The Dichotomy Between Colonial Heritage and National Identity in the Senegalese Education System

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The dichotomy between colonial heritage and national identity in the Senegalese education system

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# Table of Contents

I. Abstract------------------------------------------------------------- pg 3

II. Introduction-------------------------------------------------------- pg 4
   a. Background-------------------------------------------------------- pg 4
   b. Purpose/Objectives----------------------------------------------- pg 6

III. Methodology-------------------------------------------------------- pg 9
   a. Limitations of Study--------------------------------------------- pg 12

IV. Analysis------------------------------------------------------------ pg 13
   a. Language Use in classroom---------------------------------------- pg 13
   b. L’indépendance du Sénégal n’est pas totale------ pg 16
   c. Colonial Mindset----------------------------------------------- pg 18
   d. Shifting paradigms: towards a more Africanized educational system----------------------------------------------- pg 19
   e. Enracinement et Ouverture----------------------------------------- pg 19

V. Results------------------------------------------------------------- pg 23

VI. Conclusion---------------------------------------------------------- pg 24

VII. Works Cited-------------------------------------------------------- pg 26

VIII. Interviews by Author--------------------------------------------- pg 28

IX. Appendices---------------------------------------------------------- pg 30
I. Abstract

For my Independent Study project, I decided to examine the dichotomy between colonial heritage and national identity in the Senegalese education system. Among many other topics, I was interested in looking at language use in the classroom, material covered, grading systems, and recent reforms in education. I went about my research by conducting an ethnographic study in two middle/high schools (public and private) in Dakar. In order to narrow my research within the schools, I decided to focus on observing history and civic education classes to better understand the dichotomy. I interviewed students, teachers, administrators, and observed the school setting as well as the history and civic education classes. In addition to my research within the school, I also interviewed a few members of educational reform and government organizations. Through my research, I found that a colonial heritage is ever present in the educational system, however it is also constantly changing to adapt to Senegalese preferences and a Senegalese reality. I believe that such a study will contribute to the knowledge of post independence educational systems in West Africa and specifically Senegal.
II. Introduction

Background
Since the 17th century, the French have had a colonial presence in Senegal, and it was not until 1960 that they became independent. Many aspects of Senegalese culture were influenced and shaped by the French, and since the 1960’s Senegal has continued to follow a French educational structure. In fact, one of the major reasons Senegal maintains the colonial heritage in their educational system is because of the “Four Communes.” During the colonial period (more specifically 1848) French authorities granted full French citizenship rights to all inhabitants of Dakar, St. Louis, Gorée and Rufisque (Four Communes). Therefore, being a full French citizen also meant that all of the systems would be modeled after a French one, hence the educational system (Searing 2005).

The Senegalese education system is highly centralized (which is very common for institutions with French roots) and relies on the Ministry of Education for the establishment of the budget, staff, curriculum, and standard examinations (World Bank, 2008). In 2001, a law was adopted which stated that all children are guaranteed access to secular education. However, this law has not been fully enforced for quite a few reasons. For one, Islamic education is often preferred, or there is sometimes a lack of resources in the area; in these cases secular education is not possible (Kinsey et al. 1990). Middle school education in Senegal begins when the child is 11, and lasts four years. According to the French system, the secondary education (or high school) lasts three years, and culminates in the passing of an exam called the “Baccalaureate.”
In terms of secondary schooling, students have an option of attending “general” school, or “technical” school. ¹ (World Data on Education, Senegal 2015)

Three years proceeding independence, Leopold Senghor (the first president of Senegal) stated in one of his speeches, “In Africa, when children have grown up, they leave their parents’ hut, and build a hut of their own by its side. Believe me, we don’t want to leave the French compound. We have grown up in it, and it is good to be alive in it. We simply want to build our own huts” (Senegal- Education System Overview 2015).

In the first 20 years following independence, it was claimed that Senghor also stated, “French is the language of the Gods.” Therefore with this type of rule in place after colonialism, it was clear that Senegal was still greatly influenced by French culture. These influences included the fact that French was still the primary language used in schools, and the fact that during Senghor’s term, many of his advisors were French. At this time period, a French education system was considered the highest form of education. (Senegal- Education System Overview 2015)

In 1971, there was an act adopted by the National Assembly to define the objectives of the educational system for an independent Senegal. This first initiative sought to “Africanize” the educational system post independence. This meant attempting to abandon parts of the French system by employing African languages, teachers, curriculum, materials and techniques. There was a second initiative in 1991 adopted by the National Assembly emphasizing the importance of creating a system which focused on increased national pride, raised cultural awareness, practical skills for

¹ See appendix b
the working world (technical training), and universal primary education (World Bank, 2008).

