centuries would serve as the main hub of the transatlantic slave trade from West Africa. After 1600, the Dutch and the French undermined the Portuguese trading post empire, the latter dominating the commerce of the coastal region around 1700.

The French established their first fortified trading post in 1659 near the mouth of the Senegal River. Despite the Franco-British rivalry and numerous conflicts at the end of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century, French influence spread throughout the region, with the exception of the Gambia. After brief periods of British occupation (1758-1779 and 1809-1814), Senegal was folded back into the French empire. Saint-Louis remained an active center of the slave trade throughout the eighteenth century. Around 1789, the town of Saint-Louis had at least 10,000 inhabitants, distributed as follows: 6,000 blacks (permanent residents), 1,200 mulattoes,

3,000 slaves and about 600 Europeans. France abolished slavery only in 1848. In 1895, Senegal officially became a French colony administered from Saint-Louis (Ball & Marley, 2016).

The chief architect of French colonization of Senegal West Africa at large was Louis Léon Cesar Faidherbe. Before France penetrated the interior of the Maghreb and West Africa, slavers and early colonial settlers established the Four Communes (*les quatre communes*) of Senegal (Ware, 2016). These are also the sites where the French fully implemented their direct assimilation rule in Senegal. (Crowder, 1990; Diallo, 2010). In the case of Senegal, France found it advantageous to their goals of cultural imperialism to model the colonial political system after the French system and to push the French language and culture agenda, especially in schools where the French teachers could easily influence children that the French way was the best way (Ware, 2016).

Nicholas Ostler, author of *Empires of the World: A Language History of the World* (2006), writes on the *La Francophonie* – the second empire of France, and its proliferation of French language to its imperial holdings in Africa, Asia and the Pacific during trade and colonization. The projection of the French language overseas was very much a result of legal royal policy, which came in two waves of colonial expansion, once in 1714, and then 200 years later in 1914. From 1883 to 1894, *Afrique-Occidentale Française* (French West Africa) was taken from the west and southwestern regions of the continent, comprising the modern Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin.

France held the second-largest colonial empire by land area in the world by the 18th century (Ostler, 2006). Ostler argues that French imperialism was more like Dutch expansion in its linguistic effects than any of its other European competitors. The French language has persisted only where settlers retained a solid identity and a large population, even under foreign

domination, French has survived and grown, particularly as the *lingua franca* for the elite, and indigenous languages were used outside of public, government-run spaces (Conseil Consultatif, 2003). The four administrative communes were sites to implement France's assimilation policies with the intent of destroying the local cultures, languages and Islamic practices to replace them with French language, culture and Christianity - not just to "save" or civilize the population, but to turn them into servants of the colonial operation in their own homeland.

In 1902, the French colonial government moved the capital in Dakar, which also became the capital of all French West Africa. France extracted resources from Senegal, and developed an agriculture-based export economy. Starting in 1914, the first Senegalese-born colonial subject was able to serve on the French Parliament, while the inhabitants of the communes of Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Gorée and Dakar were granted French citizenship. France's administration of the West African territories adopted three basic principles as could be inferred from the above: centralization, 'bureaucratism', and absolute and arbitrary power which swept aside existing traditional authorities or brought to rigid collaboration (Ball & Marley, 2016).

By 1913, French was the language of a good third of Africa's land area and only fifty years earlier, the French language had not been heard in Africa outside of Algeria and Senegal. By World War I, French was entrenched in its colonies, and during the post-colonial era, language choice impacted West Africa's literary movements, Senegal's education policies and the entirety of the newly sovereign state, which will be discussed in greater detail below. After the Second World War in 1945, a territorial assembly was created in Senegal. Léopold Senghor, who was one of the deputies in the French Parliament at the time, dominated the local political life of his country. In 1958, two years before independence, Senegal was recognized as part of the larger French republic and linguistic community known as *la francophonie*. This

Francophone sphere, which remains a relic of French colonialism, is an international, political, technical, and cultural linguistic organization. This organization of Francophone nations were not just organized by France, by distinguishing second-language speakers, particularly heads of state of former colonial possessions such Tunisia, Cambodia, Senegal and Niger (Mackey, 1984). Leopold Senghor was one of the politically motivated founders of the *La Francophonie*, an international political, technical and cultural organization, comprised of the French language community. Today, *La Francophonie*'s emphasis is on protecting and enabling cultural diversity.

