The Light on the Horizon: N'ko Literacy and Formal Schooling in Guinea

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Foreword

This thesis is based on field research conducted by the author in Guinea and Mali from May to July, 2002. Research was sponsored by the George Washington University Department of Anthropology through a Lewis W. Cotlow research grant. Informants' are referred to anonymously in this paper and interview data has been coded to assure anonymity.

My interest in N'ko began in 1995 under the tutelage of Youssouf Fofana, fellow teacher at Kankou Moussa High School in Siguiri, Guinea. By studying N'ko for two years in Siguiri, I not only became literate in a local script but I was also accepted into a tight-knit community. Learning to read and write in N'ko was not especially difficult, but it signified my participation in a burgeoning social movement. I soon found that writing N'ko served as a kind of passport for friendship and acceptance into a community of N'ko learners throughout Guinea and West Africa. My sustained interest in N'ko is due to Youssouf Fofana's great patience and knowledge as an N'ko teacher. While he was not an informant during my most recent research trip, I would like to thank him for years of instruction, motivation and friendship. I would also like to thank the members of the N'ko community in Guinea for their help, especially the staff of the Conakry ICRA-NKO *Lerada,* AVRA-NKO in Kankan, the Sanoussy Fiman Diané school in Kerouané, and the teachers at Sir Samaké and Souleymane Kanté schools in Siguiri.

N'ko is an indigenous West African alphabet created in 1949 by Souleymane Kanté, a Guinean trader and self-taught scholar. The alphabet is a simple phonetic script made up of 27 characters (see Appendix, Figure 1). Several accents and diacritics indicate tones and special sounds found in many West African languages, which are especially relevant to Mande languages. Mande refers to one of the main branches of the Niger-Congo family of West African languages. Mande languages constitute a broad grouping of sixty-eight languages in the Saharan, Sahel, and sub-Sahel zones of West Africa with similar syntax, morphology, and lexicon.[1] Estimates vary on the number of living speakers of Mande languages in West Africa, ranging in the tens of millions.[2] While linguistic relationships between the languages in the Mande subfamily are considered "loose,"[3] the Western group of languages has much linguistic overlap.

Joseph Greenberg was one of the first linguists to classify a distinct branch of the Niger-Congo language family for "Mandingo" or Manding languages.[4] Maninka is part of the Manding subset of a dozen languages, also called the Mande Core languages, which have 80 to 90 percent lexical similarity.[5] Manding-language communities are spread over several countries in West Africa, including Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. Three Manding languages—Maninka, Bamana and Jula[6]—are very closely related and have the largest number of speakers among Mande languages. While they are traditionally considered distinct languages or dialects, Maninka, Bamana, and Jula are closely intertwined,

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[1] Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), "On Niger-Congo languages," in Barbara F. Grimes and Joseph E. Grimes, Eds., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fourteenth Edition* (Dallas, TX: SIL, 2000). The name "Mande" was used to link these languages and dialects on typological and genetic grounds as early as the middle of the 19th century by Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle (1854) and Heymann Steinthal (1867).

[2] A 1972 estimate cited 20 million speakers of Made languages. A 1994 is more conservative, citing just 10 million speakers. Census data culled in the 1970s and 1980s places the number of speakers at over 18 million. See Pierce Alexander, *Languages and Language in Black Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 55; R. E. Asher, Ed., *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1994), 2801; William Bright, Ed., *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 383-386.

[3] Asher, 2801.

[4] For Greenberg's map of Mandingo languages, see Joseph Greenberg, *Studies in African Linguistic Classification* (Branford, CN: Compass Publishing, 1955), 9. Also see "African Languages" in Elliott P. Skinner, ed., *Peoples and Cultures of Africa: An Anthropological Reader* (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1973), 71-80.

[5] David Dwyer. "Mandé." In John Bendor-Samuel, ed., *The Niger-Congo Languages* (Lanham, MD: SIL/University Press of America, 1989), 50. Accounts vary on the exact number of Manding languages. Dwyer (1989) notes 11 languages, Asher (1994) states there are just 10, and Bright (1992) lists 13 different dialects.

[6] These terms are often very confused in non-native scholarship, with Maninka often referred to as Malinké, Bamana called Bambara, and Jula complicated with a variety of spellings.

described as "subcontinua smoothly flowing into each other."[7] All three of these linguistic communities are discussed in this paper, but Maninka speakers are the primary research population.

Literacy in N'ko has spread in many communities that speak Manding and Mande languages throughout West Africa. However, N'ko literacy remains especially prevalent among Maninka people in Guinea, with growing N'ko literate networks in surrounding Bamana communities in Mali and Jula communities in Ivory Coast. For this paper, Maninka language literacy in Guinea is the research focus, with some discussion of literacy in surrounding Manding language areas. Since Maninka are, by some estimates, the largest ethnic group in Guinea, and Manding ethnic groups have a significant presence throughout West Africa, Manding language literacy is not a minority-language phenomenon. However, the dominance of European language literacy and literacy in Latin letters makes N'ko a kind of 'minority' literacy that has been subject to a history of marginalization akin to that of many minority cultures.

Map - Distribution of Mande Languages in West Africa

Source: Professor Tom Bassett with Jane Domier, Department of Geography, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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[7] Valentin Vydrine, *Manding-English Dictionary (Maninka, Bamana) Volume 1* (St. Petersburg, Russia: Dimitry Bulanin Publishing House, 1999), 7.

Introduction

This paper examines the development of literacy education using the N'ko script in the Republic of Guinea, West Africa. N'ko is studied in relation to its role as one of the most popular and widely used indigenous scripts in contemporary West Africa. This paper explores the socio-cultural significance of N'ko literacy education in Maninka communities in contrast with colonial, national, and international literacy education in Guinea.

Despite decades of literacy campaigns, illiteracy is still considered a pressing concern for Africa. As a region, sub-Saharan Africa has one of the lowest levels of literacy in the world.[8] Within sub-Saharan Africa, West African states fill the region's bottom rungs in terms of literacy rates. In fact, ten of the thirteen least literate countries in the world are located in West Africa.[9] Most West African countries report illiteracy rates at 50 percent and higher.[10] In Mali and Burkina Faso, each with large Mande language communities, only about one-quarter of the population is literate. In other countries with Mande populations, such as Guinea, the Gambia, and Senegal, a little more than one-third of the population is literate.[11]

Bilateral and multilateral donors consider illiteracy a universal concern for human development, incorporating literacy into evaluations of social and economic development. Illiteracy has been linked with poverty while literacy has been correlated with economic growth, reduced fertility rates, better infant health, and environmental protection.[12] In an effort to promote development, international literacy campaigns have been mounted in Africa since the beginning of the drive for "functional literacy" at the 1965 UNESCO World Conference of Education Ministers in Tehran. International efforts at improving African literacy began soon after the end of colonial rule in many African countries, building on colonial education by teaching literacy through the Latin script and, excepting UNESCO's Experimental World Literacy Program, in European languages.

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[8] The average adult literacy rate of sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 was 61.5 percent. According to the 2002 UNDP Human Development Report's adult literacy index, 63 percent of the bottom quartile of the index is made up of sub-Saharan African countries. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002,* (New York: UNDP, 2002).

[9] UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002,* (New York: UNDP, 2002).

[10] UNESCO *Instititive for Statistics,* estimates July 2002.

[11] Illiteracy rates for 2000: Mali (74.4%), Burkina Faso (76.1%). The Gambia and Senegal, which also have sizable Mande-language populations, have high illiteracy as well: The Gambia (63.4%), Guinea (60%), and Senegal (62.6%). UNESCO *Institute for Statistics,* July 2002.

[12] UNESCO, *UNESCO and Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2003); Daniel A. Wagner, *World Education Forum-Thematic Study: Literacy and Adult Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2001).

West Africa has been the testing ground for attempts at fostering literacy since the opening of missionary schools and the beginning of colonial occupation in the 19th century. Despite the introduction of formal education in the colonial era and the expanded educational and literacy campaigns undertaken after independence, statistics indicate stubbornly low levels of literacy in the West Africa. In Guinea, for example, literacy has increased by just one percentage point for each year since independence, with the majority of Guinean adults and children left illiterate. These statistics seem to indicate a deep-seeded resistance to literacy in West Africa.

Yet, the outlook may not be as bleak as the statistics indicate. Literacy in West Africa is more widespread than official figures suggest, calling into question international definitions of literacy as a cognitive skill. Official conceptions of literacy do not adequately consider multiple "literacies"[13] and culturally constructed literate practices, preferring universal notions of literacy. Generally, official literacy is evaluated through two components: literacy in an official language and literacy in an official alphabet. In most West African countries, official literacy means the ability to read and write in a colonial European language using the Latin alphabet. West African countries categorized as anglophone, francophone, or lusaphone measure literacy in their respective colonial languages. Yet, some scholars have rightly noted that the Africans living in these countries are overwhelmingly "africanophone," with little knowledge of official, ex-colonial languages.[14] This leaves many uncounted people in West Africa who are literate in indigenous languages using modified or wholly unique writing systems, yet who are deemed officially illiterate. West Africa has been depicted as rich in oral tradition but poor in written scripts. High illiteracy is often blamed on the lack of written tradition among West African cultures, justifying the imposition of the Latin alphabet and foreign-language literacy. Some scholars have argued that African elites have been complicit in this depiction of Africa, advocating for the continued use of European languages and literacy to maintain their control over power and privileged.[15] However, this depiction ignores the

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[13] The concept of literacies draws on the sociolinguisitic study of the diversity of languages to argue that literacy takes on variegated forms. Heath defines literacies as "varieties of representation that reading and writing entail in their interdependence with tools, motivations, and group and individual will." Shirley Brice Heath, "Literacy and Social Practice" in Daniel Wagner et al., eds., *Literacy: An International Handbook* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 103.

[14] See Beban Sammy Chumbow and Augustine Simo Bobda, "French in West Africa: a sociolinguistic perspective" in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 141 (2000): 45; J. Schmied, *English in Africa: An Introduction* (London: Longman, 1991).

[15] Magnus O. Bassey, *Western Education and Political Domination in Africa* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999); David D. Laitin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 104.

dozen or more indigenous writing systems used in West Africa during the 20th century alone.[16] These scripts competed with and even thrived alongside imported writing systems in West Africa. In Guinea, at least five writing systems are currently being used to transcribe indigenous languages: Latin, Adjami, Loma, Kpelle and N'ko (see Appendix, Photo 1).[17]

Indigenous writing systems have an especially important cultural significance in their linguistic communities, transcending a simple functional approach to literacy education. The process of learning to read and write can no longer be considered monolithic, with universal "cures" to eradicate illiteracy. The socio-cultural motivations for literacy choice must be examined more closely. Illiteracy can be oversimplified and misconstrued as a problem to be solved, eschewing a discussion of the social significance of literacy. Literacy must be understood through its situated relevance and the complexity of competing writing systems and literacies in specific environments.

In exploring the socio-cultural role of indigenous scripts and indigenous-language literacy, this paper takes the N'ko literacy education as its focus. N'ko represents a socio-cultural phenomenon that uses local language literacy as a vehicle for social and educational development. As a community-based, indigenous literacy movement, N'ko calls into question the programmatic and universalisitic approach to literacy encouraged through top-down development. This paper does not address literacy in the general terms of literacy campaigns or the development discourse, which often present literacy in technical terms as a skill independent of its social context. In addition, this paper does not present a psychological analysis of literacy acquisition or human cognition. Instead of presenting literacy as a goal or *product*, this analysis focuses on the specific *process* of N'ko literacy education and its *practice* in Guinea by presenting a situated, socio-cultural analysis of a specific literacy phenomenon.

This paper explores N'ko literacy within its specific social, cultural and historical contexts in West Africa in the second half of the 20th century. Special attention is paid to historical trends in literacy education and language policy that affected the development and spread of N'ko. This

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[16] According to David Dalby, these writing systems include Mende, Via, Kpelle, Bassa, Bete, Loma, Oberi-Okaime, Bamum, Wolof (Assane Faye), Fula (Oumar Dembélé), Fula (Adama Ba), Yoruba (Josiah Oshetelu), and N'ko. One could also include Akan Adrinkra symbols of the Asante of Ghana, although they do not represent a phonetic writing system. See David Dalby's three essays on West African writing systems: "A Survey of the Indigenous Writing Scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa" in *African Language Studies* 8 (1967): 1-51; "The Indigenous Scripts of West Africa and Surinam: Their Inspiration and Design" in *African Language Studies* 9 (1968): 156-197; "Further indigenous scripts of West Africa: Manding, Wolof and Fula alphabets and Yoruba 'holy' Writing" in *African Language Studies* 10 (1969): 161-181.

[17] Adjami means an adapted version of Arabic characters. In Guinea, Adjami refers to a modified Arabic script used by Pulaar speakers in the Fouta Djalon region of Middle Guinea. See Abdourahmane Diallo, *Phonologie et morphologie des emprunts arabes en pular de Guinée* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2001), 30-32.

paper defines three distinct approaches to literacy education in Guinea: colonial schooling, post-colonial education reform under the First Republic, and the community-based approach of the N'ko literacy movement. Colonial schooling focused on French-language fluency and limited literacy. Post-colonial education valorized African cultures by teaching literacy in indigenous languages using Latin letters. N'ko education built on community literacy priorities for indigenous literacy through a grassroots social movement. These three literacy approaches are analyzed as historical transitions between divergent educational priorities. This historical analysis is balanced by field research in Guinea exploring a recent shift in the N'ko literacy movement, characterized by the reorientation of N'ko literacy through private formal schooling. These two perspectives, one historical and the other ethnographic, respond to the underlying question implicit in this research: What accounts for the broad-based support for N'ko literacy in Maninka communities in Guinea?

In answering this question, this paper argues that N'ko literacy mediates the dialectic between state educational policy and community-based educational priorities. The relationship between the state and the community regarding education is 'dialectical' in that the relationship is characterized by tension and opposition between two stakeholders: national-level policymakers and local-level community members. Since Western formal education has been largely imposed on African communities since its introduction in West Africa, education remains a contentious sector, where the local and the national meet and compete. N'ko literacy emerged as a reaction to this dialectic, 'mediating' or negotiating the tension between state education policies and community education priorities.[18]

This paper examines this dialectic in terms of N'ko literacy, comparing 'top-down' national language programs with 'bottom-up' N'ko literacy. Field research in Guinea discussed in this paper reveals how N'ko formal schooling is an important development in the mediation of this dialectic (see Appendix, Figure 2). This paper takes a decidedly contextualized analysis of N'ko literacy practice among Maninka in West Africa. Through field work, I explore the local manifestation of N'ko literacy and how it mediates and responds to official power. Street (1998) states, "any ethnographic account of literacy will, in fact, bring out its significance for power, authority and social differentiation, in terms of the author's own interpretations of these concepts." Instead of

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[18] This argument does not suggest that N'ko was the only means communities used to negotiate the dialectic on education. Quranic schooling and, to some extent, traditional African education were other vehicles for communities control over education.

ignoring the role of power in my research, I actively present my study as an attempt to understand how N'ko literacy mediates the dynamic between local communities and national priorities.