However, these initiatives proved to be slightly problematic for several reasons. First, the production of textbooks in African languages proved to be difficult not only because of an immense raise in the cost, but also because the diversity of languages in Senegal lessened the demand for any one language. In 1968, the World Bank showed that 153,000 textbooks were produced in French in contrast to 4,140 in Wolof, and 153 in Diola. Yet another issue brought to the table at this time was Senegalese dispute over what it meant to “Africanize” the educational system. The wealthy elite believed it meant preserving the cherished French system, and for a lower income population, this meant a system that included African languages, culture and tradition (Senegal-Constitutional Legal Foundations 2015).

**Purpose/Objectives**

When formulating an idea for this project, I knew that I was interested in the remnants of colonialism in present day Dakar, and also in the educational system. I have always wanted to be a teacher, and I also went to school in France for a year so I thought that researching aspects of the school system in Senegal would be an interesting choice. After researching the background of education in Senegal post Independence, I became particularly interested in the initiatives to “Africanize” the education system, and wanted to hear opinions. I put these ideas together, and decided that I wanted to research the dichotomy of colonial heritage and national identity in the Senegalese education system. I wanted to learn as much as I could
about the school system as a whole, however, I also had to keep in mind the limited amount of time. Therefore, I decided to narrow my study by focusing in on history and civic education classes in the middle/high schools of Dakar. Civic education is a class that comes from the French system, and according to the Ministry of Education in Senegal, it is taught to promote citizenship, human rights, patriotism, and development skills among many other values (Context et Justification du Nouveau Programme d’Education Civic 2015). Therefore, out of all of the middle/high school subjects I could focus on, I thought that content of history and civic education would most easily reveal the manifestation of this dichotomy. Looking at what is covered, what is emphasized, and goals for both of these classes could show very obvious remnants of colonialism, but also very obvious changes. In order to conduct my research, I then formulated some general questions to guide my study:

1) How does this dichotomy of the French system and national identity manifest in the teaching of history and civic education in secondary education?

2) How does the curriculum from many years ago compare to the present curriculum in these classes? If it has changed, how so?

3) Do these two identities (French and Senegalese) seem to conflict with one another in the classroom setting?

4) How do students feel about the French language being imposed in school when most are speaking different languages at home?

5) Referring to the initiative made in 1969 and subsequent initiatives in the 1970s, to “Africanize” the education system, what does this mean from a Senegalese perspective?
In order to gain some perspective on previous research that has been conducted in this field I am interested in, I looked at two articles alluding to topics of education in Senegal. The first is called “English in education policy shift in Senegal: From traditional pedagogies to communicative language teaching” (Diallo 2005) and another from a former SIT student titled, “The Current Education System in Senegal: A Closer Look at the Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending a Private Catholic Institution in Dakar” (Clasby 2002). The first article talks about the growing influence of the English language in the Senegalese education despite the French heritage, and touches on the idea of European invasion into an African system. The other article talks about the current state of education in Senegal by focusing on one school in Dakar. The author focuses a large part of her study on the idea of a private, Catholic school and the benefits of attending an institution like this. Consequently, both of these articles addressed issues I was interested in, however they did not delve into the ever-present topic of colonialism. During my time here, I have noticed how proud the Senegalese are of their culture and tradition, and have been perplexed and fascinated by the mélange of French and Senegalese culture in educational institutions. Therefore my hope for this project was to gain an understanding of the extent of this dichotomy, as well as a more personal and specific idea of how colonialism has affected the mindsets of the Senegalese in the context of education. My project will fill a gap in this body of knowledge, and will bring the voices of younger and older generations to this discussion.
III. Methodology

In order to conduct the bulk of my research I decided to look at two different "general" middle/high schools in Dakar, Senegal. The majority of middle/high schools in Dakar are divided into public and private and therefore I chose one from each category to give a reasonable representation of the educational system. The first middle/high school I chose was a private, Catholic school called Collège Sacré Coeur. The second school I chose was a well-known public school called "Saidou Nourou Tall." I looked at the dichotomy of colonial heritage and national identity through an ethnographic research that included participant observation of history and civic education classes as well as interviews with teachers, students, and administrators. I wrote a set of approximately seven questions for each category of person I was planning to interview: student, teacher, administrator, and also composed a small list of questions to guide my observations of the classes. My interview questions asked about the content of classes, language use in classes, and sought to gather opinions about "Africanizing" the education system from people of all generations. My goal was to observe at least one history and one civic education class at each school, interview at least four teachers of history/civic education, at least six students, and two administrators.