Johnson (2005) tells the story of how and why the French recognized imperial holdings as an extension of the motherland. This is a key element in understanding the purpose of integrating French as the only official language spoken in most countries in West Africa. Not just the expansion of territory, but language and notions of citizenship and patriotism was key to the success of France's colonial project abroad. France could not see these foreign domains as anything other than parts of France: *la civilisation francaise* was indivisible and unified – by language, values, and tradition. Colonial subjects in the four communes could even aspire to full French citizenship, despite race and national origin. French was initially used for administrative purposes, and instituted as the language of instruction in secondary and higher education, even where there was an former tradition of literacy in some other language (Johnson 2005). Ngom's (2003) research asserts that Senegal, a nation the heart of the former French West African empire, is a successful example of French assimilationist policy Ngom's work examines the social status of Arabic, French, and English in the Senegalese Speech Community. It examines how the French assimilation process was implemented through the introduction of French as the sole language of education, designed to make local people use only French as heir major means of communication.

Senegal gained independence from France on June 18, 1960. The Mali Federation, which regrouped Senegal and French Sudan (now Mali) dissolved in August the same year, and was undermined by internal strife. Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) presided over the Senegalese government until his resignation in 1980. He won the first presidential election of 1963 and was re-elected regularly until 1978. Although Senghor transformed Senegal from a multiparty system to a one-party state in just a few years, Senghor was always considered to have a relatively tolerant, stable and democratic regime. When Senghor resigned in 1980, he became the first leader of modern Africa to retire by his own will (Ball & Marley, 2016). At the time of its accession to independence, Senegal, like most French-speaking African States, chose French as its official language. Political leaders have thus privileged the language that appeared to them most immediately available and operational: the language of the colonizer. Despite Senegal obtaining its independence in 1960, it has maintained a positive relationship with France, and many elements of French culture introduced during the colonial period remain an important part of Senegalese identity and history. However, the French colonial language policy is obviously motivated by socio-political considerations where by Africans were subjected to a policy of cultural assimilation, now regarded as neocolonialism.

A History of Language Policies & Laws in Senegal

More than any other European empire, France struggled with the question of what their true interest in these subjects was: exploitation, assimilation, evangelization, education or simply political association (Ostler, 416-420, Fanon: 1963). French was used for administration and instituted as the language of instruction in secondary and higher education, even where – as in Indo-China and North Africa – there was an ancient tradition of literacy in some other language. French remained, everywhere but Algeria, a language of the governing elite.

The colonizing elites created their own class in French West Africa called *les evolués*, or the evolved, in English. The colonial administration developed a special class called *indigenat*, from *indigene* or native. The *indigenes* were forced to adhere to a separate code of conduct and penal system called *Le Code de l'Indigenat*, authorizing indentured servitude (or slavery) to build the colony. The members of this class spoke a simplified or "broken" version of French, called *petit nègre*. It is a term and a vehicular language that has a particularly negative and racially charged connotation. French became the key to social promotion, so France attempted to capitalize upon this phenomenon to expand empire. According to a professor of literature at Cheikh Anta Diop University, “the Senegalese helped the French colonize other African countries...they were the auxiliaries of colonialism" (Nadeau, Barlow 2008, Chapter 7).

Colonial administrators, members of the evolved elite or *évolue* class, came from all over French West Arica to Dakar to study and train how to be colonial auxiliaries at the *École* William Ponty. For the French, the ultimate objective of colonization was cultural assimilation, done primarily through mass education. The French language became a tool for empire building and oppression during the colonial era, because it sought to civilize and education its subjects, who were considered part of the empire and therefore, needed to grow accustomed to the language, cultural norms and values. In French West Africa, particularly in Senegal, French instruction began in the early 19th century and ultimately succeeded in educating the *évolues*, who would eventually serve as colonial auxiliaries for the metropole, and took over after independence, a hallmark of France's colonial strategies after the World Wars (Johnson, 2005).

Apart from the favored Senegalese communes, no attempt was made to establish political organizations besides powerless councils of handpicked chiefs that French administrators utilized as they saw fit during the colonial period. In 1927 and 1935, the French Parliament passed a law

against all forms of criticisms and African deputies were allowed to sit in parliament in metropolitan France and in Africa. This made it difficult for African leaders to rescind lack of non-participation in their political affairs (Nadeau, 2008).

Despite curbing the political rights of colonial subjects, according to the 1946 amendment to the French Constitution, “France forms with the overseas peoples a Union founded on equality of rights and duties, without distinction of race nor religion.” It is interesting to note that language was not included as one of the features, which the Union is free from distinction: that is because in the Union, everyone’s language is expected to be French. The entire written language policy of Senegal at that time was based on Article 1 of Senegal's Constitution, which made French the official language. This constitutional article established the French language as the idiom of the Republic, the National Assembly, the public administration, the courts, the armed forces, the police, education at all levels, and the media. The French colonizers and their language took the place in the political and socio-economic space, and permeated into the Senegalese culture and linguistic (Nadeau, 2008).