N'ko's relationship with state education went through three distinct phases. First, in the colonial phase, the creation of the N'ko alphabet was a reaction against foreign denigration of African cultures. The author argues that the exclusively French-language colonial education system was the chief colonial vehicle for disparaging local languages and cultures by inculcating a colonial worldview based on French superiority. Second, in the independence phase, the spread of N'ko literacy through trade networks and nonformal teaching arose due to total state control over education and the exclusion of N'ko literacy from post-colonial education programs. Third, in the rapprochement phase, the formalization of N'ko literacy education through its integration into private primary schools since the 1990s marks an attempt to broaden the N'ko movement and prove N'ko literacy's relevance to national educational goals.

This paper explains how in each phase, the N'ko literacy movement reacted to state educational shortcomings and responded to community needs, mediating the dialectic between official policies and community priorities. In this manner, this paper attempts to shed light on the underlying socio-cultural reasons why the N'ko alphabet has become the most widely used indigenous alphabet in West Africa. This study concludes that, through community-based support, the N'ko movement presents an indigenous literacy through which literacy becomes culturally meaningful and locally relevant.[19] The shift to N'ko formal schooling represents the most recent and significant mediation of Maninka community education priorities. Formal schooling, the author argues, allows greater access to N'ko literacy while reorienting N'ko toward national pedagogy. Instead of remaining a nonformal alternative to public education, the shift to formal schooling shows N'ko's relevance to national policies for education and development.

Structure of the paper

The first chapter examines the colonial foundations of state-based language policy and literacy education in West Africa. Here, the colonial approaches of British and French colonialists are contrasted to show the distinct colonial social hierarchy, or *ontology*, underlying French imperialism in West Africa. This section brings to light the effects of French cultural superiority and French-language centered education on African subjects. French colonial policy's assimilationist

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[19] Clifford N. Fyle presents this idea briefly in "Language and literacy in West Africa" in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 141 (2000), 71.

approach denigrated and dismissed African languages. Through French-language education, colonial schooling instilled a social hierarchy which legitimated French colonial rule and distanced African students from their communities and cultures.

The creation of the N'ko alphabet during this period provided an alternative to the colonial system of French language and literacy education. Instead of conceding the superiority of foreign languages and cultures, the Guinean scholar Souleymane Kanté proved the validity of African languages by transcribing his own language, Maninka. The unique, indigenous N'ko alphabet became a symbol of African ingenuity and responded to African literacy needs. N'ko is used as a means to explore the cultural construction of literacy, which argues that literacy is not a neutral skill but a culturally situated practice informed by the value ascribed to different writing systems within specific socio-cultural environments. The author argues that the N'ko alphabet was developed and gained popularity in Maninka communities as an indigenous rejection of French colonial power propagated through colonial schools. N'ko represented an indigenist approach to African development, which was an indigenous alternative to the assimilationist and associationist approaches imposed by colonial powers in West Africa. N'ko is shown to have contested and resisted French colonial ideology and education, which defined literacy and culture as exclusively French. Instead, Kanté validated indigenous knowledge by using the Maninka language and N'ko literacy for African self-development.

Chapter two explores the post-colonial period. The first section examines attempts to decolonialize Guineans and revalorize African culture during Guinea's First Republic. The role of indigenous-language education and literacy is closely examined as a reaction against French colonial language policy. Guinea's independent leadership's use of literacy in the "socialist cultural revolution," analyzed through ruling party publications and the prolific writings of Guinea's first president Sékou Touré, explains the integral role indigenous language literacy education played in the new Republic. In the second section, the impetus behind Souleymane Kanté's nonformal promotion of the N'ko alphabet is compared with Sékou Touré's nation-building objectives. The two Guinean savants' ideologies regarding indigenous language literacy are shown to be comparable, while the means of achieving their goals are shown to be divergent. The failures of Touré's institutionalized approach are contrasted with the successes of Kanté's nonformal approach. The continued spread of N'ko literacy despite the end of state sponsorship of indigenous language literacy is explained through an analysis of the *semiotic*, or representational capacity, of N'ko. The

semiotics of N'ko are explored on two levels: one linguistic, the other cultural. N'ko is shown to prove its value to Maninka people through its powerful representational capacity on these two levels, which fostered its development despite being marginalized under Touré and continued it spread after the termination of official support for indigenous language literacy.

Chapter three examines the most recent developments in the N'ko literacy campaign. A review of field research in Guinea shows a recent shift in the N'ko literacy movement, reorienting education toward formal schools in Guinea. An in-depth analysis of six N'ko formal schools in Guinea reveals a push to standardize, legitimize, and further N'ko literacy through formal primary schooling. Shifting away from the nonformal approach pioneered by the inventor of the N'ko alphabet, N'ko associations in Guinea are reorienting their literacy campaign. This is a new departure from the decentralized, rural, and nonformal approach that have characterized the movement. Instead of remaining an alternative to public education and an adversary of official language policies in Guinea, the formalization of N'ko literacy represents a new rapprochement between the N'ko community and official educational objectives. N'ko formal schools reveal a shift toward national educational goals and a streamlining of the movement in order to increase its relevance and community support.

This change represents a shift in the N'ko literacy movement, which presents new opportunities and challenges. The author argues that the N'ko community is trying to renegotiate its relationship with the state and more effectively mediate the dialectic between local communities and national priorities. This transition has brought new momentum and popularity to the N'ko movement. Through formal schooling initiatives, N'ko organizations continue to broaden N'ko literacy and better tailor N'ko literacy education to Maninka communities. However, the author concludes that some important challenges posed by this shift have not been sufficiently met. Official perceptions of N'ko literacy in Guinea reveal a divide between local objectives and national educational priorities. This is most evident in the perceptions of government officials, foreign NGOs, and foreign donors regarding N'ko literacy, which differ from the community based strategies being implemented in Maninka communities. These problems must be addressed through a united, coordinated effort by the N'ko community in Guinea if they are to meet their objective for reorientation through the integration of N'ko literacy into the public primary school system.

This paper concludes with an analysis of N'ko's changing role in Maninka literacy over the colonial, independence, and rapprochement phases. N'ko is shown to have maintained its

popularity among Maninka by continuously affirming local and cultural relevance of literacy education. Under colonialism, N'ko validated Maninka culture, presenting an alternative to colonial pedagogy. After independence, N'ko contributed ideologically to the national drive to indigenous language instruction, but remained focused on community and individual empowerment instead of national dogma. Most recently through rapprochement, N'ko formal schools are reprioritizing indigenous literacy, showing that national development can benefit by making education culturally relevant. But, despite the most recent shift to state-model schooling, N'ko continues to encounter resistance from national policymakers, revealing the often contrary relationship between national priorities and indigenous cultural rights. While N'ko literacy is no longer suppressed and marginalized as under colonialism and the First Republic, N'ko still faces institutional hurdles to gain official support and incorporate N'ko literacy into public schools. N'ko supporters are proving the validity of 'bottom-up' development, but national and international policymakers remain largely unconvinced. Yet N'ko retains its cultural salience and proves that literacy education based on cultural relevance can thrive despite institutional denigration and marginalization by taping into deep community support.

CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY

This chapter analyzes colonial language and education policies in West Africa, which spurred the development of the N'ko script. French and British colonial approaches to language learning are contrasted, highlighting how divergent approaches led to distinct literacy practices defined by colonial borders. Special attention is given to the cultural imperative of French colonialism as manifest in colonial schools. French language education is shown to have been predicated on the transmission of a French colonial ontology, which marginalized Maninka culture and proscribed literacy in indigenous languages. N'ko is shown to have developed as a reaction against foreign denigration of African cultures, languages, and literacy. The author portrays N'ko as an alternative to French colonial schooling, countering foreign control of knowledge, literacy, and education. N'ko's popularity is explained through a discussion of the cultural construction of literacy. N'ko, the author argues, built upon indigenous Maninka culture and proved relevant to local literacy needs unmet by colonial education. The N'ko movement is shown to have defined itself in opposition to colonial education through its nonformal promulgation of an indigenist ontology.

Colonial approaches and indigenous alternatives:
N'ko and colonial language education in Guinea

<u>**Introduction**</u>

In West Africa, the course of power can be traced along the geographic boundaries of language use. Histories of empire and domination can be read today through continued language dominance in certain regions. Through a combination of military might and trade, empires expanded in West Africa and spread their languages across their domains. The rise and spread of the Empire of Mali from the 13th to 15th centuries contributed to the broad spread and coherence of Manding languages across West Africa today.[20] Across central West Africa, Muslim invaders taught Arabic and opened Quranic schools to spread Islam, and Arabic literacy continues to flourish in this area. Colonial empire was no different, and French colonialists especially prioritized the dissemination of their language in the territories under French rule. As a result, the history of West African peoples' interactions with foreign powers can be read through the strata of language and literacy in the region. This linguistic archeology tells the story of West African oral cultures that succumbed to literacy in foreign languages and alphabets. The colonial period had an especially significant impact on literacy in West Africa, where European language education and literacy remain as official policy today.

This chapter analyzes colonial language policies in West Africa. Colonial education is examined through its articulation of an imposed social hierarchy and its denigration of indigenous languages and literacy. The N'ko alphabet is positioned as an indigenous response to French colonial education. By analyzing the historical context of language education in Maninka communities in West Africa, this chapter studies the rationale behind the development and spread of N'ko literacy during the colonial era. N'ko is shown to have provided an indigenous alternative to French colonial control over education and literacy, catalyzing and benefiting from the social momentum culminating in the end of French colonial rule in West Africa.

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[20] Charles Bird, "The Development of Mandekan (Manding): A Study of the Role of Extra-linguistic Factors in Linguistic Change" in David Dalby, ed., *Language and History in Africa* (London: Cass, 1970).

Through colonial education in West Africa, France adopted the formidable task of imposing its language on one of the most diverse linguistic landscapes in the world.[21] French education adopted the education imperative of Christian missionaries, who pioneered Western formal schooling on the continent in the 18th and 19th centuries. In many cases, missionaries were the first foreigners to transliterate traditionally oral languages in West Africa. As a result, "agents of the church and the literacy movement marched in lockstep,"[22] and missionary schools established Western literacy education in West Africa. Missionary schools established a model of formal schooling that suited colonial rule in West Africa. As a result, most colonial administrations adopted the missionary structure of formal schooling, but with slightly different objectives. Instead of religious conversion, colonialists used formal schooling as a means to convert Africans to the colonial system and, especially in the case of French colonialism, proselytize the superiority of Western culture. Through formal schooling, European colonial administrations used European language education to enforce a power hierarchy of European dominance and African subordinance and to facilitate colonial rule. French colonialism was especially restrictive, mandating the exclusive teaching of French in all West African colonial schools throughout the colonial era.

This chapter examines the effect of colonial language and education policies on West African indigenous languages. In the first section, British and French approaches to colonial rule are contrasted, highlighting their contradictory affects on language education and literacy in West Africa. French language education is examined as a tool for colonial rule and a means to propagate a French colonial worldview based on dominance, or a French colonial *ontology,* in colonial Guinea. In the second section, the N'ko alphabet is examined as an indigenous reaction against cultural denigration under French colonialism. N'ko is shown to be both a catalyst for and a product of African cultural revival at the end of the colonial period. N'ko is shown to symbolize the communal rejection of cultural denigration and subordination as propagated in French colonial schooling. In its initial development, N'ko championed Maninka community priorities over imposed colonial order. Under colonialism, N'ko spread through individual Maninka along trade routes outside of colonial control.

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[21] West Africa is reported to have the most complex linguistic makeup on the continent with, by one estimate, more than 550 languages over 15 countries. Furthermore, West Africa has a higher proportion of languages in relation to the population than in any other part of the world. See Emmanuel N. Kwofie, *The Acquisition and Use of French as a Second Language in Africa* (Grossen-Linden: Hoffmann-Verlag, 1979), 23; Beban Sammy Chumbow and Augustin Simo Bobda, "French in West Africa: a sociolinguistic perspective" in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 141 (2000): 40.

[22] David G. Scanlon, *Church, State, and Education in Africa* (New York: Columbia University's Teacher's College Press, 1966), 6.

The author argues that N'ko rejected the domination of colonial rule by advancing community cultural renewal and asserting indigenous control over literacy education.

Colonial language policies in West Africa

When European powers carved up the African continent at the 1884-5 Berlin Conference in what historians refer to as the "Scramble for Africa," [23] West African linguistic communities were split by colonial cartography. Colonial borders imposed a political geography that divided indigenous groups during and after colonialism: "new political frontiers cut through ethnic groups and led to situations in which the inhabitants were torn between ethnic and linguistic allegiances and allegiance to the state." [24] Soon after the Berlin Conference, aspirant colonial powers began considering administrative approaches for their new possessions.

Although policymakers approached the management of African territories as a purely administrative endeavor, colonial policy was influenced by the European debate on Africa. This debate took two opposing viewpoints, one dismissing the validity of African cultures through a belief in European cultural universalism and the other defending African cultures as autonomous systems that should not be disrupted by European civilization. Partisan interpretations of Africa colored colonial administrative policies and led to two camps on colonial rule: assimilationists and associationists.

> On one side were the *assimilationists*, those who sought to assimilate Africa to European culture. They believed that an African elite would first adopt French language and European culture, and that Africans generally would more gradually learn to fit into French or Belgian society…On the other side were the *associationists*, those who wished to preserve the connection between European and African societies, but without the culture of one permeating the other.[25]

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[23] Thomas Pakenham notes that the term "The Scramble for Africa" was probably coined in 1884. Joseph Conrad helped popularize the term through his 1923 essay on colonialism in Africa, calling this period "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human consciousness." M. E. Chamberlain explains that the Scramble for Africa lasted at most twenty years. See M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Longman, 1974), 91. Pakenham takes a broader perspective, defining the Scramble as the 36-year span between 1876 and 1912. See Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Random House, 1991), xxv.

[24] Samuel Gyasi Obeng and Efurosibina Adegbija. "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Joshua Fishman, ed., *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 355.

[25] Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1985* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 93.

Assimilationist rule endorsed domination and militarization while associationist policy favored sovereignty and trade. [26] Associationism led to a "centrifugal" British system of governance promoting indigenous autonomy, contrasting with the "centripetal" French system of governance that brought subjects under the control of the mother country.[27] The British approach accepted political sovereignty, "governed by the assumption that political independence was a foreseeable endpoint,"[28] while the French approach imposed home-country rule over local authority.

This contrast between sovereignty and domination was manifest in divergent language policies in British and French West African colonies. Promoting cultural superiority and assimilation, French colonialist regimes in West Africa denigrated and marginalized African languages in French colonies. In contrast, the hands-off, associationist policy of British colonialists officially endorsed African languages in colonial affairs. Administrative control and armed domination were the two arms of France's assimilationist policy of direct rule: "Subjugation by military force became an ironic but ever-present aspect of assimilation. The establishment of unified political dominion, rather than equality, was the key objective in the assimilationist view."[29]

Shifts in French and British rule during distinct phases of colonialism raise questions about the assimilationist-associationist dichotomy advanced above.[30] However, colonial language policies changed little during these shifts, especially in primary education, maintaining the salience of the dichotomy. While British colonial administration incorporated native languages into British rule, French colonial administration never wavered from a strictly French-only language policy.