Collège Sacré Coeur is located in the “Sacré Coeur 1” neighborhood of Dakar. It is a primary, middle and high school and more than 4000 students attend this school (Cours Sacré Coeur 2015). It is a pleasant looking campus with a large courtyard and open spaces. All of the students wear uniforms and because of the religious aspect, there is a prayer held every morning before classes. I heard about this school from my
advisor, but had no contacts. Therefore, I decided to simply show up, and speak to the principle myself. I ended up visiting Collège Sacré Coeur four times in order to gather my data. On my first visit, I talked to the director of the school on Friday and arranged to come back to observe classes and conduct interviews on Tuesday. After a bit of confusion, I came on Wednesday and managed to sit in on a history class (3ème) and a civic education class (3ème). I had explained my project to the teachers of both of these classes beforehand, so they helped me by choosing students from their classes I could interview. I ended up interviewing two male teachers, three students (two boys, one girl) and the director of the school that day. I decided to come back to Collège Sacré Coeur one more time so that I could observe a history class (4ème) being taught by a female teacher. I sat through her lesson, and interviewed her as well as two other students (boy and girl). I also was able to observe and take pictures of the history textbook in this class.

Saidou Nourou Tall is a reputable public school located in the “Point E” neighborhood of Dakar on the side of a somewhat busy street. The campus is smaller than that of Sacré Coeur, and the buildings are built in a square shape around a large courtyard area. I was inclined to conduct research at this school for my advisor had a contact there, and my host sister attended this school. Despite these contacts, I ended up simply showing up and asking to see the director just as I had done at Sacré Coeur. I was received very nicely, and ended up visiting Saidou Nourou Tall three times in order to gather my research. I attempted to talk to the principle of the school first to explain my project and conduct an interview, however she was busy and directed me to a history/civic education teacher I could work with. I ended up observing his civic
education class (4ème), later on his history class (Seconde), and was able to conduct an interview with him and one student in his class. Later on, he gave me the contact of another male history/geography and civic education teacher whom I interviewed. After some more confusion, I was finally able to interview the principle of the school, and later on conduct a group interview with two students (my host sister and her friend).

Apart from the high schools, a smaller section of my research was conducted in interviews with members of the institutions CLAC (Centre de Lecture et d’Animation Culturelle), DALN (Direction de l’Alphabétisation et des Langues Nationales), INEADE (Institut National d’Etude et d’Action pour le Développement de l’Education) and NEAS (Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal). Similar to my procedures for conducting research in the middle/high schools, I composed a set of seven general interview questions beforehand for members of government/educational reform organizations. These questions were guided around the same ideas as my questions for the middle/high schools, but they also asked about the goals for the organizations, and hopes for the future.

In order to conduct these interviews with various members of educational reform and government organizations, I visited “La Foire de Dakar” and attended the FILDAC (Foire International du Livre et du Materielle Didactic de Dakar) exhibit. It was a large book fair in which different publishing companies and educational organizations set up stalls with information flyers and books. As I was walking around, I stopped at the stalls that seemed relevant to my project, and this is when I interviewed the members of CLAC, DALN and the director of INEADE. I explained my project to them and

\[^2\text{See appendix a}\]
conducted the interviews at their stalls. While I was at this fair I also got a chance to observe and take pictures of the table of contents in history/geography and civic education textbooks (for 5ème, 4ème, and 3ème) to understand which topics the Ministry of Education has decided to cover.

Even though NEAS was represented at FILDAC, I ended up conducting my interview with the commercial director of NEAS later on. I received his contact through my advisor, and conducted an interview with him at his office downtown.