The following two aspects can characterize Senegal’s language policy: it promoted the main national languages as cultural languages, and it maintained French as the official language and as the language of international communications. This article of the Senegalese Constitution January 2001 officially recognizes that “the official language of the Republic of Senegal is French, the national languages being diola, malinké, poular, serer, soninké, wolof and any other national language which shall be codified” (constituionproject.org). his law was passed with only 11% of the population were able to speak and write in French, making it highly unlikely that the people could be active participants of government, post-independence. This decision, according to Diallo, divided the country socio economically, socially, educationally etc. by preserving the

French language, continuing to benefit the elite, white, wealthy minority. However, recognition is not the same thing as institutionalizing it. This decision was more consistent with the values of *Négritude*, even though Senghor says that "national languages as relics of the past and ill-suited for the tasks of nation-building and development" (Mabana, 2012).

Language in Pan-African and Francophone Intellectual Movements

Francophone Africans around the world created political and ideological movement aimed at 'decolonizing the mind' (using the title of Ngugi wa Thiongos' book) of the formerly colonized populations. In other words, I am looking at how French language can also be a means of resistance for colonized people, and the example of *Négritude* (a literary and ideological philosophy) that developed at the same time as the nation-building era that emerged after Senegal's independence from France. The *Négritude* movement was a literary movement, which was born out of the Paris intellectual environment of 1930s and 1940s. It is a product of black writers joining together through the French language to assert their cultural identity. Writers challenged the authority of colonialism and claimed that the best strategy to oppose it was to encourage a common racial identity for black Africans worldwide. However, this movement did not reclaim the tongue of their people. Instead, contributors dealt with the imperialist imposition of the language by which they and their ancestors were governed. They used the language of domination imposed by French colonialism to cement the international *Négritude* movement and reclaimed the language of the colonizer to build it into their own weapon of fighting the same power. That way French-speaking audiences in Europe could understand the fundamental violence their linguistic imposition had caused in colonized spaces through their literary or philosophical productions, even though that very work (although written in French) was not written or intended for audiences in the former metropole. Contributors to this movement also

wrote grammars and dictionaries for African languages, such as Wolof as a step towards developing literacy in indigenous languages (Diallo 2001; Rabaka, 2015).

Senghorian Negritude has a tendency to acquiesce to colonial assimilation even as it purports to defend 'African Cultural values'" Senghor feared that without the French or their language, Senegal may never be able to recover from colonialism (Mabana, 2012). Senghor used Negritude to create the appearance of African cultural values and it played a significant role in informing the unjust language system through the conviction that the success for Senegal is contingent on Europe and their customs, like language. Many critics argue that the way in which Senghor used his ideas of Negritude was actually detrimental to the recovery of black Africa after colonization (Gellar, 2005). Another viewpoint by Frenchman and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre said that *Négritude* was first and foremost a black poetic appropriation of the French language. Unlike other nationalisms, he explained, which reclaimed the tongue of the people against the imperialist imposition of the language by which they were governed, black people had to use the language of domination imposed by French colonialism as cement for their shared *Négritude* and as "miraculous weapons" against that same domination. In so doing they radically transformed and resisted it (Diallo, 2011; Rabaka, 2015).

The question of the language in which African writers do their writing is one that reveals much about the role of different languages in society, particularly those ravaged by colonialism and forced assimilation or acculturation. Many of the issues are explored in the research presented in *World Englishes* (1993), and discusses two topics that are worth pursuing - readership, and elitism and ethics in education and academic spaces. Thiong'o Ngugi's most revered texts, *Decolonising the Mind* (1992) and *African Languages and Global Culture in the Twenty-first Century* (2000) argue that virtually all African writers are capable of writing in

African languages, so African writing should be done in African languages, particularly in response to a growing linguistic *Anglification/Francofication* of the continent (Ngugi, 1986). Writing in local African languages, as opposed to the dominant European language, is "part and parcel" of the anti-imperialist struggles of African peoples. He continues by saying the intentional usage of writing in a former colonial language should be seen in the light of the fact that "90% of the population in Africa speak on African languages...African thought is imprisoned in foreign languages...anything in [a European language] is only reaching one percent of the population" (Ngugi, 1983) and that writing in local African languages, as opposed to the dominant European language, is "part and parcel" of the anti-imperialist struggles of African peoples.