Linguist and one time professor in francophone West Africa, Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou noted a critique of French colonialism's cultural agenda: "the French language…is henceforth the instrument of French imperialism…It is the instrument of alienation *par excellence:* mental and cultural alienation."[31] French rule meant not only the spread of French political control but what Robert Phillipson calls linguistic imperialism. According to Phillipson, linguistic imperialism was

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[26] Manning, 61.

[27] William Bryant Mumford. *Africans learn to be French; a review of educational activities in the seven federated colonies of French West Africa, based on a tour of French West Africa and Algiers undertaken in 1935 (*New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 71.

[28] Leonard J. Lewis, *Education and Political Independence in Africa* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973) 2.

[29] Manning, 61.

[30] See for instance Prosser Gifford and Timothy C. Weiskel, "African Education in a Colonial Context: French and British Styles" in Prosser Gifford and W. M. Roger Louis, Eds., *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

[31] Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou, *Le Français en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Bordas, 1973), 50.

based on an informing ideology that created colonial language hegemony.[32] Like colonial racism, linguicism gave preferential status to the dominant language while denigrating others. This ideology was part of the colonial order which validated French language and culture while marginalizing indigenous languages and peoples.

Despite the variegated results of divergent colonial approaches to administration, it is important to note that colonial powers exclusively dictated how they would manage their African subjects. Both associationism and assimilationism highlight the colonial power dynamic, in which colonial administrators, not indigenous communities, controlled the course of the colonial encounter. Deliberating between assimilationism and associationism, the European debate gave little thought to an *indigenist* approach, where Africans would decide the course of their relationship with the West.

The development and spread of the N'ko alphabet in French West Africa is an example of an indigenist rejection of colonial linguicism. French colonial linguicism made language a flashpoint for reform in West African communities under French rule: "Under the French system, there was no serious and systematic study of African linguistics, nor was there any printed literature in the local languages nor even any system of transcription…this system was to favor political awakening of the African peoples, and finally boomerang upon its initiators."[33] While state-sponsored assimilationism and myopic promotion of the French language marginalized indigenous cultural contributions, the N'ko alphabet offered a different approach to literacy education. The N'ko alphabet represents an indigenist approach, creating a native social movement that tailored literacy to local communities. The N'ko alphabet created an alternative to European cultural superiority. Although the French defined their West African colonies as Gaullois possessions, "*l'Afrique Occidentale Française*," the spread of the N'ko alphabet indicates that not all French West African subjects accepted their colonial masters' insistence on the universal applicability of French culture.

Comparing formal schooling in British and French West Africa

Formal education in West Africa was pioneered by religious missionaries, who controlled African education almost exclusively in the pre-World War I period.[34] When colonial government took over control of education in their African territories, they often retained the missionary school structure and objective. Both missionary and colonial schools introduced Western beliefs into

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[32] Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 115.

[33] Jean Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa 1900-1945* (New York: Pica Press, 1971), 382.

[34] David Scanlon, *Traditions of African Education* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), 4.

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African societies; however, colonial schooling replaced religious faith in a Christian God with cultural belief in the superiority of European civilization. Schools became the primary vehicles for opposing indigenous cultures and instilling a new colonial order: "It was in the schools that there was the immediate and face-to-face challenge to traditional society."[35]

The divergent French and British colonial approaches to colonial rule discussed in the previous section were reflected in their contrary approaches to African schooling. West African education programs under French rule followed the assimilationist approach, with its stress on inculcating African subjects with French language and culture through rudimentary French-language education at the primary level and more advanced literacy training at the secondary level. British colonial education pursued an associationist agenda, where Africans were allowed a degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy in the choice of language of instruction and literacy education.[36] Education helped French colonialists assume social, political, and economic control over their West African colonies. In British colonies, Africans were allowed to contribute to their colonial schools. In contrast with French schooling, British education was not as tightly controlled under colonial rule.

This difference in colonial administrations was especially evident in language policies adopted in colonial schools. While Britain applied a culturally pluralistic approach, attempting to "educate Africa along African lines,"[37] French imperialists had a more culturally essentialist world view based on the universality of French civilization. French language learning became the cornerstone of French colonial primary education:[38] "from the lowest standards upwards French takes precedence over the vernaculars, and even in the sub-standard classes verbal French is the chief taught subject."[39] In contrast, the British approach encouraged the use of local languages in the early years of primary school:[40] "the British view is that it is easier, and sounder teaching, to learn

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[35] Cowan et al., 39.

[36] British upper level education in West Africa took a stricter approach to English language education than the indigenous language approach of primary schools. "In Ghana, for example, students who spoke a Ghanaian language were disgraced by having a board with the inscription 'I'm stupid, I spoke a vernacular on the school's premises today' placed on their chests." Obeng & Adegbija (1999), 357.

[37] Mumford, 54.

[38] Gail Kelly notes that French colonial education in Vietnam differed in significant ways from the primary education system established in French West African colonies. Regarding indigenous language use, "West African schools taught solely in French, but in Indochina, the elementary schools taught in the mother tongue—Vietnamese, Rhade, Khmer, Lao." See Gail Paradise Kelly, *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa* (New York: AMS Press, 2000), 240.

[39] Kelly, 57.

[40] Cowen et al, 8.

first in the mother-tongue and later to transfer the skill attained to work in a European language."[41] French colonial education tried to integrate West African subjects into the French system, while the British preferred "making the African a better 'African' rather than a British citizen."[42]

Britain and France only began to formally manage and systematize education in their West African colonies in the 1920s. In British Africa, the Phelps-Stokes Report of 1922 was the first attempt to shape education according to African social conditions and colonial objectives.[43] The 1925 report *Education Policy in British West Africa* further defined colonial schooling, stressing the teaching indigenous languages in West African schools and recommending the production of textbooks written in local languages: "Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life."[44]

Conversely, French administration of African education, beginning with the 1925 *Réorganisant l'Enseignment en Afrique Équatoriale Française*, mandated the reorganization of the educational system through universal use of French as language of instruction. French colonial education was organized around the central premise of teaching French, deemed "the essential vehicle of communication of our civilization."[45] Later, resolution three of the Report on Education at the 1944 French Africa Conference in Brazzaville reiterated this agenda by mandating that "local dialects will be totally forbidden for use either in private or public schools."[46]

When these contrasting approaches were put into practice in colonial schools, they resulted in dramatically different linguistic landscapes. The arbitrary colonial boundaries between British and French territories became salient markers of indigenous literacy, fostering the development of disparate literacy traditions within ethnic groups where communities were split by colonial borders. Generally, in British territories, West Africans learned to write their indigenous languages, while French subjects remained illiterate in the native tongues:

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[41] Mumford, 57.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Scanlon, 54.

[44] Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies, *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1925), 4-5.

[45] Gouvenement Général de l'Afrique Équatorial Française, *Instructions Relatives à l'Application de la Circulaire du Mai 1925 de M. le Gouverneur-Général R. Antonetti Réorganisant l'Enseignement en Afrique Équatoriale Française* (Brazzaville: Imprimerie du Gouvernement Général, 1926).

[46] *Conference Africaine Française*, Brazaville (Paris: Ministère des Colonies, 1945).

> The contrasts [of French colonies] with adjoining British territories were sometimes dramatic. Hausa was written in Nigeria but not in Niger, Yoruba was written in Nigeria but not Dahomey [Benin], Ewe was written in Gold Coast [Ghana] but not Togo, Mandingo was written in the Gambia but not in Senegal or Sudan [Guinea/Mali].[47]

The development of indigenous language literacy among traditionally oral languages implies a greater degree of cultural autonomy in the British associationist system compared to the French assimilationist approach. While the French rejected the development of indigenous languages after the end of Jean Dard's brief experiment in bilingual education in Saint-Louis, Senegal in 1820,[48] Britain developed indigenous language literacy. By 1950, ten "vernacular" literature offices produced teaching and reading materials in and about indigenous languages in British Africa. This helps explain the continued hegemony of French language education and literacy in former French colonies and the formal, political obstacles that blocked the development of native language literacy movements in French West Africa.

While educating African subjects was not a priority for European imperialists, educational institutions were an important means of instilling respect in and control over African subjects for colonial governments. Colonial education socialized Africans by way of European norms and traditions: "Africa's colonial system of education was…characterized by conscious and obvious attempts, first by the foreign missionaries and later by the colonial governments, to educate Africans away from their cultures."[49] European languages became central to educational achievement and advancement in the colonial system. Foreign language acquisition became associated with access to foreign knowledge, power, and wealth, so European language ability became prestigious among Africans aspiring to become local elites.[50]

Formal schooling in West Africa was an important tool of colonial administration. School and rule became two sides of the two counterparts of colonialism, school acculturating Africans to colonial rule and forming an educated cadre to maintain the colonial system. Describing the connection between language policy and colonial conquest, Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o recounts the violence of colonialism as carried out in the classroom: "The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of chalk and the blackboard…The bullet was the means of

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[47] Manning, 168.

[48] Makouta-Mboukou, 17-21.

[49] Brigit Brock-Utne, *Whose Education for All? The Recolonization of the African Mind.* Studies in Educaiton/Politics Vol. 6. (New York: Falmer Press, 2000), 17.

[50] Ibid.

physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation."[51] Oppressive effects of language policy in colonial education took on a less alliterative form for West African students. The primacy of European languages in the colonial mission, even among associationists, often led to policies strictly forbidding indigenous language use at school. French colonial education in West Africa was especially restrictive, adhering to a *mission civilisatrice* "civilizing mission" of inculcating colonial subjects with an appreciation for French language and culture.

French colonial education – ontology and power

Economic exploitation rationalized through the cultural arrogance of ethnocentrism epitomized French colonialism in West Africa. In fulfilling their duties, some French colonialists took up the dissemination of their culture with missionary-like zeal: "The assimilation concept of French cultural superiority was embraced by most colonial administrators, who saw themselves as the instruments of a civilizing mission and felt that the African subjects should be happy to accept the free gift of French culture."[52] A precious few colonialists, like linguist Maurice Delafosse, deemed African culture worthy of study. Delafosse deplored the error of French colonialism's negation of African cultures. African historian Jean Suret-Canale states that "this 'error' was, in fact, a necessity inherent in the colonial system."[53] By this reasoning, colonial power was predicated on the dismissal of African languages and cultures. Attributing to colonialism the power of transforming primitive Africans cultures, the Inspector General of Education in French West Africa, Albert Charton, described the French colonial imperative in 1930 thusly:

> Colonialism, then, resolves itself into effecting the transformation of an indigenous society…The great contribution that we can make as a colonizing power lies precisely in the interweaving and blending of primitive civilizations with our own universally applicable civilization, which will have to justify its position of superiority and authority.[54]

Education was an apt vehicle to justify France's cultural superiority and institutionalize colonial authority. While fervently secular, French colonial education built off missionary schools, striving to convert Africans to believers in the supremacy and universality of French culture: "The French

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[51] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: the politics of Language in African Literature (*Nairibi: Heinemann, 1986), 9. Ngugi took the language question to heart in his writings by switching from publishing in English to his native language Gikuyu in 1977, albeit transcribed in Latin letters.
[52] Harold D. Nelson, *Area Handbook for Guinea* (Washington DC: American University, US Government Printing Office, 1975), 22.
[53] Suret-Canale (1971), 369.
[54] Albert Charton, "The Social Function of Education in French West Africa" in Mumford, 97-112.

would hold that there is one universal civilization to which the world is moving…hence the educational systems which France introduces into Africa are modeled upon French ways of thought and French civilization."[55] This educational approach simultaneously affirmed the justness of the colonial mission and rendered the mission easier to complete by creating African students sympathetic to the colonialism.

For the French, the imposition of French language and culture forged a unified colonial territory. Ethnicity was to be replaced by allegiance to *la patrie*. Hence, French colonial schooling in West Africa was a means to socialize Africans into accepting a power hierarchy based on French cultural superiority and African subordinance. Herbert Deschamps, colonial administrator in Madagascar and governor of Ivory Coast and Senegal, unequivocally tied French language education to cultural assimilation: "Assimilation manifested itself in one area: everywhere and at every level, education was given exclusively in French."[56] Despite the adaptation of colonial education to West African settings, the exclusive use of the French language in schooling and administration perpetuated the assimilationist approach by imposing a colonial worldview on African subjects. This worldview was entirely French in origin and application, resulting in the institutionalized marginalization of indigenous languages: "Politically, assimilation meant the centralization of French rule from Paris, the use of French as the language of administration and the prohibition of the use of African languages in national life."[57] This new social order was central to what I term the "French colonial ontology": a philosophy of being that justified French superiority and the denigration and marginalization of indigenous cultures.[58]

French colonial ontology refers to how French colonialists understood and ordered their world based on what they perceived as universal truths. Central to the French colonial order was a belief in a hierarchy of existence based on European, and specifically French, cultural superiority and African primitivism. I argue that schools, as agents of socialization, taught the colonial ontology as

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[55] Mumford, 54.

[56] Prosser Gifford and W. M. Roger Louis, Eds., *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 552.

[57] Emmanuel N. Kwofie, *The Acquisition and Use of French as a Second Language in Africa* (Hoffmann-Verlag: Gorssen-Linden, 1979), 12.

[58] I employ ontology in the sense of a culturally specific understanding of the world. While ontology has a long history in philosophy regarding existence, often in universalistic terms, I highlight the cultural construction of existence in the culturally derived salience attributed to perceived relationships between objects, people, and concepts. Ontology is based on a formal representation of knowledge, or a *conceptualization*, which represents the relationships between things and ideas (Geneserth and Nilsson, 1987). All ontologies are committed to some specific conceptualization, either explicitly or implicitly (Gruber, 1993). These specific conceptualizations inform the agent's worldview and create a culturally constructed logic of existence.

"truth" and became the vehicles for the propagation of this socio-culturally constructed worldview. This ontology was most effectively transmitted through French colonial language policy impeding indigenous language instruction and literacy. Through French colonial ontology, language and literacy became central to the legitimization of colonial power.

Michel Foucault (1972) maintains that power is based on *discourse*, which is a narrative that defines how power is constructed socially and thereby orders the rules of interaction.[59] According to Foucault, power is "a complex strategic situation in a particular society,"[60] which is enforced through "disciplinary coercions."[61] In colonial French West Africa, the school can be understood as a disciplinary coercion that perpetuated and enforced colonial power. School language education propagated the colonial discourse on power, central to the colonial ontology. By creating an educated elite through colonial education, the colonial school system perpetuated the colonial ontology through educated African administrators. French power was buttressed by linguicism, which Phillipson defines as in terms of an "unequal division of power" on the basis of language."[62] French colonialists used language to legitimize colonial power and differentiate between the African masses and those in whom they could entrust a modicum of power. Linguicism perpetuated the colonial ontology's divisive social hierarchy, which championed things French and denigrated African society.