**Limitations of Study**

My limitations were few, but they mostly included misunderstandings and confusion in my arrangements at the schools. I specifically visited Collège Sacré Coeur on Friday before I was planning on doing any observation/research and they told me to come back on Tuesday at 10:00am. When I arrived, I was told that I was supposed to have come at 8:00am, and that one of the classes I intended to observe had a test the whole week. I also visited Saidou Nourou Tall on a Monday in order to make plans before I conducted research, and was told that the principle was busy until the following Tuesday. I came back on that Tuesday and was told that she was still busy. Eventually I received all of my information, but there was a certain level of miscommunication, and plans falling through. I had expected some level of disorganization, but it was nonetheless disappointing to have to alter the schedule I had planned for myself.

I had also planned to interview parents of some of the students who attended these schools but was constricted by time, and lack of resources. For example, if I had
an extra week to conduct research, I could have attempted to contact a parent group for interviewees but this was not the case. Unfortunately, a parent’s opinion on why they send their child to a certain school could have been very interesting, but that will be left for another time.

Another constriction I experienced was not being able to borrow textbooks from the classrooms. Every time I had access to a textbook it was for less than five minutes, and I had to hastily take a picture of the table of contents to see what material was being covered. While I was observing a textbook at the publishing company, NEAS I was reprimanded for taking a picture and not buying the book. Borrowing textbooks could have been very helpful because I would be able to truly analyze the material rather than just glancing at the table of contents, and one or two pages in the book.

IV. Analysis

Through my interviews and observation, I amassed quite a bit of data that shows the dichotomy of the colonial heritage and Senegalese identity. I found it very interesting that many of my interviewees gave very quite similar responses to my questions. Therefore in analyzing the data, I came across a few common themes, opinions, and ideas which arose from interviews, class visits, and observations. The following themes are a result of my ethnographic analysis.

Language use in the classroom

The diglossic context of Senegal’s linguistic landscape appeared in the interviews I conducted with students, teachers, and administrators alike. I observed
that in both schools (private and public) the language spoken in the classroom was always French, and outside of the classroom the vernacular language spoken was Wolof. I occasionally asked why French was spoken in the school setting, and the majority of the answers were that French is the official language, implying that there is no choice.

I actually observed a bit of a generation gap in the opinions of students and teachers. When talking about the use of French language in the classroom, many of the students seemed to be in favor of this because they said it would be more useful in the professional world. Mountaga Wane, a student in 3ième at Sacré Coeur stated,

“I think it’s a good thing to speak French at school because people always speak Wolof, and it’s good to learn and practice our vocabulary in French. Especially in the professional world, it lets us express ourselves. If we speak Wolof, it doesn’t necessarily allow us to progress.”

Some also expressed that they already speak Wolof at home and with their friends, therefore it is good to practice French in the classroom setting. Others acknowledged that it is important to study one’s maternal language, but that speaking universal languages (French, English, or even Portuguese) was far more useful and practical for their future.

Teachers on the other hand would acknowledge that French is more useful in the world outside of Senegal, however still focused on the fact that it is very important to be well versed in your own language. I usually started this discussion by asking if
the teachers accepted Wolof being spoken in class. For the most part, the teachers responded that they accepted Wolof from time to time especially if it helped their students understand the material better. A teacher of history/geography and civic education stated,

“We like the national languages, and want to work with that- we understand faster! We understand well, and we can express everything we want to say. Contrary to the French language. There are a lot of difficult words in French the students don’t understand, so as a teacher I have to lower the level.”

However, as soon as I asked the teachers if they would be in favor of an incorporation of national languages into the school system, many of the automatic responses were that this is not a realistic goal. The consensus was that this debate of the integration of national languages has been occurring for years, and the funds needed to make this happen simply do not exist. When I spoke with a member of DALN and a member of CLAC, they expressed that their goals are literacy and the introduction of national languages into the education system, however corresponding to the concerns of the teachers they affirmed that there is lack of budget to realize these goals. Both members of DALN and CLAC also stated that the introduction of national languages did not necessarily mean an eradication of the French system. In fact, in response to my question, “Would you want class instruction to be taught in exclusively Wolof/Pulaar?” Abdoulaye Faye (the member of CLAC) responded,
“No, France is powerful, we were colonized by the French. We often say that we are independent, but we are not independent. Colonization exists until the present.”

“L’indépendance du Sénégal n’est pas totale”

Translated from French, this means, “The independence of Senegal is not total.”

This theme ended up being very prevalent in not only many of my interviews, but also in subtleties I noticed throughout observation of classes, and textbooks. The quote from Abdoulaye Faye is a very telling a good starting point for delving into this complex issue.