David Diop, a French national with Senegalese and Cameroonian heritage thinker and writer and counterpart to Senghor, argued a case against the use of colonial languages in African literary writing, because he observed that the use of English and French was a matter of temporary historical necessity to organize and emerge out of formal colonialism and occupation. This was the case with the literary arts *Négritude* movement, which occurred within the twenty-year period of uninterrupted dominance of literature in European languages immediately following independence in West Africa. According to Obi Wali (1963), real African literature can only be written in African languages, that is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, which would exclude the *Négritide* movement since all its contributors intentionally used and preferred French language (Ngugi, 1986).

These range of perspectives and arguments about language employment indicate that this subject can hold many different tensions across time and space. Intellectual, ideological and literary movements like this one sought the use of European artistic modes to reverse alienation

and challenged the relationship between art and politics. Contributors reinvented their culture in a period of change and responded with the same vitality to the stresses engendered by colonialism in their nations.

Education Policies and Language: Colonial Era to Present

For decades, the French colonial state crafted legislation designed to move African children out of local schools and into French ones. But as was so often the case, the results of colonial interventions were contradictory and unpredictable. It is important to note that France's efforts to mass educate its colonial subjects do not necessarily correlate with the program's ability to widely spread the French language. Rate of success or failure differed in colony, region, continent, etc. However, scholars have argued that the second wave of French colonial assimilation was much more successful than the first push because the French government sent settlers to their colonies abroad, having a more significant impact on the colonial subjects (Vigouroux, 2008). Wittingly and unwittingly, the French colonial state preserved, extended and deepened Senegal's engagement with Wolof and other indigenous languages, even as it sought to weaken them. Schools like *L'Ecole Normale de William Ponty* on the Gorée Island, were created with the aim of serving the colonizers rather than the students. It was a tool to implement France's assimilation policies with the intent of destroying the local cultures, languages and Islamic practices to replace them with French language, culture and Christianity.

L'Ecole Normale de William Ponty

L'École française shaped the dynamics of language transmission, particularly in the four communes which were also the sites where the French fully implemented their direct cultural and linguistic assimilation rule, making Senegambia an even more compelling case study. Despite the fact that French imposed harsh language laws in that were later continued by the post-colonial government, it paradoxically helped preserved the use of languages like Wolof or Arabic throughout the centuries, especially thanks to Qur'anic schools where native languages like Wolof were used & languages like Arabic are studied for religious purposes (Ware, 2016).

In 1903, the French colonial government passed a series of decrees to install secular instruction in West African primary schools. This system and educational program sought to educate the masses, establish and enforce French culture in African colonies, and to train indigenous staff to ensure the rise of a French-speaking elite class. By 1925, the French implemented village schools where children who were more skilled in French were removed and sent to regional boarding schools. Due to lack of popular support and financial restraints, the French colonial government was unsuccessful in establishing sustainable and self-sufficient institutional infrastructure, which ultimately worked against education. Instead, the French relied on the work of missionaries to teach French and proselytize the African colonial subjects. There was a lack of qualified instructors from France willing to go teach Senegalese students French as a second language (Nadeau, 2008).

The recent attention to local language instruction in Francophone African countries can be traced to the writing and advocacy primarily of French linguists at a certain point in time, which exercised influence over the leadership of *La Francophonie.* Their influence changed the perception of French and other Francophone leaders regarding the value of local languages in

education. According to Donal's research, this caused this set of African nations to include this element consistently in their education strategy for Africa (1998). After a few years, out of the 15 former French colonies, only four were using one or more African languages in their primary education instruction.

According to testimonies of formerly colonized author and activist Ken Bugul, the confrontation between languages and cultures in the classic colonial situation, in which some languages and cultures are considered superior while others, typically the "native ones", are deemed inferior, has created "psychic, cross-cultural, institutional, and geopolitical effects" that are present today. The colonial education she received in Senegal gave her a heightened awareness of the subtle and not so subtle "relations of power embedded in language". For those in a colony, learning the colonizer's language is not simply a matter of learning a foreign language they are interested in. For the youngsters of her generation, learning French was not exactly a choice. However, in her view she is seeing a change. We talked about the difficulty of the prospect of shifting the official language of Senegal from French to Wolof. Firstly, Wolof is not a largely written language. It is sometimes transcribed phonetically in either Roman or Arabic characters, depending on context. Another issue exists in the fact that only about half the population of Senegal speaks Wolof as their primary language. To make Wolof the official language would be to, in effect, risk alienating another 50 percent of the population. Bisong (1995) raises the issue parents are having in selecting a French-medium school for their children, and are unsure whether this language choice secures tangible advantages for children. Multilingualism ought to be a central concern for these education systems and for parents of students. Otherwise, using solely French or English-medium education in post-colonial education

systems produces an elite that is progressively and linguistically alienated from the rest of the uneducated population.