Literacy training through French colonial schools was an important means of inscribing French power in West Africa. Street (1993) presents an "ideological model of literacy" which focuses on the inextricable link between literacy practices and the structure of power and authority in society.[63] In this respect, French literacy education, and its marginalization of indigenous languages, can be understood in terms of reinforcing the power relationship created through the French colonial ontology. Freire and Macedo (1987) critically examine the objectives of literacy in terms of its allocation of power. They argue that literacy must be understood in terms of how literacy practices function to either empower or disempower people. French colonial literacy education resulted in the reinforcement of colonial power the divestment of indigenous authority. The Inspector General of Education in French West Africa succinctly relates the colonial nexus of

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[59] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
[60] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1 (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 93.
[61] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowldege* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 106.
[62] Phillipson (1992), 47.
[63] Brian Street, "Introduction: The New Literacy Studies" in Brian Street, Ed., *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (Camridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 7.

power and paternalism: "Through education, conquest and domination become a kind of moral annexation."[64]

William Bryant Mumford portrayed French colonial education in West Africa as a system for making African subjects "French in all but the color of their skin."[65] Following Mumford, French colonial education has traditionally been portrayed as a transplant of French metropolitan education in West Africa.[66] However, French educational approaches shifted during the more than one hundred years of French influence and rule in the region. The earliest French schools, such as the School of Hostages, forcibly tried to convert the sons of African chiefs into Frenchmen, while colonial schools after 1894 took a different approach. With the establishment of the Ministry of the Colonies in 1894, colonial education became formalized in colonial administration. The Inspector General of Education for French West Africa, Georges Hardy, instituted an "adapted education" pedagogy in colonial schools.[67] Instead of replicating French metropolitan schooling in West Africa, this system provided limited and inferior schooling based on African themes.

The objective of adapted education was to "inculcate a deep and abiding respect for French civilization and its accomplishments in West Africa."[68] These schools assimilated Africans into a French ontology that legitimized the colonial power hierarchy:

> The texts were written in such a way as to encourage Africans to deny the validity of their own cultural traditions and to admire instead those of the French. Thus they could be considered more assimilative in their overall effect than a straightforward metropolitan curriculum might have been, because they encouraged Africans to measure all experience against the norm of French culture.[69]

Not only did French formal schooling champion French culture, it misrepresented and denigrated African culture based on ethnocentrism and a general disregard for indigenous cultural systems. In French West African colonial schools, African languages, along with the rest of the students' cultural heritage, were shown to be poor, meager, and wanting in comparison with French language and culture. George Hardy, the Inspector General of Education, sums up the role of colonial education as "to transform the primitive peoples of our colonies…in a word, to open schools for him where

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[64] Charton in Mumford, 101.
[65] Mumford, 47.
[66] See Guy de Lusigan, *French-Speaking Africa since Independence* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 47.
[67] Gifford and Weiskel, 691.
[68] Gifford and Weiskel, 697.
[69] Ibid.

his mind can be shaped at our will."[70] French colonial schools based education on French-language education and the solidifying of colonial rule through the teaching of French cultural superiority.

Despite policy shifts and regional differences, education in French West Africa maintained four guidelines during the colonial era: French as language of instruction, limited number of secondary and advanced students, agricultural and vocational training, and secondary education standards equal to secondary school in France.[71] French language instruction was the most faithfully adhered to guideline, since French colonialists saw their language as integral to the colonial civilizing mission. But, their rationale was also economic: "In the French view, it would have been uneconomical, as well as undesirable, to create a literature in scores of African languages."[72] This cost-benefit analysis of indigenous language literacy justified the colonial agenda of imposing French colonial ontology through the French language: "the schools adhered to their mission of teaching the French language, adjusting Africans to their milieu, and of extolling the benefits of French rule."[73] In colonial French West Africa, the "milieu" was not just rural life, but the imposed system of domination. As William Bryant Mumford observed during his tour of French West African colonies in 1935, "The French system is concerned with only one educational objective, preparing pupils for an increasingly European, or *French* Africa."[74] This system of domination, the French colonial ontology, established a social hierarchy, favoring French culture, language, and colonialists over African cultures, languages, and subjects.

While French colonial education was founded on the universality of French civilization, it paradoxically taught difference and socialized African students into the colonial power hierarchy. Gail Paradise Kelly's analysis of colonial curricula in French West African primary schools between 1918 and 1938 shows how French language instruction used African themes and settings to indoctrinate students with a French colonial understanding of European superiority and African inferiority. French primary school textbooks introduced the French language through vignettes, which depicted a power hierarchy with colonialists at the top, followed by educated Africans, and the uneducated African masses at the bottom. Schooling taught that the first step to climbing the ladder to French civilization and colonial privilege was the French language: "The school thus

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[70] Hardy 1917, quoted in Phillipson (1992), 114.
[71] Scanlon, 118.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Kelly, 213.
[74] Mumford, 59.

defined the 'good' student as one who sets himself apart from other Africans by exclusively speaking French."[75] In this way, French schooling extolled the student who separated himself from his peers and culture through his adoption of the French language. French and indigenous languages, according to the colonial hierarchy, were mutually exclusive.

General primary education in French West Africa focused on imparting functional fluency in spoken French, and only students who continued on to secondary schools were taught French literacy. The colonial administration guaranteed employment to African students who successfully became literate in French by completing post-primary education.[76] Consequently, schooling and French literacy became the means and markers of economic status among colonial subjects: "The schools taught the belief that the French language, literacy and francophone culture were the means to individual social advance and aggregate social renovation."[77] Education produced a new social class of elites, distinguished from the African masses as *évolué*, evolved. The indigenous elites were instrumental in perpetuating French ontology and culture in colonial and independent Africa. Their worldviews were informed by colonial curricula, which distanced African students from their communities and cultures. "The academic content of the instruction, which was entirely in French, was of French origin and largely irrelevant to African life."[78] They solidified the importance of French fluency and literacy as a symbol of status and connection to resources.

French colonialists recognized the effectiveness of the educational system as a medium of transmission of the colonial order, making an effort to spread their influence as their control over West Africa weakened at the end of the colonial era. The last French colonial educational development plan promulgated in Africa before the collapse of French control recommended expanding primary enrollments to accommodate 50 percent of the school aged population in French West Africa. Despite the plan's promotion of "truly human, social and practical instruction,"[79] it is important to note that this plan did not stray from the central colonial policy of promoting French language instruction and literacy.[80] The "superiority" of French was both the medium of instruction and the message. Thus, throughout the colonial encounter in West Africa, France dedicated schooling to promoting a French ontology. While colonial lessons and schoolbooks portrayed

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[75] Kelly, 191.
[76] Cowen et al, 10.
[77] Manning, 100.
[78] Nelson, 29.
[79] *Premier Rapport de la Commission de Modernisation des Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Paris, 1948), 74.
[80] See Article 5 in *Rapport*.

African scenes, the message of African inferiority was alien to African society. French colonial education and language policy promulgated a new perception of Africa based on French ethnocentrism and African marginalization.

Colonial schooling was the principal vehicle for inculcating this ontology: "colonial action in cultural matters was limited more or less exclusively to education, an education conceived as strictly utilitarian and proceeding from the only culture considered to be of any value—that of the colonizer."[81] The imposition of French as the exclusive language of instruction and as the only alphabet for literacy was the chief means of supplanting the centrality of African cultures: "The strict control of education and the depersonalization of the pupils meant forbidding the use of local languages."[82]

The N'ko alphabet was created in this social milieu of French-language dominance propagated by French colonial schooling. It represented a challenge to French colonial schooling and the monopoly on civilization and knowledge it promoted. Invented outside of the colonial schoolhouse, the N'ko alphabet drew its intellectual base from Quranic schools and indigenous knowledge. Like Quranic schooling, learning N'ko allowed students access to literacy and knowledge outside of the officially sanctioned colonial channels. Unlike colonial schooling, N'ko learning was not rooted in the colonial social hierarchy. Instead, by embedding itself in African languages and promoting African cultures, N'ko disproved the supremacy and universality of French culture. Instead of promoting colonial control and conquest, the N'ko alphabet allowed Africans a degree of autonomy and control outside of the colonial hierarchy. Where French language literacy was a symbol of colonial power and wealth, N'ko literacy was a means of self-empowerment, especially among informal traders outside the official colonial economy. In this respect, N'ko became an especially important tool and symbol for Maninka communities experiencing the cultural stranglehold of French colonial rule.

Maninka communities under French rule

After colonial powers divided up their spoils at the Berlin Conference, Maninka communities and lands were subsumed into the French Sudan territory, where they were subject to French colonial domination and schooling. After the French Sudan was divided into the separate territories of Guinea and Mali in 1899, colonial boarders split the largest Maninka community along

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[81] Suret-Canale (1971), 371.
[82] Suret-Canale (1971), 381.

the eastern boarder of Guinea and the western boarder of Mali.[83] This separation followed the colonial strategy of divide and conquer, splitting indigenous communities to facilitate colonial rule. The division diminished the political clout of the Maninka community, who became "hence rendered impotent in any effort to unify against the French empire."[84] Since both Mali and Guinea remained French territories after the division, education and language policies stayed rooted in French fluency and literacy, impeding the development of native-language literacy.

Maninka and Manding communities in budding urban centers like Kankan and Bamako suffered French education and thus indoctrination into the colonial ontology. Both towns had preparatory "initiation schools," which introduced Africans to "the world of French peoples," where the main subject of the curriculum was spoken French.[85] The educational infrastructure in Kankan, Guinea was composed of preparatory schools, primary schools, a regional school, and a vocational agricultural school. While the educational infrastructure under colonialism was not extensive, it was the primary vehicle of socio-cultural indoctrination that had repercussions throughout native society, including Maninka who did not attend French schools. According to Guinea's first president, all levels of colonial education eroded Maninka cultural autonomy: "primary and secondary education aimed at all times at producing depersonalization and cultural dependence."[86] For the most part, the penetration of French colonial schooling was limited in remote Maninka areas, reaching only eight percent of the national population by one estimate.[87] However, the effects of French pedagogy spread beyond the classroom by reinforcing French cultural superiority and native underdevelopment. Sékou Touré blamed colonial schools for perpetuating colonial power through oppression: "The colonial school, in its structure as well as in its contents, reflected the colonial philosophy: it was a laboratory of dehumanization and enslavement."[88] Thus, the French colonial system was an important vehicle for instilling the imposed worldview and social order of the French colonial ontology.

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[83] Jean Suret-Canale, *La République de Guinée* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1976), 84; For the geography of Maninka communities on the border, see Valentine Vydrine and Ted Bergman, "Mandé Language Family of West Africa: Location and Genetic Classification," (SIL International, 2000).

[84] Diane Oyler, *For 'All Those Who Say N'ko': N'ko Literacy and Mande Cultural Nationalism in the Republic of Guinea.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Florida: 1995), 121.

[85] Mumford, 32.

[86] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Africa on the Move* (London: Panaf Books, 1979), 446.

[87] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Afrique et la Révolution* (Paris, Présence africaine, 1967).

[88] Touré (1967), 210.

Language policy in French schools was the main instrument of the dehumanization Touré recounts. "In French Guinea, for example, the use of French as the language of instruction began the process of deculturation in the elementary school."[89] Deculturation meant not only the replacement of local cultures with French culture, but also the fostering of student self-denigration and disdain for one's own culture. In colonial schools, valorization of French meant the vilification of indigenous languages. Formal education concentrated on French fluency, ignoring and marginalizing Maninka and other local idioms, leading to student disregard for their own languages. The sub-text to colonial language and literacy policy insinuated that indigenous languages were not worthy of formal study and not appropriate for sophisticated thought.

Maninka students learned French literacy and composition while studying French history and geography in Kankan at the Government Regional School.[90] Regional schools were boarding schools run under the watchful eye of a French school director, with learning structured according to French metropolitan norms. Regional schools were an institutional experience and "formed a discrete cultural enclave where Frenchmen detached the sons of indigenous elites from African society."[91] Bamako's Higher Primary schools taught "French arts" and were considered "growing points of French civilization in Africa."[92] Maninka students studied the French language using colonial textbooks like the *Mamadou et Bineta* series which, while introducing African settings into colonial curricula, promulgated African inferiority and the colonial social hierarchy. Lessons contrasting the mud huts of the native quarter with the "pretty houses built of stone and white wash" of the European quarter highlighted difference and illustrated the local geopolitics of the colonial social order.[93] In French Guinea, Maninka students read from *Deuxième Livret de l'École Noir,* reciting texts that inculcated deference to colonial power: "My teacher is a white man. He is my master. I am his student. I like him and obey him."[94] As a result, Maninka students from initiation schools up through higher primary schools were instilled with a colonial worldview based on the primacy of French civilization and language. Learning to be marginal, as discussed by Gail Kelly (2000), was an integral objective of French colonial education.

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[89] Oyler (1995), 57.

[90] Ibid, 35.

[91] Kelly, 190.

[92] Mumford, 44.

[93] Monod, *Deuxième Livret de l'École Noir. Language Correspondant au Programme des Écoles de Villages de l"AOF* (Paris: Delagrave, 1929), 73 cited in Kelly, 2000: 194.

[94] J. L. Monod, *Deuxième Livret de lÉcolier Noir. Language et lecture correspondant au program des écoles de village de l'AOF,* (Paris: Delagrave, 1926), 7, quoted in Kelly, 191.

For Guinea's first president, who was Maninka, French colonial schooling's focus on French civilization at the insult of African culture had a detrimental effect on Maninka people: "Our school textbooks in the colonial schools taught us about Gallic wars, the life of Joan of Arc or Napoleon, the list of the French departments, Lamartine's poems of Molière's plays, just as if Africa had never had any history, past, or geographical existence or cultural life."[95] While curriculum guides and teacher manuals issued by the Education Service of French West Africa promoted the teaching of West African history in colonial schools, colonialist historians such as J. L. Monod rendered a biased version of African history. Though charged with writing African history texts for French West African schools, Monod readily admitted that he found African history incomprehensible and seemingly disconnected.[96] When African history was taught in the colonial classroom, African heroes, like Maninka anti-colonialist Samoury Touré, were portrayed unfavorably as despots and war-mongers.[97] History lessons became propaganda for French rule, portraying colonial conquest as bringing peace and order to a barbarous and chaotic Africa.[98] For some Africans, the adaptation of textbooks and curricula to African schools was evidence of a colonial agenda. Sékou Touré accused French colonial education of purposefully limiting technical and cultural empowerment of education for Guinean subjects: "The colonialists were very careful, for example, to avoid founding schools of administration where young Africans could have been trained as efficient administrators or as teachers of true African history. This conscious intention to keep the African population in a state of inferiority is obvious from the curriculum and nature of colonial education."[99] Written entirely in French by colonialists, textbooks recapitulated the colonial worldview and satisfied French colonial education objectives.

The social implications of French language education did not escape Maninka people. Many Maninka speakers opposed the imposition of French language education, refusing to send their children to the colonial schools.[100] While schools were instruments of colonial power, they also became foci of cultural dissent. With the drive to independence in West Africa came the demand for the Africanization of colonial schools. While the expansion and Africanization of the education

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[95] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Africa on the Move* (Lodon: Panaf Books, 1979), 445.

[96] Kelly, 215.

[97] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *African Resistance to Colonial Penetration* (Conakry: Bureau de presse de la Présidence de la République populaire révolutionnaire de Guinée, 1983), 13.

[98] Kelly (2000), 224. Kelly quotes from J. L. Monod's *L'Histoire de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles indigenes de l'AOF, 1926).

[99] Touré (1979), 446.

[100] Oyler (1995), 79.

system at the end of the colonial period did not displace French language education and literacy in most francophone West African countries, an indigenous alternative to French education was budding in Maninka communities. The N'ko alphabet offered an alternative to French-language education and permitted the creation of indigenous texts suited to indigenous audiences.