The mere phrase “France is powerful” rang true in more than a few ways, and one of the times I truly started to understand the meaning of these words was in my interview with Amari Sow (the commercial director of NEAS). At the end of our interview we talked about how the publishing company was originally a pan African company that included Togo and the Ivory Coast as well as Senegal. In 1997, the company divided and when I asked the reason, Mr. Sow explained that this pan African company was threatening to European powers. With this powerful company, European powers could not penetrate the African market, and therefore the company became divided, and consequently each sector became weaker. The mere fact that European powers were able to manipulate and weaken African companies on a whim is a large indication of this sentiment that “colonization exists until the present.”

Apart from this colonial presence in companies, it is also apparent in classroom content. While it is true that different grades focus on different part of the world for
their history classes, a focus on Europe and France is particularly noticeable in certain years. At the FIDAC exposition, I found a 3ème history/geography and civic education textbook in which there is an entire lesson dedicated to the role of France in the world, as well as a section about living in France. In this same textbook, the lesson on civic education contains a section about European and French citizenship. These examples in particular struck me as remnants of French power and not simply learning about the outside world because learning about French citizenship, and the landscape and setting in France is very specific. The students are not learning about other parts of the world in this level of depth, and it strikes me as some sort of advertisement to live in France, and become a part of it’s culture- a very subtle exertion of power.

In a civic education class being taught to 4ème, I observed that one of the major topics was about the economy of Senegal, and how it was taken over by the French during the colonial period, and during Independence. The teacher also told that class that France prohibited Africans from participating in industrial activities. It was clearly stated in this class that France still has economic power over Senegal, however this was not the only way in which power manifested. I also noticed that a large theme in my interviews and observations classes was a “colonial mindset” in the students today.

Colonial mindset

While Europeans brought mostly material items into and out of African colonies during their Imperialist missions, they also brought in mentalities. They constructed ideas of race and civilization which have sadly been carried on to present day Senegal.
The incident which prompted my discussion of the “colonial mindset” occurred in a history class (3ième) that I observed. The teacher was talking about Imperialism and asked the class why European colonizers came to Africa. One of the students raised his hand and responded that the Africans were not as civilized as the Europeans. The teacher quickly corrected him, saying that Africans and Europeans had different definitions of civilization and therefore Europeans perceived Africans as “uncivilized.” This was not an isolated incident, and I also noticed students talking about French being a more civilized language, and that Africa is not developed, or progressive. Many of these ideas come from a European notion of “civilization” or “development” which do not take into account an African or more specifically Senegalese idea of these concepts. These ideas were necessary in order for colonial hegemony to be successful, however even though Senegal has technically gained Independence, these mindsets have lingered.

After interviewing a few history teachers (who taught mostly middle school, and one or two years in high school), I understood that many of them are making an initiative to change this mindset. In my conversation with M. Dramé (a history/geography and civic education teacher), he emphasized that the goal in his history class was to show that Africa is very important to history. He talked about the marginalization of African history in the past because of the prevalence of oral history and therefore lack of written sources. He expressed that he tries to make his students understand that Africa is not only a part of history, but an integral part of history because it is the birthplace of the first humans on earth. In another conversation with
the M. Dijigo (another history/geography and civic education teacher), many of the same concerns were expressed. He stated,

“We know that the principle reason for colonization is economic. But people have come up with many more reasons such as reasons of civilization, religion etc. Saying that the African man does not have a past. Saying that Africa is a “vide de sac\(^3\).” Africa is a place that is portrayed as not having civilization or culture, so it was necessary to colonize.”

M. Dijigo then expressed how important it is to “Place the African man at the heart of the debate,” and teach his students how necessary it is to study African history not only for their own knowledge, but also to alter these false ideas and mindsets put in place by colonizers and imperialists.

Shifting paradigms: towards a more Africanized educational system

Now that Senegal is more than forty years from Independence, I was naturally curious about the educational system closer to the time of Independence. I did not focus on this topic, but in talking to a few administrators, and government workers I was able to gain a little bit of an understanding of the conditions in the educational system closer to Independence. I talked about the high school experiences of the director of INEADE, and the principle of Saidou Nourou Tall, and they ended up touching on the exact same subjects. They both mentioned that when they were in

\(^3\) Word that means “vacuum or empty space” implying that there is no culture or civilization. (Alluding to a Western idea of culture and civilization)
high school, they were taught that their ancestors were the Gallic people and said that all of the students sang the Marseillaise each day before school. Therefore even from these two examples, it is very obvious that the system has become more “Africanized” since the 1960s and 1970s, but the question now is to what extent?