Senegal's public education system has moved towards a trilingual education which consists first of literacy in the mother tongue and then of teaching the Wolof (the dominant national language), before moving on to French language. In short, language policy focuses on both French and national languages, but these languages do not all receive the same status in practice. It should also be noted that kindergarten schools use national languages, but private schools only use French. In all educational institutions, written communication is provided only in French in the school administration. In primary and secondary schools, Wolof usually takes the place of French during recess and out-of-class conversations (Albaugh, 2007).

Despite the efforts made in the field of education, French mostly likely will never become a national vehicular language for Senegalese. Wolof has already supplanted French on this plan and its expansion now seems irreversible. Senegal's language policy seems to harmonize with the long-term coexistence of Senegalese languages and French to ensure both social stability and economic development. The future prospects of French would be reduced to that of a second language. Senegal is not quite there yet since its linguistic decolonization has just barely begun. Senegal is moving towards a situation in which indigenous languages have the same, or relatively similar status to French (Locraft, 2005).

Leclerc (2015) argues that government has no real intention of challenging "the privileged status of French," despite attempts to reinforce the indigenous languages. Moreover, the country has not overcome certain inconsistencies. As a Muslim country, it seems unbelievable that the state gives so little space to Arabic, despite its historical authority and its influence and symbolic status. It is also strange to see a country where Wolof is spoken at all levels and under all

circumstances, despite the official status of French. All these practices testify to the contradictions and ambiguities of the linguistic reality of Senegal.

Mackey's argument (1984) presents a more violent account of the origin of linguistic bargaining between the Parisian metropole and its overseas African departments, "the advent of linguistic irredentism, the revolt of language minorities and the rise of regionalism have engendered the practice of the politics of accommodation whereby more local languages have had to be recognized, taught and used in schools" (Mackey, p. 40). The 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal found that mother tongue education is cited as one of nine good practices and successful policies for the African context (Preamble, 1999). Due to this decree, many former colonies like Senegal are allowing the use of local languages early in education, thus raising the possibility of perpetual multilingualism within their borders. Many African nations are allowing the use of more local languages early in education and thus raising the possibility of perpetual multilingualism within their borders (Wakerley, 1994).

Today, Wolof is widely used even in almost every domain in Senegalese society, which would normally utilize the state's official language. Oral communications in everyday life between differ between the administration and citizens, but French is generally competing with the local vehicular language, including between the civil servants themselves. Whether a representative of health, agriculture or livestock, even more in rural areas, the local vehicular language is normally used, namely Wolof, Fulani, Malinké or Diola. If the agent of the government does not speak the local language, they are usually accompanied by an interpreter who translates the national language known by the agent into the village, and vice versa (Johnson, 2005).

The use of French can be preferred when the official wants to symbolize the authority that they represent, since French allows them to create a linguistic and political distance between themselves and the citizen. Citizens who speak French can use this language to elevate themselves or to receive certain treatment from the state representative. Knowing the French language is a status symbol, one of power that grants certain privileges and access to those who have fluency (Diallo, 2011). Senegalese authorities do not at all consider questioning the privileged status of French, which probably serves their own interests. Although most oral communication is usually done in one of the six recognized national languages, French is the language of privilege and power. All written documentation is done in French, but there are generally translations done in the six national languages. Senegal is not the only country in the world where texts, laws and institutions are written in a language - French - that the majority of citizens cannot read or understand.

Conclusions

Findings of this research indicate that the French language, as an instrument of expanding empire, was for the subjugation and control of the populations, land and its resources in West Africa, and later, a means of resistance for Pan-African ideological and literary movements (such as the *Negritude* movement) and for nation building after independence. A significant component of this research delves into the evolutions of the educational system in Senegal, and its language instruction since colonization. According to Diallo, “the primary purpose was to alienate Africans, in order to assimilate them into the French culture and values” through schools (Diallo, 2011). This research concludes with observations of how Senegal, like many other Francophone African countries, are continuing to make efforts to have minority languages

recognized in public spaces, leading to a stronger and more sustainable linguistic and political unity.

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