Indigenous literacy under French colonialism

Throughout West Africa, colonial schooling spread Western education and literacy in the Latin alphabet. In French West Africa, Latin letters were taught exclusively for French literacy, French colonialists showing little interest in transcribing indigenous languages. Perhaps not coincidentally, during the colonial era, many non-Latin scripts developed and spread in African communities. Among indigenous scripts, the N'ko alphabet figures prominently in the recent history of literacy in West Africa. As a means for transcribing the Maninka language, it has gained popularity unrivaled by other scripts.

Yet, N'ko was not the first script to be adapted to Maninka. The adaptation of Arabic script to Maninka predates all other accounts of Maninka-language literacy: "Testimonies exist of the use of Arabic characters by Maninka people for the transcription of their languages dating back 160 years, indicating that the beginning of this practice dates from a more ancient period."[101] Quranic schools were first established in Maninka communities as early as the 11th century, spreading the Arabic language and script. However, Arabic never displaced Maninka as a common language. Modified Arabic scripts are sporadically used in Maninka communities currently, but neither spoken nor written Arabic entered into common usage among Maninka people.

Today in Muslim West Africa, Maninka speakers learn Arabic prayers and may attend *madersas* as children, as did Souleymane Kanté. Consequently, some Maninka speakers are able to read and write Arabic scriptures. Yet, exceedingly few people use Arabic to write Maninka.[102] While the N'ko script can notate Arabic sounds through special consonant and diacritic combinations,

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[101] Valentin Vydrine, "Sur l'Ecriture Mandingue et Mandé en Caractères Arabs," in *Mandenkan: Bulletin d'Etudes Linguistique Mandé,* No. 33 (Spring 1998): 1.
[102] Vydrine (1998).

writing Arabic in N'ko is quite limited. The vast majority of Muslim themed religious publications available in N'ko are translations of Arabic into Maninka using N'ko characters.[103]

A 1994 literacy of survey of Kankan, Guinea found that only about 8.5 percent of the survey population was literate in Arabic script.[104] This statistic was comparable to the level of N'ko literacy in the same population. So despite the long-standing tradition of formal and nonformal Arabic literacy education in the historical hub of Islamic learning in Guinea, people in Kankan were as likely to be able to write Arabic in Arab letters as write Maninka in N'ko. This finding is surprising considering that, at the time of the survey, the N'ko alphabet had been in existence for less than 50 years, while Arabic literacy had been taught among Maninka for perhaps hundreds of years. The Kankan census did not investigate what percent of the Arabic literate population used Arabic letters to write in Maninka, but other research indicates that Arabic literacy among Maninka is almost completely confined to reading and writing from the Quran and hadiths.[105] So, apart from limited use of Latin letters to write Maninka names, the N'ko alphabet is the preferred system among Maninka for transcribing their language.

In addition to Arabic script, N'ko has competed with indigenous writing systems developed in West Africa. Despite Western perceptions of the feebleness of literacy in West Africa, there is copious evidence of numerous African literacy movements. Linguist David Dalby surveyed sixteen modern West African indigenous scripts, almost all of which, like N'ko, were invented during the colonial era.[106] Most were invented by Africans who had not received formal education or attended colonial schools. Few had attended Quranic schools, gaining basic literacy in Arabic. All of the inventors tailored their writing systems to their natal languages. These alphabets and syllabaries were taught within specific language groups and some transversed colonial borders, spreading into neighboring communities. Outside the colonial education systems, these writing systems were taught nonformally and transmitted along traditional and extra-colonial networks, through kinship, chiefdoms and traditional political hierarchies, trade routes, traditional religions, and Islam. The majority of these scripts served narrow cultural and functional roles in their respective communities.

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[103] See "Publications in N'ko" http://home.gwu.edu/~cwme/Nko/publications.htm, accessed 4/20/03. Some books note special Arabic prayers and holy words in Arabic using N'ko characters. See Arafan Keita, *Ala Too (99 Names of God),* Kissidougou, Guinea, 1999.
[104] Oyler (1995), 330.
[105] Vydrine (1998).
[106] David Dalby, "The Historical Problem of the Indigenous Scripts of West Africa and Surinam" in David Dalby, ed., *Language and History in Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), 109-119.

These scripts experienced varying degrees of popularity among their linguistic communities, most of which were limited to note-taking and personal correspondences. The Vai syllabary gained wide-spread popularity in Liberia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but its dispersion has lessened in the post-colonial period. Only the N'ko script has continued to mushroom in popularity from colonialism up to the present, able to sustain a grassroots literacy movement across West Africa.

Cultural construction of literacy

With evidence of the numerous indigenous attempts to create literacy movements in West Africa, what accounts for the success of N'ko over other similar initiatives? Did some scripts prove "better" than others? What motivated learners to choose one script over the other? These questions solicit a discussion of the assumptions underlying literacy.

Literacy is often considered a neutral tool that can be applied in any setting. However, becoming literate is not simply a cognitive process or learning a skill. Literacy is complicated by the social milieu in which it occurs. Brian Street (1993) differentiates between these two conceptions of literacy: the *autonomous* model, conceiving of literacy as a skill independent of social context, and the *ideological* model, viewing literacy as inextricably linked to culture and power structures which produce a variety of cultural practices around literacy.[107] A methodological approach based on the autonomous model portrays literacy as technical skill, focusing myopically on the mechanics of literacy education. It isolates literacy as an independent variable, removed from its cultural context, and correlates literacy with universal notions of "progress" and "development."[108] This approach ignores the cultural conditionality of the social milieu as a determining factor on the adoption of specific literacy methods. "In general, this approach abstracts methodological issues from their ideological contexts and consequently ignores the interrelationship between the sociopolitical structures of a society and the act of reading."[109]

Literacy cannot be defined universally by a skill level or one body of knowledge. Instead, definitions of literacy vary according to specific cultural contexts, as do motivations and implications of literacy. Like other cultural constructions, literacy is *situated* knowledge, drawing its significance

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[107] Brian Street, "Introduction: The New Literacy Studies" in Brian Street, Ed., *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (Camridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 5-7.

[108] Brian Street, "Literacy and Social Change: The Significance of Social Context in the Development of Literacy Programs" in Daniel A. Wagner, Ed., *The Future of Literacy in a Changing World* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1998), 56.

[109] Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers Inc., 1987), 145.

from the specific cultural conditions of its application. This is true for both indigenous and adopted literacies. In a case study of Arabic literacy among the Mende of West Africa, Bledsoe and Robey (1993) argue that the Mende have reinterpreted Arabic literacy to fit their cultural need to protect knowledge. Instead of facilitating communication, Arabic literacy is valued in Mende society, according to the authors, because of its difficulty and restrictiveness.[110] As elsewhere, literacy practice in West Africa is dependent on the socio-cultural implications of literacy choice. In colonial French West Africa, French literacy served colonial aims and promoted assimilation into a colonial worldview, giving educated Africans exploiting French a taste of colonial power, prestige, affluence, while N'ko literacy served local needs and promoted an indigenist perspective, giving Maninka an alternative to French literacy and colonial definitions of 'civilization.' In this way, literacy choice in colonial West Africa served different goals, presented different worldviews, and created different conceptions of self for Africans. McCarthey (2001) argues that "literacy practices are one means through which identities are constructed."[111] Different literacies have distinct cultural implications that affect not just access to written information but also the construction of identity.
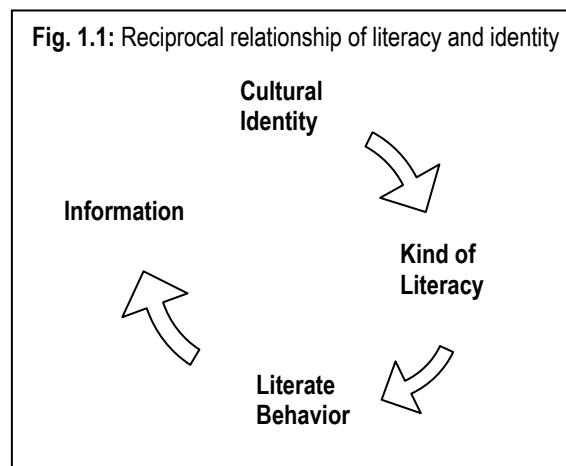
Fig. 1.1: Reciprocal relationship of literacy and identity

Roth (1984) notes the connection between "literacy acquisition" and "cultural transmission." Ferdman (1990) argues that cultural identity both affect and is affected by literacy: "cultural identity mediates the process of becoming literate as well as the types of literate behavior in which a person subsequently engages."[112] So, cultural identity affects literacy choice, which in turn determines the kind of information accessible and the kind of literate behavior undertaken. These literacy practices transmit cultural knowledge which recycles back to inform cultural identity (see Figure 1.1). The reflexive nature of literacy and identity make

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[110] Caroline H. Bledsoe and Kenneth M. Robey, "Arabic Literacy and Secrecy among the Mende of Sierra Leone" in Brian Street, Ed., *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (Camridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 110-134.

[111] Sarah J. McCarthey, "Identity Construction in Elementary Readers and Writers" in *Reading Research Quarterly* 36, Vol. 2 (April-June 2001): 124.

[112] Bernardo M. Ferdman, "Literacy and Cultural Identity" in *Harvard Educational Review* 60, No. 2 (May 1990): 197.

them especially sensitive to culture. The recent history of language learning in West Africa attests to the cultural salience of literacy.

While French colonialists unflaggingly promoted French language literacy, African communities adapted scripts to indigenous languages in direct reaction against colonial laws banning indigenous languages and colonial demotion of African language to 'dialects' and 'vernaculars.' The creation of more than a dozen indigenous scripts in West Africa during the height of the colonial era seems to be more than coincidental. Dalby explains that many of the inventors of these new scripts shared a belief that they were divinely inspired to create these writing systems, "chosen to bring the gift of writing to their people."[113] While impressed by the communicative power of writing as employed by colonialists,[114] these inventors were motivated by a 'divine' mission to create a script of their own adapted to their culture and language. These inventors shared a cultural imperative to bring literacy to their communities, which were excluded and marginalized by colonial education. They spread literacy in indigenous languages using home-made scripts, choosing to build on their cultural resources instead of accepting the denigration of their languages. In this respect, choosing N'ko literacy under French colonialism was not just a practical choice for Maninka people. N'ko was a cultural choice that supported indigenous identity over colonial ethnocentrism. Purves (1987) argues that literacy involves mastering a body of conventional knowledge. However, N'ko literacy under colonialism shows that literacy choice also entails a broader choice of knowledge systems, where literacies can present different and conflicting ontologies. At their cores, French language literacy meant accepting the superiority of French culture, while N'ko literacy meant validating African knowledge.[115]

To illustrate the cultural construction of literacy among indigenous writing systems in West Africa, Vai literacy offers an interesting comparison to N'ko. Vai is a syllabary popular among the Vaiyinka of Liberia and Sierra Leone. They are Mande language speakers whose language shares a high degree of lexical similarity with Maninka. Scriber and Cole (1981) note "The Vai and other Manding peoples maintain close linguistic and cultural ties to this day."[116] Vaiyinka ethnic groups

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[113] David Dalby, "The Indigenous Scripts of West Africa and Surinam: Their Inspiration and Design" in *African Language Studies* 9 (1968): 163.

[114] Scriber and Cole (1981) recount a story where the inventor of the Vai script was awed by the communicative capacity of letters that transmitted information over space and time without an interlocutor.

[115] While seemingly essentialist, this statement does not insinuate that literacy choice limits cognition or thought. Instead, I argue that different literacies, due to their cultural construction, provide access to different information and viewpoints.

[116] Scriber and Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 265.

border areas where N'ko users can be found and some Vayinka are reported to have learned N'ko at mosques in West Point and Kakatata, Liberia.[117] Yet, while N'ko and the Vai script have been in use since the colonial era, they are not conflicting literacies. This is due to the specific and separate socio-cultural roles Vai and N'ko fulfill in their respective communities. On the functional level, Vai and N'ko are not in competition due to the linguistic and cultural specificity of the two scripts. The Vai syllabary was created by a native Vai to conform to the syllables of the Vaiyinka language. Vai proved successful and in 1933 linguist Klingenheben declared the Vai syllabary ideally suited to the characteristics of spoken Vai.[118] In contrast, the N'ko alphabet was created by a Maninka with his natal language's tonal character in mind. While N'ko has been used to transcribe other languages, it remains most widely used for transcribing Maninka, and N'ko's morphology has been tailored to Maninka. [119]

Apart from this functional analysis, however, the cultural relevance of the two scripts also prevents their competition. Scribner and Cole's research in Liberia shows that the Vai script is used in important personal affairs, especially private correspondences, finances and funerary ceremonies. The Vai script has been incorporated into the private and ceremonial lives of Vai people, accruing cultural value within the local cultural context. N'ko is not part of the cultural heritage of Vai people and currently is not culturally salient for Vai people. Both scripts were created to promote indigenous languages within their specific socio-cultural contexts. For Maninka communities in Guinea, N'ko originally spread as an alternative to the marginalization of indigenous language literacy propagated under French colonialism. The early 19th century invention of the Via script was a response to increased pressure from foreign literacies, Roman and Arabic, due to the spread of Islam and the foundation of the Colony of Liberia.[120] In this respect, Vai and N'ko presented indigenous literacies adapted to their specific linguistic and cultural environments.

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[117] Oyler (1995), 272.

[118] A. Klingenheben, "The Vai Script" in *Africa* 6: 158-171.

[119] N'ko informants in Guinea testified to the inherent adaptability of N'ko, showing me letters and documents written in languages other than Maninka. However, publications available in N'ko demonstrate that writing non-Manding languages in N'ko is still quite rare.

[120] Scribner and Cole (1981), 265; Dalby states, "It seems almost certain that the main impetus behind the devising and popularizing of the Via script was the desire to acquire the power and advantages which were seen to belong to the literate Europeans, Afro-American settlers and Mandingo Muslims with whom the Vai came in contact." David Dalby, "A Survey of the Indigenous Writing Scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa" in *African Language Studies* 8 (1967): 9.

The cultural construction of literacy attests that literacy is not a neutral tool, drawing attention to the cultural conditionality of literacy practices. As Brian Street (1993) notes, "Literacy is part of the communicative repertoire…it is a social construction not a neutral technology: it varies from one culture or sub-group to another and its uses are embedded in relationships of power…"[121] The cultural construction of literacy informs by what means literacy can be achieved and to what ends literacy can be applied in any particular society. For Maninka people, N'ko literacy rose out of the power hierarchy of French colonial rule. N'ko developed from a single Guinean's creation to a broad literacy campaign that defended Maninka culture before the denigration of French colonial education.

Development of N'ko

It was in a colonial environment of African linguistic and cultural marginalization that Souleymane Kanté, the inventor of the N'ko script, was raised. The impetus to create the N'ko alphabet arose as a response to the ethnocentrism that the French colonial hierarchy instituted in West Africa. Souleymane Kanté's youth in French-controlled Guinea and his adult years in neighboring Ivory Coast represent an alternative to the French colonial educational system and a direct rejection of the precepts of French-language superiority it represented. The creation of N'ko served as an important expression of indigenous intelligence and an affirmation of the validity of African cultures and knowledge.