Some obvious evidence of colonial heritage appeared in practices in the classroom. I attended one year of school in France (5ème) and got a chance to observe and participate in the French school system from up close. From this experience, I observed quite a few aspects of the Senegalese schooling system that were identical to the French system. For example, both Senegalese and French schools use a grading system in which the students are graded out of twenty, and in both settings I observed that the teacher reads the grades out loud when they are handing out a test. I also noticed that the lessons given in Senegalese classrooms are given in the “dictée” style that is so popular in French school settings. For this style, the teacher reads out the lesson word for word very slowly, and the students write down the lesson word for word. This style was used in all of the history and civic education classes I observed to give out a new lesson.

Even though the teaching style is similar to the French, there have been obvious changes and additions in the school system since Independence, which now correspond to an African reality. For example, both the private and public school I observed sang the national hymn before school (instead of the Marseillaise). The history courses for primary students now focus on Senegal and the history of the community, neighborhood, and environment. In addition, in correlation to what the teachers were telling me about the importance of African history, I looked at a middle
school history textbook that focused on prehistory, kingdoms, and empires in Africa. The principle of Sacré Coeur also told me that history classes diminished the focus on France, and one teacher in particular mentioned that he focused much of his history curriculum on Islam, and especially it’s importance in Africa.

“Enracinement et Ouverture”

I posed the question, “what does it mean to “Africanize” the education system?” to every person that I interviewed because I thought that this was a very relevant and important question for all generations. While many teachers expressed a large interest in incorporating an African reality into the system, many students, teachers and administrators alike expressed the idea of “enracinement et ouverture.” Translated into English, this phrase means, “staying rooted in one’s culture and staying open.” This was indeed the sentiment of many of my interviewees- as Hady Djigo (a history/geography and civic education teacher) stated,

“(We must) Keep in mind our reality, but also know what is going on elsewhere.”

This idea originally stems from an article written in 1980 by the first president, Leopold Senghor, entitled, “Ethiopiques 59 revue négro-africaine de littérature et de philosophie.” He uses the words “enracinment et ouverture” and explains in this article that Senegalese citizens will not progress educationally if they do not stay rooted in their culture, but at the same time, being open to the world and other civilizations is crucial. Essentially, maintaining a delicate balance between the two (Makhily 2015).
Many of my interviewees (younger and older generation) used the exact words “enracinement et ouverture” and for this reason I believe that they were building off the ideas of Senghor. Even the director of INEADE stated in response to how he thinks the school system should be run:

“It’s a mix- “enracinement et ouverture” in our system. Our students should not be closed in the cocoon of Senegal.”

Many of my interviewees also seemed somewhat reluctant and almost scared to talk about abandoning the French system. Out of all the students I talked to, none of them expressed that they wanted to get rid of the French system; it was more a matter of adding to it. The director of Sacré Coeur expressed to me that he wanted to:

“Keep African culture in the system while still copying the Occident- because the Occidental system was their (African) culture too. We have to take elements, but also add.”

The general opinion was not necessarily to discard of the colonial heritage, but to adapt with African reality, and culture. It does not have to be one way or another, for the idea of “enracinement et ouverture” encourages a borrowing and learning from different cultures in order to become a more open citizen.
V. Results

From my 19 interviews, and classroom/school observations I found that the colonial heritage is still ever present in Senegalese middle/high schools but there have been multiple efforts to change this and adapt to an African reality. I found that the presence of colonialism is not always obvious in the school setting, and oftentimes the larger presence exists in the mindsets of the students (colonial mindset). In this sense, the colonial heritage in schools exists more than I expected it to, because the mindsets and subtleties of the ever present French dominance are oftentimes more powerful than the obvious aspects. It was a strange phenomenon to see some answers from students falling under a veil of European domination. They were not quite aware of the meaning behind their answers yet, and therefore the colonial presence in their ideas was not as apparent to them as it was to me, or the educators of an older generation.