Souleymane Kanté was born in 1922 in Soumankoï, a small village 15 kilometers from the regional capital Kankan. By 1922, Kankan was already the second biggest city in Guinea, designated the capital of Upper Guinea.[122] It served as a thriving commercial center and an important colonial outpost. The colonial infrastructure was well developed in Kankan, being the last stop on the national railway, connected by bridges and roads to other regions, and having colonial educational infrastructure including a Governmental Regional School. Tax collection and forced labor were organized by French colonialists throughout the region, causing migration out of Upper Guinea.[123] Kankan was also an important center of Islamic learning in Guinea. The Baté area, where Soumankoï is located, was home to renowned Maninka *marabouts*, respected Muslim priests, called

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[121] Brian Street, ed., *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28-29.
[122] P. Humbolt, "Kankan: metropole de la Haute-Guinée" in *Renseignments Coloniaux et Documents* no. 6 (1921).
[123] Oyler (1995), 135.

Manika-Mori.[124]   They were responsible for the expansion of Islam in Maninka communities through numerous Quranic schools in the Baté area. The convergence of these French and Arabic systems in Kankan was important to the development of N'ko, pressuring Souleymane Kanté to prove the validity of indigenous culture.

Souleymane Kanté spent his youth learning Arabic at his father's Islamic school in Soumankoï. He did not attend the French schools, since it was irrelevant to village life and his father, a renowned Muslim teacher in the region, emphasized religious learning. His father is reported to have attracted Mande students from around West Africa to his school, which taught hundreds of students at its peak.[125]   The convergence of students from different regions and countries who shared a cultural history and linguistic root was a formative experience for Kanté, driving his later efforts to create a script relevant to Mande people.

Souleymane Kanté's father did not send his children to colonial school, like many other families in Kankan prefecture: "In Kankan, many Muslims rejected the imposition of the French language and culture on the socialization of their children by refusing to send them to the French schools."[126] By Souleymane's youth, the colonial social hierarchy had clearly defined the roles of different languages. French was the language of foreign administrators and educated African évolués, acting as a symbol of colonial power and administration. Arabic remained the language of religious authority for Muslims. Maninka was the language of commerce and local culture. By attending his father's Muslim school, Kanté gained access to religious knowledge, Arabic literacy, and respect from the Muslim community for his mastery of Arabic script. By remaining outside French colonial education, Kanté remained part of what *l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) school books and French colonialists considered the dull African masses. Kanté was excluded from the networks of official power and privilege accessed through French literacy education. Instead, Kanté cultivated a profound respect for his native language and culture—developments which a colonial education would have impeded. His education gave him literacy and fluency in a foreign language without denigrating his own culture or imposing an ontology based on French superiority. Despite

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[124] Djibril Tamsir Niane, *La République de Guinée* (Conakry: SAEC, 1998), 41. Niane explains that the Maninka-Mori were originally Sarakolé migrants from Mali who settled in the Baté area in the 17th century, devoting themselves mostly to Islam and commerce. See Djibril Tamsir Niane, "Mise en place des populations de la Haute-Guinée" in *Recherches africaines* No. 2 (April 1960): 40-53.

[125] There were as many as 300 students in attendance, representing various Manding language speakers (Bamana, Maninka, Mandingo, Meni). See Diaka Laye Kaba, "Souleymane Kanté : l'inventeur de l'alphabet N'ko" in *L'Educateur : Trimestriel Pédagogique des Enseignants de Guinée* no. 11-12 (Avril-Septembre 1992): 33.

[126] Oyler (1995), 140.

his lack of French language education and literacy, Kanté gained a reputation as a bright scholar with a natural acuity for memorization and study.[127] However, Kanté would not remain content with Arabic language literacy, since Arabic was primarily used for religious study with little practical functionality or cultural value for Maninka.

Despite his emersion in Arabic schooling, Kanté was not completely outside of the reach of the French colonial government. After his father's death in 1941, Kanté left Soumankoï to travel in West Africa. From World War I, a term of three years' military service was compulsory for African subjects, fueling French colonial expeditions in Syria, Morocco, Indochina, and Algeria in the inter-war years and later conscripting West Africans to defend French territories from German occupation.[128] Afraid of being conscripted, Souleymane Kanté abandoned his travels and soon returned home where he hid from colonial officers who were drafting African subjects to defend France against Nazi Germany in World War II.[129] A year or so later, Kanté was able to sneak across the border into Ivory Coast, traveling back roads to avoid capture by French militia, who had closed the border and were imprisoning travelers and traders who tried to get across.[130] After more than a month of traveling, Kanté arrived safely in Bouaké, Ivory Coast where he became part of a large diaspora community of Manding language speakers, including Maninka and Julas[131], whose language was mutually intelligible with Kanté's native Maninka. As a trade language, Jula was widespread in Ivory Coast, intelligible to the majority of Ivoirians.[132] Here he began his professional career as a trader and his intellectual search for a means to transcribe his language.

Ivory Coast near the end of the colonial period resembled Guinea in the extent of colonial penetration and control. The French colonial ontology was, if anything, more entrenched in Ivory Coast due to large French settlements and investments. Colonial schooling was more widespread, enrolling more than twice as many students in Ivory Coast than Guinea at the end of the colonial

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[127] Oyler (1995), 146.

[128] Suret-Canale (1988), 192.

[129] Bourama Kanté, "Souvenir de Kanté Souleymane" in *Somoya Sila: Journal Culturel de l'Association ICRA-N'KO* no. 19 (December 1996).

[130] Oyler (1995), 77.

[131] The term Jula is alternately written Dyula or Dioula. This term refers to a Mande trader class and is also the name of the Manding language dialect they speak. For a detailed synopsis of the different linguistic and cultural meanings attributed to Jula, see Valentin Vydrine, *Manding-English Dictionary (Maninka, Bamana) Volume 1,* Introduction, Section 1.4 (St. Petersburg, Russia: Dimitry Bulanin Publishing House, 1999), 8-9.

[132] While colonial period estimates are not available, post-colonial estimates approximate that 65 percent of Ivoirians speak Jula, and an even higher proportion can understand it. Conférence des Ministres de l'Éducation des États d'Expression Française, *Promotion et integration des langues nationals dans les systèmes éducatifs* (Paris: Champion, 1986).

period.[133] French colonial schools and a large French settler community promulgated French cultural superiority and a colonial social hierarchy. While accounts of Kanté time in Ivory Coast make no mention of his interaction with French colonialists, his Arabic-language fluency and literacy provided him a connection to Lebanese traders in the region. Lebanese represented a liminal class in the colonial social hierarchy. Within this hierarchy, Lebanese were an intermediate group— neither European elites nor African subjects.[134] They traded with local Africans and competed with Maninka and Jula traders like Souleymane Kanté, but they generally identified with the colonial depiction of African subjects as culturally inferior. They sided with French culture, but were not considered as equals according to the colonial social hierarchy: In Ivory Coast, "some Lebanese vigorously sought to ingratiate themselves with the French administration of the colony…Like Europeans, Lebanese had light complexions and, especially if they were Maronite, partook of French culture. By no means, though, were they accepted as members of the colonial white elite by colons and administrators."[135] For Souleymane Kanté, one particular interaction with the Lebanese community in Ivory Coast made clear Lebanese affinity for French colonialism and foreign ethnocentrism.

While in Bouaké, Souleymane Kanté is reported to have learned the opinion of a Lebanese journalist who considered African languages impossible to transcribe.[136] By most accounts, Kanté read an article by Lebanese journalist Kamal Marwa in an Arabic publication called *We are in Africa*, which argued that African languages are primitive since they lack a written tradition.[137] The author likened communication in African languages to the tweeting of birds, reiterating colonial perceptions of the inferiority of African languages and cultures. Reading this article, Kanté became painfully aware of foreign perceptions of his language and culture based on ethnocentrism and a misrepresentation of Africa by foreigners. The journalist's argument was premised on the position that the only means for Africans to advance and develop is through the appropriation of foreign-language literacy and the abandonment of indigenous languages. This perspective was supported by

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[133] Jerry B. Bolibaugh, *Educational Development in Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Ivory Coast* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1972), 16.

[134] Kenneth Blakemore and Brian Cooksey, *A Sociology of Education for Africa* (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers, 1981), 23.

[135] Chris Bierwirth, "The initial establishment of the Lebanese community in Cote D'Ivoire, Ca. 1925-45" in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, Issue 2 (1997): 325.

[136] Kaba (1992), 33.

[137] Diane Oyler, "A Cultural Revolution in Africa: Literacy in the Republic of Guinea since Independence" in *The International Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (2001b): 588 f6.

the French colonial education system's strict ban on the use of African languages. "[Marwa's] position reflected the prevailing belief of colonial Europeans that Africans were inferior because they had no indigenous written form of communication."[138] The official validation given to French language and literacy through colonial language policy and the benefits reaped by évolué African subjects served to legitimate the superiority of French. The Lebanese journalist seems to have adopted the French colonial ontology, denigrating African languages. This indirect refute of African linguistic valor shocked Souleymane Kanté into action.[139]

As a rebuttal to the Lebanese journalist and the colonial worldview he propagated, Souleymane Kanté began a seven year study of indigenous language literacy. Abandoning both the Arabic and Latin scripts as ill-suited to transcribing a tonal language like his native Maninka, Kanté decided to create a wholly unique writing system tailored to Maninka and other Mande languages. On 14 April 1949, Kanté is reported to have unveiled his new creation, the N'ko alphabet.[140] Expressly conforming his alphabet to local conditions, Kanté hoped to create an alphabet that would be easy and intuitive for his fellow Africans. He accomplished this by using 25 simple characters, with seven vowels and 18 consonants.[141] Eight diacritics conformed to tones in Maninka and related Mande languages.[142] After finalizing the letters, Kanté surveyed illiterate villagers "untouched by Islam's Arabic influence or by colonialism's European influence"[143] to find out what would be the easiest and most intuitive direction for the script. The majority of people surveyed wrote from right to left, so Kanté made his script one of the few writing systems in the world which is written in this manner.[144]

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[138] Diane Oyler, "The Era of Mande Enlightenment" in *Mande Studies* 3 (2001a): 77.

[139] Oyler (1995) notes informants reported that Kanté was sick with shock for several days after reading the article.

[140] Kaba (1992), 33.

[141] The alphabet has undergone permutations. Two consonants were added—*n* for special use in Maninka indicating first person and first person possessive (I, my) and *rr* a doubling of the *r* sound—expanding the alphabet 27 letters. The letters for *j* and *ch* were also revised, since, in their original form, they were the only letters which dipped below the baseline. Some informants explained that the original forms often interfered with accents and letters in words written below them.

[142] More specifically, N'ko codes for eight vowel tones through seven diacritics written above N'ko vowels. These tones, called *kammasséré*, also allow dialectical variations in pronunciation, such as a long vowel tone and a long vowel interrupted by a *g* or *k* sound differentiating Bamana from Jula. These variations are pronounced differently but have the same meaning which all speakers can understand through N'ko tone diacritics. Some of the seven diacritics can be applied in various combinations over consonants to indicate imported, non-Mande sounds. The eighth diacritic is positioned below vowels to indicate a brief nasal *n* sound added to the end of the vowel.

[143] "Première letter: de Souleymane Kanté à Maurice Houis" in Valentine Vydrine, ed., "Lettres de Souleymane Kanté et Maurice Houis" in *Mande Studies* 3, (2001b): 135.

[144] There are some inconstancies regarding how many wrote from right to left. Diane Oyler's informant states that seven out of ten villagers who Kanté asked wrote from right to left. Souleymane Kanté's notes in a letter that 96 percent of people he surveyed wrote his alphabet from right to left. See Vydrine, (2001b): 135.

Cultural significance of N'ko

Souleymane Kanté authored an indigenous script based on local capacities, conceptions and traditions. This defied the colonial education system and the belief in French linguistic and cultural supremacy it taught. "Souleymane Kanté created the N'ko alphabet as an act of defiance against the intellectual and cultural denigration of Africans who were living under European cultural domination."[145] Rejecting the cultural denigration expressed by the Lebanese journalist Kamal Marwa and imbedded in the colonial education system, Kanté's alphabet introduced a vehicle for the assertion of an indigenist ontology. This ontology was premised on and committed to the intrinsic value of African knowledge. His indigenist approach prioritized local assets and needs over national priorities of colonial rule, tying indigenous and specifically Maninka culture to knowledge development. Instead of just inverting the social hierarchy proffered by the colonial ontology, the indigenist ontology promoted by N'ko did not discriminate against knowledge. N'ko teaching and later N'ko texts championed the Maninka language and culture without dismissing other cultures, including French.

Kanté intended his alphabet to be widely applicable among Manding language speakers and even broader for use with Mande languages. For this reason, Kanté called his alphabet N'ko, which means "I say" in Manding languages. Kanté harked back to his father's medersa, where students speaking different Mande languages converged to study and, despite their different dialects and languages, all said "n'ko."[146] In this sense, Kanté created a sense of cultural nationalism.[147] His alphabet provided an indigenous alternative to the restrictive and isolating French-language curriculum of colonial schooling and the exclusive colonial language policy in French West Africa.

Naming his alphabet N'ko not only rooted it in Manding languages, it also harked back to a distant Mande past before colonial conquest. The words "n'ko" are often used ceremonially in stories and myths, representing an important discourse and founding moment for Mande culture. In 1236, the first king of the Empire of Mali, Magan Soundjada Keïta, delivered a historic speech to his people, saying: "I am speaking to all men, women and children of Manden, and to all my brothers

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[145] Oyler (2002), 83.

[146] Fodé Baba Nabé, *Syllabaire N'ko-Français Gbonkifi Kelenna* (Conakry, 2001).

[147] This nationalism has been carried on by Kanté's diciples. Despite the different appellations of Malinké, Bambara, Mandingo, Wankara, N'ko is applied everywhere and to all dialects that make up a general language and ethnicity, eliminating the confusion and regionalisms created over time and through colonialism. See Souleymane Kanté, "Le N'ko" in *Methode Pratique d'Ecriture N'ko 1961* (Siguiri: Mamadi Keita, 1995).

who say N'ko."[148] These words also refer to the cultural and linguistic union of all Mande people who speak the *kan gbè* or "clear language," those who use the term "n'ko." In the Mande Creation Myth transcribed and analyzed by Germaine Dieterlen (1973), N'ko takes a prominent role as the first words spoken on earth. In the section of the creation myth entitled "Revelation of the World and Building of the First Sanctuary," Simboumba Tangnagati, one of the first beings created by the Mande god, says "n'ko", initiating a ceremony for the planting of eight divine seeds of the four elements and the four cardinal points, delineating the order of the world.[149] In respect to history, language use, and mythic origins, the name of the alphabet, N'ko, resounded with Manding-language speakers throughout West Africa. N'ko harked back to the earliest myths and the historical apogee of Mande culture during the Empire of Mali.

By drawing on this regional history, Kanté hoped that his alphabet would unite the Mande diaspora across West Africa. "He promoted Mande unity by using Mande language and literacy as a cultural thread to draw together and focus Mande speakers on the value of history and culture."[150] The growth in popularity of N'ko during the colonial and post-colonial eras has, in some respects, proven Kanté right, since the early spread of N'ko literacy followed geographically the expansion of the Empire of Mali, spreading from Maninka communities in Guinea and Mali out to other Manding-language communities on the peripheries of the ancient empire's borders.

N'ko and the colonial ontology

Through the N'ko alphabet, Souleymane Kanté tried to create a unique and thoroughly indigenous writing system tailored to African needs. Kanté championed the uniqueness and balanced nature of N'ko, which is written right to left like Arabic script, but has vowels and consonants like the Latin alphabet: "thus N'ko is independent, because it is neither occidental, neither oriental. So it is based on positive neutrality."[151] Linguist have argued that the similarity to some letters and numbers to Arabic, the order and voicing of the letters in the alphabet,[152] the right-left orientation, and the connection of letters in words by a baseline suggest an Arabic derivation, or

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[148] Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Sundiata: an epic of old Mali* (London: Longmans, 1965), 87.
[149] Germaine Dieterlen, "The Mande Creation Myth" in Elliott P. Skinner, Ed., *Peoples and Cultures of Africa* (New York: Natural History Press, 1973), 634-653.
[150] Oyler (1995), 176.
[151] Souleymane Kanté, "Alphabet de la langue N'ko 'n'ko sebesun'" in *Méthode pratique d'écriture N'ko* (Kankan, 1961) reprinted by Mamady Keita (Siguiri, 1995).
[152] Most notably, the N'ko letters for *a, t, m,* and an old version of *j* closely resemble their Arabic counterparts.

at least inspiration, for the N'ko alphabet.[153] Yet, Kanté promoted the uniqueness of the alphabet and its special relevance for Mande languages. In effect, foreshadowing the political position Guinea would take after independence, Kanté created a "non-aligned" writing system by promoting N'ko's "positive neutrality." N'ko is divorced from the denigration of the colonial ontology and the intractability of Arabic religious study. Unlike French and Arabic literacy, N'ko did not create an elite class or make a monopoly on sacred and foreign knowledge. N'ko literacy was not conceived to be restrictive, secret or difficult to master. Instead, it was designed as a popular script that appealed to African sensibility and drew on common cultural and linguistic knowledge.

While Kanté based his script on his native Maninka culture and language, he had broader hopes for N'ko. Kanté championed N'ko as a universal alphabet applicable to any language in the world.[154] In this respect, Kanté's alphabet, while rooted in local culture, had international potential as a tool for the self-development of illiterate, colonized, and marginalized peoples, akin to Freirian "liberation pedagogy" precepts of empowerment through literacy.[155] Locally, N'ko gave Maninka an indigenous and familiar script to study foreign languages and knowledge, bypassing the intellectual monopoly claimed by French colonial education. Subsequent efforts by N'ko associations in Guinea have built on the universality of the N'ko script, publishing speeches and books in a variety of African and European languages.[156]

During the late colonial period, Kanté spent much of his free time teaching N'ko to friends and relatives in Ivory Coast.[157] Due to the colonial repression of indigenous languages and cultures, Kanté refrained from publishing books in N'ko while Maninka communities in West Africa were under French colonial rule. Publishing may have been seen as an overt rejection of colonialism by promoting indigenous cultural and intellectual development. Kanté refrained from attracting attention that might have been construed as a burgeoning resistance movement.[158] Instead, he taught his neighbors N'ko at home and offered instruction while selling knives and other traditional

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[153] Vydrine (2001b); David Dalby, "Further Indigenous Scripts of West Africa: Manding, Wolof and Fula Alphabets and Yoruba 'Holy' Writing" in *African Language Studies* 10 (1969), 163-64.

[154] Souleymane Kanté wrote, "…our alphabet can easily transcribe all the sounds of all the languages spoken in the world…" Vydrine (2001b), 135.

[155] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

[156] Of special interest is the March 1997 edition (no. 22) of the N'ko monthly newspaper *Somoya Sila*, which published the translation of a historic speech by Ibrahima Kanté, son of Souleymane Kanté, on 47th anniversary of the creation of N'ko. The speech was translated into seven languages (English, French, Maninka, Pulaar, Sousou, Kissi, and Loma) all of which were transcribed using N'ko.

[157] Bourama Kanté (1996); Oyler (1995).

[158] Oyler (1995), 183.

nyumu blacksmith goods in the market.[159] Through nonformal instruction, Kanté taught many students who became N'ko devotees and themselves taught others at home and at the far ends of Manding trade routes.

Just a few years after its creation, the N'ko alphabet is reported to have spread from Ivory Coast back to Guinea, ranging from Kankan to Kanté's village Soumankoï, and south into the forest of Macenta. It also spread within Ivory Coast from its birthplace in Bingerville to Bouaké and Abèngörö, while gaining ground in more removed areas like Koyindou and Sédadou, Sierra Leone.[160] At this point, N'ko's popularity was based on ease of transcription for personal correspondences and record-keeping, since no literate had yet been written in N'ko. Trade routes were responsible for taking N'ko across colonial borders. N'ko literacy had particular benefits for Manding traders. It facilitated personal communication between separated family members, friends, and business partners divided by colonial boarders. N'ko kept correspondences safe from colonial supervision and kept unregulated trade secret from colonial customs officials.

Throughout the rest of his life, Kanté strove to spread his alphabet and expand its cultural importance to Mande people everywhere. Kanté spent little time condemning of the French colonial system; instead he devoted himself to developing and teaching N'ko in order to refute Marwa's critique and colonial ethnocentrism. Through his teachings and writings, West Africans learned that the colonial education system was not the sole arbiter of what could be considered education, knowledge, or civilization. As the next chapter explains, Kanté's creation of a large and diverse body of knowledge in N'ko added to a new indigenous discourse on pedagogy that fueled a post-colonial rethinking of African education.

Conclusion

This chapter laid the historical foundations of the emergence of the N'ko literacy movement and its position relative to colonial language education. N'ko was created as a reaction against the repressive French colonial ontology spread through colonial education and reiterated by Lebanese journalist Kamal Marwa. N'ko represented indigenous cultural valor and responded to the needs of Maninka people, fostering an indigenist ontology that rejected the colonial social hierarchy. N'ko

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[159] N'ko teachers today carry on Kanté's type of nonformal N'ko teaching. In 2002, I interviewed and studied N'ko with merchants at their shops and tables in Conakry's Marché Medina, Kankan's Marché Central, and Bamako's Soukouninkoura market.
[160] Oyler (1995), 183-188.

represented an alternative to the French colonial pedagogy by teaching N'ko nonformally and spreading N'ko along trade routes and through networks outside colonial control. As an alternative to French and Arabic literacy education, N'ko decoupled literacy and knowledge from foreign languages and writing systems. In the case of French, N'ko allowed Maninka people excluded from the benefits of colonial education but susceptible to the cultural erosion and denigration it propagated to use an indigenous means to access knowledge and manage information. Tapping into a growing sense of independence and Maninka pride, N'ko mediated the dialectic between the Maninka communities and colonial rulers by prioritizing African languages and indigenous knowledge over foreign education. During the late colonial period, resistance characterized the Maninka community's relationship with colonialism as well as N'ko literacy's relationship with formal education.

During the last decade of French colonialism in West Africa, N'ko's spread was limited by organizational means and the threat of French repression; yet, the grassroots and decentralized dissemination of N'ko proved a useful adaptation against the centralized and centripetal approach to colonial rule employed by France. N'ko crossed colonial francophone and anglophone borders, proving the salience of Mande trading networks and indigenous cultures while defying the divisiveness of colonial cartography. N'ko facilitated personal correspondences and record keeping, created a sense of ethnic solidarity, and strengthened regional loyalties based on trade routes and the Maninka diaspora. These uses of N'ko were in opposition to state literacy education for colonial administration, creating loyalty to *la patrie,* and strengthening the colonial state. Drawing on local culture, responding to local needs, and relying on local networks, N'ko facilitated the budding of an indigenist ontology that neither assimilationism nor associationism had considered.

For many scholars, colonial languages are the most obvious and significant manifestations of the colonial legacy in West Africa. They cite the continued dominance of European languages in official affairs and formal schooling as both a blessing and a curse. As a blessing, European languages provide a national language and unity to one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world, saving Africans from the fratricide of ethnic politics. Yet, since independence, African leaders and international educators have also recognized European languages as a curse, perpetuating the colonial legacy of European cultural supremacy over indigenous knowledge and facilitating the creation of an elite alienated from its cultural heritage. European language instruction

sacrifices local communication for national and international functionality. Gifford and Weiskel phrased the problem poetically:

> The bittersweet legacy of language, reinforced by education, means that African peoples must present themselves to the world largely through the words, the metaphors, the concepts of the Western intellectual tradition. To speak through another's mask and to preserve the self within is a constraining art.[161]

Their metaphor of the mask of language resonates with colonial theorist Frantz Fanon's discussion of colonial languages on the colonized mind in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the chapter titled "The Negro and Language," Fanon connects the subordination of colonized people with colonial languages: "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation."[162] Fanon argues that black subjects have to repress their own cultures and become white in order to succeed. This assumes that the colonial ontology is a totalizing discourse, that is, an ontology that could not be challenged and to which no alternative could be imagined. However, colonial ontology, as a cultural construct, is situated in a specific cultural and historical framework. It is not ahistorical or static but impermanent, subject to displacement by an alternative ontology.

N'ko can be understood as an alternative to the colonial ontology and the French-language monopoly on knowledge. The popularity of the N'ko alphabet among Maninka people in West Africa shows that there is perhaps another means of expressing and representing oneself without hiding one's cultural identity behind the mask of French language and culture. N'ko promoted an alternative to the tragedy of colonial education based on French language education and literacy. As will be discussed in the next chapter, N'ko responded to and developed indigenous knowledge while also providing access to foreign knowledge previously claimed exclusively by schooling. To extend Gifford and Weiskel's metaphor, the art of representation stems not from learning how to act the fool on another's stage, but in writing a play that suits the players. N'ko's indigenist ontology built on local assets and responded to community needs instead of accepting the colonial marginalization of African cultures. French education in Maninka society presented contrasting faces of colonialism: the white face of assimilation and the black face of denigration. N'ko promoted an indigenist

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[161] Gifford and Weiskel, 711.
[162] Fanon, Frantz *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 18.

ontology and a transition to independence that, for some Maninka people, presented the means to remove this Janus-faced mask of the colonial order.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY

N'ko literacy grew as a reaction against French colonial language policies in the optimism of liberation that permeated the early post-colonial period. Colonial exclusion of indigenous languages created a post-colonial backlash that promoted indigenous language instruction. This chapter examines post-colonial indigenous language promotion in Guinea through national policies and local initiatives. The author compares and contrasts education reform through two distinct indigenous language literacy initiatives: the N'ko movement of Souleymane Kanté and the revolutionary education reform promoted by Guinea's first president, Sékou Touré. While their motivations and goals are shown to be similar, their conflicting means of implementing indigenous language literacy reveal fundamental ideological differences. N'ko grew as a decentralized, self-motivated literacy movement among Maninka communities while formal literacy education under the First Republic was a centralized, imposed vehicle of state political hegemony. A semiotic analysis of N'ko's representational capacity explains why N'ko gained popularity while Touré's state-led indigenous literacy failed. N'ko is shown to be a source of empowerment and cultural pride among Maninka.

African backlash to French colonial education:
Sékou Touré's Revolution and the rise of N'ko literacy

Introduction

With the fall of colonialism in West Africa came the end of direct European control over African education and literacy. While many independent leaders maintained colonial school systems, a few leaders advocated new approaches. Soon after achieving independence, some African governments embarked on a revolutionary rethinking of African education. Heads of state set out to decolonize and rebuild their nations by reforming national education programs. Leaders redefined education's objectives in order to benefit the popular majority instead of serving the ruling minority. Through a radical rethinking of educational goals, learning was fashioned to respond to the linguistic, political, and economic realities of African communities. In some cases, such as in the Revolutionary Republic of Guinea, indigenous language instruction became the cornerstone of reform movements. Among revolutionary African leaders, local language education was envisioned as a panacea, facilitating student comprehension, rejuvenating African culture, and severing curricular and cultural dependence on Europe.

However, revolutionary African leaders were not the only ones who rejected colonial language policies and capitalized on the optimism of liberation to promote indigenous languages. Community initiatives also gained momentum from the drive toward independence. Of special importance to this study, the N'ko literacy movement in Guinea exemplifies the growth of a community-based literacy initiative in the post-colonial era. As explained in the preceding chapter, the N'ko alphabet was conceived at the end of the colonial period in West Africa, acting as a catalyst for Mande cultural revival; but, N'ko teaching and N'ko literature developed significantly only after the fall of colonialism, benefiting from the popular support for Africanization. Restrictive colonial language policies and French-only education limited the teaching and development of N'ko in the colonial order. The institutional denigration of African cultures and languages under French colonialism ran countercurrent to the precepts of N'ko literacy, making it a threat to the colonial order. The fall of colonialism offered new freedoms and resulted in the spread of N'ko and the transcription of dozens of books in N'ko by the alphabet's author, Souleymane Kanté. After independence, Kanté was able to openly promote his alphabet without fear of retribution from

colonial authorities. In the post-colonial period, Kanté built a network of learners and a library of books that drove the N'ko literacy movement.

This chapter examines post-colonial promotion of indigenous language education in Guinea during the First Republic (1958-1984). Analyzed through the political discourse of President Sékou Touré, whose ideology permeated Guinean education for the country's first 26 years of independence, national programs are compared to Souleymane Kanté's community-based N'ko literacy movement. State sponsorship of indigenous language literacy in independent Guinea provided an opportunity to transform N'ko education from a nonformal, community-based venture to a national educational objective. As this chapter explains, the revolutionary leader of independent Guinea, Sékou Touré, shared many of Kanté's ideas on indigenous language literacy as a medium to attain decolonization, cultural renewal, and national development. However, the method of attaining these goals differed between the two leaders.

This chapter analyzes the theoretical underpinnings of these two approaches to indigenous language literacy. Touré's institutional approach through formal schooling is contrasted with Kanté's community-based approach through nonformal and self-motivated learning. The implications for both approaches are evaluated in terms of community impact and support for indigenous language education. The author asserts that the community-based mission of N'ko literacy responded to community priorities better than the national indigenous language program, which became a platform for Party ideology instead of local initiative. Through an analysis of the representational power of N'ko literacy, the alphabet is shown to be effective on two semiotic levels: linguistic representation and cultural representation. This exploration of the semiotics of N'ko explains the spread and popularity of N'ko literacy despite the abandonment of state indigenous literacy education. I assert that the N'ko literacy movement has reclaimed the socio-cultural mission ceded by the government's withdrawal from indigenous language education following Touré's death. N'ko has maintained the socio-cultural mission of indigenous language literacy, fostering a community-based social movement in Guinea and in Manding language communities throughout West Africa. N'ko has become a vehicle for self-development, cultural pride, and transnational literacy outside the domain of the state.

Africanization of colonial education

Despite French plans to increase enrollments as laid out in the 1948 *Premier Rapport de la Commission de Modernization des Territoires d'Outre-mer*, the education sector was never significantly expanded under colonial rule. Following independence, many African leaders targeted the education sector as central to development, and immediately set out to increase access to education.[163] Colonial regimes had left only meager material resources for education at the disposal of their former subjects—resources that became more strained through increased enrollments following independence.