I also observed a generation gap in the opinions about “Africanizing” the education system. The older generation mostly saw this as a more urgent and important addition to education, but for the most part students were somewhat indifferent. Many students expressed that they would like to have more aspects of education that correspond to their culture, but that they also loved learning the “universal” languages in order to help them become successful outside of Senegal. Even though the opinions of different generations may have varied slightly, almost everyone I interviewed agreed with the general sentiment of “enracinement et ouverture.” The Senegalese men and women/boys and girls I interviewed are aware of their own reality, but are also aware of the reality outside of Senegal. Perhaps
stemming from European influence or perhaps impacted by the words of Leopold Senghor, the recent Senegalese consensus has been to explore both of these realities.

VI. Conclusion

The main intent of my study was to research the dichotomy of colonial heritage and national identity in the Senegalese education system. Through my study I found that the French language is still present in the classroom, Senegal does not have complete independence, and that a “colonial mindset” still exists. I also found that the system has been adapting to a Senegalese reality since Independence. This included the hiring of exclusively Senegalese teachers, emphasizing national pride in civic education classes, and focusing more attention on the history of Africa, and Senegal in particular. I came into this study trying to dissect French and Senegalese identities as separate entities, and from my data, realized that at this period in time the identities are somewhat merged. Students have grown up with the “French” system their whole lives, but have not always thought of it as the “French” system, for it is now part of a Senegalese reality as well. Many of the students I interviewed agreed with an incorporation of national languages, and more cultural values but they also did not seem bothered by the current system. Even administrators, and government workers I interviewed disagreed with discarding the French aspects of the system - for this would mean abandoning the basis of the Senegalese education system as a whole.

In terms of furthering the research in this field, I think it would be helpful to interview a different demographic of students. I mostly interviewed younger students (middle school and very early high school) but noticed that the slightly older students had stronger opinions about “Africanizing” the system, and also a raised awareness
about the “colonial mindset.” Therefore, it would be interesting to interview university students who most likely would have stronger opinions since they already passed through all of high school, and who may be more informed opinions about the realities and dichotomies of the system.

I believe that my research contributes to the body of knowledge of the education system in West Africa and specifically Senegal. I explored the system post independence, and delved into what remained of the French, but also the desires to express national identity. Through my ethnographic research I have brought in voices of students and an older generation of educators to this ongoing debate.
VI. Works Cited


VII. Interviews By Author


4) Student (Sacré Coeur). Wane, Mountaga. Interview by author. Formal Interview. Dakar, Senegal, November 18, 2015.


16) Students (Group Interview) (Saidou Nourou Tall). Laye, Ramatou and Camara, Ndeye Marie. Interview by author. Formal Interview. Dakar, Senegal, November 26, 2015.


IX. Appendices

a. Organizations

CLAC (Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle):
Translated to English, this means “The Center for Reading and Cultural Animation.” CLAC is a francophone program established in 1986, and its goal is to create access to books, newspapers, and information in general in developing Francophone countries. Their three objectives for the sector in Senegal are:
Source: (La Direction De la Langue Français et de la Diversité Culturelle et Linguistique 2015)

DALN (Direction de l'Alphabétisation et des Langues Nationales):
Translated to English, this means “Direction of Literacy and National Languages.” This is an organization under the Ministry of education whose goals are to eradicate illiteracy (make sure everyone in Senegal knows how to read and write in at least one language) as well as promoting national languages in the education system.
Source: Interview with Demba Mendy

INEADE (Institut national d'Etude et d'Action pour le Développement de l'Education):
Translated to English, this means “The National Institute of Learning and Action for the Development of Education.” INEADE was created in 1981 and is an organization under the Ministry of Education. Its goals are to edit textbooks before they are put in schools. They make sure that the content adheres to national guidelines, and that they respect the history of the country.
Source: Interview with Mame Ibra Ba

NEAS (Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal):
Translated to English, this means “New African Publishing house of Senegal.” NEAS is a publishing house that edits books, and textbooks (including history/geography and civic education textbooks). They make sure that the content of the textbooks conforms to the national standards.
Source: Interview with Amari Sow

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4 I want to acknowledge that the word “developing” can be problematic especially in used in reference to countries with a colonial past. As mentioned previously in this paper, “developed” is a term often used to describe the European conception of development. However, this word was used on the CLAC website to describe the goals of the program, so I decided to keep their wording.
b. French System of Grades (For Middle School and High School)

Middle School
6ème --------------- 6th grade
5ème ---------------- 7th grade
4ème ---------------- 8th grade
3ème---------------- 9th grade

High School
Seconde--------------- 10th grade
Première------------- 11th grade
Terminale------------ 12th grade