African leaders' investments in expanding formal schooling based on European education systems facilitated the continued use of European curricula in African schools. In many African countries, independence was largely ceremonial "flag independence," signaling a change in leadership rather than a change in institutional structure. The fall of colonialism in West Africa presented an opportunity for African leaders to reconsider and reorganize education to suit local needs. However, most former French colonies maintained French language education and independent African leaders generally did not prioritize indigenous language education. Education ministries, along with all other colonial administrative departments, became Africanized, but formal schooling based on the European model remained.

Due to a lack of financing, equipment, and trained staff, independent African countries remained dependent on Europe. African leaders continued to import European textbooks and request the assistance of European teachers to equip rapidly expanded school systems.[164] Schooling remained fundamentally European, perpetuating the colonial social hierarchy which promoted European civilization at the insult of indigenous languages and cultures. Guinea's first president observed, "Unfortunately, in numerous African countries, the education program has remained as it was under colonial domination! Too many are they who, in these countries, think that no other cultures exists other than those of European origin."[165] Despite gains in access to education, preservation of the European formal education system after independence resulted in student

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[163] Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1985* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 167.
[164] Cynthia Szymanski Sunal, ed., *Schooling in sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary Issues and Future Concerns* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1998), 230.
[165] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Afrique et la Révolution* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1967), 256.

disaffection, deculturation, and "intellectual recolonization."[166] In most cases, independent African countries developed a curriculum dependency, reliant on former colonial masters to supply the books, materials, and sometimes teachers for 'African' schools.

Language and education in independent Africa

While the first international effort to promote indigenous languages in education arose from UNESCO's 1953 report *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education,* francophone African countries had to wait until they gained independence before considering restructuring their education systems to incorporate native languages. In 1961 at the height of decolonization in Africa, representatives of thirty-seven African countries meet in Addis Ababa to discuss the future of education in independent Africa. Recommendations following the meeting focused on finding alternatives to imported European curricula, assuming control of the contents of education, and tailoring curricula to fit "the Africa environment."[167] Language policy became an important component of nationalist political platforms and education reform: "one of the highest priorities of the new governments was to render policy regarding the status of the colonial language as well as recognition of indigenous languages as an important and natural means of communication."[168]

Only a few African countries followed the recommendations reached at the Addis Ababa conference, embarking on radical education programs to wean themselves off European curriculum dependency. Bassey (1999) argues that most African rulers perpetuated colonial education to propagate elite power and maintain elite control over social mobility for political domination.[169] But a few African leaders saw independence as an opportunity to revalorize African cultures and rebuild African communities rent by colonialism. For these independent African leaders, "education was seen as the most important vehicle for bringing about social and political change."[170] In Tanzania, for example, Julius Nyerere envisioned "African oriented education"[171] as a key to nation-building and *Ujamaa*, or togetherness. Nyerere issued a directive called *Education for Self-Reliance*, which

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[166] Brigit Brock-Utne, *Whose Education for All? The Recolonization of the African Mind.* Studies in Educaiton/Politics Vol. 6. (New York: Falmer Press, 2000), xxiii.

[167] UNESCO/UNECA, *Outline of a Plan for African Educational Development* (Paris: UNESCO, 1961), 23.

[168] Edmun B. Richmond, *New directions in language teaching in Sub-Saharan Africa: a seven-country study of current policies and programs for teaching official and national languages and adult functional literacy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), 2.

[169] Magnus O. Bassey, *Western Education and Political Domination in Africa* (Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey, 1999).

[170] Mohammed Kabiru Farouk, "Citizenship Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Defining a Nation," in Cynthia Sunal, ed., *Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary Issues and Future Concerns.* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 170.

[171] Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity* (London: Oxford U.P., 1967): 130.

stressed the importance of increasing access through universal primary education and the use of Swahili as the official national language and the language of instruction in Tanzania.[172]

Other African leaders adopted a "nationalistic attitude that favored pride in a nation's cultural heritage and the need to make education an instrument of mass empowerment and participation."[173] They implemented educational reforms to promote the use of local languages in classroom instruction. Among these leaders, Sékou Touré, Modibo Keïta, and Kwame Nkrumah, the first presidents of Guinea, Mali, and Ghana respectively, represented a West African vanguard. They instituted radical educational reforms to create African-centered classrooms and advance African culture.[174] Under the Guinea-Ghana-Mali Union established in 1960, the first presidents of these countries embarked on a course of economic unity, joint security, and social promulgation of an Afro-centrist, pan-Africanist agenda.[175] They Africanized their education systems and experimented with the introduction of local languages as the mediums of instruction in primary classrooms. These leaders proposed that sub-Saharan Africa be united into a United States of Africa, adopting an African language like Swahili as a universal, official language.[176] In Ghana and Mali, however, this Africanist agenda was interrupted in the first decade of independence with the downfall of President Nkrumah in 1966 and the ousting of President Keïta in 1969. Only Guinea remained committed to a radical reconstruction of education, manifest in teaching Swahili as an international African language and indigenous Guinean dialects as national languages.[177]

Revolutionary education in independent Guinea – The First Republic (1958 – 1984)

As the only African country to reject its invitation to join the *Communauté Française*, Guinea blazed a path of self-sufficiency at independence. From the outset, Guinea declared itself a socialist revolutionary state, committedly "non-capitalistic" but also eschewing communism, setting national priorities on decolonization and the reassertion of indigenous economic and social autonomy.

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[172] Brock-Utne, 124. See also William Duggan and John Civille, *Tanzania and Nyerere: A Study of Ujamaa and Nationhood* (New York: Orbis books, 1976), 119.

[173] Ayo Bamgbose, *Language and Exclusion: The Consequences of Language Policies in Africa* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2000), 50.

[174] Brock-Utne, 20-21.

[175] Harold D. Nelson, *Area Handbook for Guinea* (Washington DC: American University, US Government Printing Office, 1975), 188.

[176] Samuel Gyasi Obeng and Efurosibina Adegbija. "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Joshua Fishman, ed., *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 361.

[177] Touré states that Swahili is being taught as an international or foreign language in *Freedom through Culture* (Belgrade: UNESCO, 1980), 19.

President of the First Republic, Sékou Touré, launched a "socialist cultural revolution,"[178] fueling post-colonial education reform. He envisioned education as central to the revolution: "We have entrusted to the Guinean school the mission to be the foundation, the root, the growth cells of the new society to which our history invites us, the socialist society."[179] As the supreme leader of the Democratic Party of Guinea (PDG), Touré became the Party's ideological anchor, as delegates rubber-stamped his policies into law. The prolific writings and speeches of Sékou Touré are fertile ground for an analysis of the language policies implemented in the First Republic. Since Guinea was closed off to foreigners and the local media was tightly controlled by the PDG, Touré's writings provide the only window into the ideology surrounding post-colonial Guinean education. The following paragraphs draws from Touré's numerous writings on literacy and education, ranging from university speeches to entire books on pedagogy.

Educational reform in the independent Republic of Guinea began in 1959 and focused on the Africanization of curricula. Central to the new educational initiatives was the desire to decolonize Guinean education and reassert African cultural values. In his writings, Touré characterizes French colonial education as a negative force on Guinean cultures, stressing the French assimilationist approach and the detrimental effects of inculcating French cultural superiority. Touré sums up the effects of colonial domination thusly: "What impact did that domination have, in fact?...It succeeded in forcing us into the cultural channels of the colonizers; it even sometimes strove to denaturalize us to the extent of making us admit the cultural superiority of the foreigner and the inferiority of the cultural values specific to our own society."[180] Touré saw French education as a system that denigrated African cultures for the benefit of colonial rule. As a result, Guineans who underwent colonial education were turned against their native cultures and inculcated with French colonial ontology:

> The colonial system had established its educational programmes with a view to facilitating its own survival and to consolidating its foundations; thus: our intellectuals became more alien to their own community because of the many complexes created in their minds and also because they had become deeply ignorant of the real life of their people.[181]

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[178] Guinée Ministère du Domaine de l'Éducation et de la Culture, *Cultural policy in the Revolutionary People's Republic of Guinea* (Paris: UNESCO, 1979), 31.

[179] In *La RDA-PDG*, No. 40 (May 1970): 19.

[180] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Freedom through Culture,* (Belgrade: UNSECO, 1980), 14.

[181] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Africa on the Move* (London: Panaf Books, 1979), 467.

While colonial education proffered economic benefits to a select minority of Africans, it affected all African subjects by officially invalidating local cultures. As a result, the outcome of French-language education was deculturation, by which African cultures were devalued: "The foundation of this teaching was to alienate man and disqualify the culture and civilization of the Guinean People."[182]

Central to Guinea's independence and Touré's drive to sever all ties with France was the purging of the Guinean education system: "Our learning must be 'africanized' and freed from all the negative ideas and bad habits, resulting from a system inspired and applied by colonialists."[183] Through restructuring, education became central to the independent leadership's revolutionary mission of decolonization and cultural renewal: "The education sector is, without any doubt, the most vital of all the sectors of the Revolution."[184] As a result, the centralized control of education policy and practice through the nationalization of all schools became a cornerstone of education reform under Touré.

From independence, the Guinean government demonstrated its fiscal as well as social commitment to restructuring public education. Article 44 of Guinea's 1958 constitution enshrined the equal right to education for all citizens.[185] Education reform ordinance No.42/MEN passed in August 5, 1959 initiated educational reform based on cultural revolution. The ordinance set out to rehabilitate African cultural values, put into effect every Guinean citizen's constitutional right to education, and to give Guineans access to scientific knowledge.[186] The ruling party declared education free for everyone at all levels while introducing education reforms meant to politicize and indoctrinate the student body into the revolution.[187] "[I]deological, political and moral training"[188] became the centerpiece of Guinea's revolutionary education.

Education shifted from a bastion of European culture to a political training ground, indoctrinating students with ruling party dogma on social revolution. The Guinean leadership

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[182] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Informer et Former pour Transformer, Tome XXIII* (Conakry: Bureau de presse de la Présidence de la République, 1978), 111.
[183] Touré (1979), 518.
[184] Touré (1978), 129.
[185] The Republic of Guinea, First Republic*, Constitution,* "Title X: On the Rights and Fundamental Duties of Citizens" Article 44: "The citizens of the Republic of Guinea shall enjoy same and equal right to work, rest, social assistance and education." This right was reiterated at the end of the First Republic in the revised Revolutionary Constitution of 1982. See République Populaire et Révolutionnaire de Guinée, *Constitution,* "Titre II : Des Droits et Devoirs fondamentaux des Citoyens" Article 11 : "Les citoyens de la République Populaire et Révolutionnaire de Guinée ont le même droit au travail, au repos, à l'assistance sociale, à l'instruction et à l'éducation."
[186] Touré (1978), 112.
[187] Claude Rivière, *Guinea: the mobilization of a people* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 228.
[188] Guinée Ministère du Domaine de l'Éducation et de la Culture, 35.

blamed colonial formal schooling for the transmission of European culture. The new government intended on remodeling formal schooling, transforming it into a social fulcrum to dislodge European hegemony: "Educational reform merges itself with the action of decolonizing the Guinean people."[189] Schools became the foci of campaigns to revolutionize the Guinean citizenry. Touré summarizes, "There is no revolution without revolutionary education, because without revolutionary education, there will be no revolutionary consciousness."[190]

Education policy in Guinea was built upon socialist concepts of radicalizing the masses through education. This approach owes much to the legacy of radical Reconstructionist thinkers, such as Theodore Brameld, who believed in the utility of education to reconstruct society and resolve social crises. Sékou Touré, like Brameld, saw his country in a state of crisis and cultural revolution, defined by Brameld as "the shifting of cultural patterns at such accelerated rates that patterns hitherto dominant begin rapidly to collapse, looking toward replacement by others that have never before been tried."[191] Through revolution, Touré intended to collapse the dominant colonial ontology as transmitted through formal education. Replacing French education with indigenous language instruction was instrumental in facilitating the emergence of a new, independent Guinea. The Guinean Ministry of Education and Culture intended the socialist cultural revolution to be a mass-revolution, "defined as a radical questioning of all the political, economic and social structures [of society]."[192] Schools were envisioned as incubators of social reconstruction through the direction and dogma of the ruling party. Curricula and content were radicalized while community activities and agricultural labor supplemented school learning. This restructuring of educational methods and objectives, according to Touré, gave Guinean students the means to reconstruct their society: "…revolutionary education puts at the disposition of young students the theoretical and practical instruments for the transformation of nature and society."[193] Touré clearly states the objectives of education in the Republic of Guinea: "Education is inscribed in the program of our Party-State as a medium for social transformation…"[194]

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[189] Touré (1967), 213.
[190] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *L'Ecole pour la vie, Révolution démocratique africaine No. 99* (Conakry: Bureau de presse de la Présidence de la République, 1976), 225.
[191] William B. Stanley, *Curriculum for Utopia: Social Reconstructionism and Critical Pedagogy in the Postmodern Era* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 19.
1998: 19
[192] Guinée, 31.
[193] Touré (1976), 272.
[194] Touré (1978), 163.

Brameld imagined teachers as instrumental to mass-revolution as "members of the working class whose task was to enable students to understand capitalism's weaknesses and the potential superiority of democratic collectivism."[195] This theory became reality during Guinea's First Republic with the creation of Revolutionary Education Centers (CER) in 1966, where teachers promoted collaborative methods of work through rural schools based on socialist cooperatives.[196] Touré trained teachers to lead students in communitarian activities to rebuild Guinea, hoping to instill a radical socialist ethic in Guinean students. Indigenous language education became an important part of teacher leadership for the reconstruction of Guinean society. Teachers were trained in indigenous languages and expected to instruct at CERs in the local language.[197]

In summary, the Guinean leadership's outlook was informed by a socialist approach to self-sufficiency, the condemnation of neocolonialism, and a *dependency theory* worldview, which portrayed the world as divided between core and periphery countries that are locked in a relationship of exploitation and subordination. Sékou Touré and the PDG understood their country's crisis as the result of the colonial legacy, which institutionalized African dependency on Europe. They determined that the crisis could only be resolved through the immediate decolonization and Africanization of society.[198] Thus, Touré and the PDG understood their immediate mission as two-fold: decolonization and nation-building. For the PDG, these objectives came together in the party dogma of permanent socialist cultural revolution. Education was targeted as the optimum vehicle to transmit these objectives. The 1963 *National Education Review of Guinea* outlined the founding principles of the new school system, emphasizing "the linking of education with social and economic realities, national policy and Party ideology."[199] This was realized through Africanization of educational materials to focus on African history and geography, substitution of local languages for French in the classroom, and replacement of French teachers by Africans. Education also promoted nationalism by "eliminating all of the characteristics particular to any clan in any

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[195] Stanley, 33.

[196] Nelson, 134-5. See also Touré (1976), 268. CERs underwent several permutations. Beginning as Centres d'Education Rural, they were changed to Centres d'Education Revolutionaire to remove the rural stigma, which created popular opposition, and emphasize their role in creating revolutionary cadres. They were also called Collèges d'Education Revolutionaire to clarify their position as middle schools in the national education system. See Sékou Touré, *L'Enseignement et L'Education en République de Guinée* (Conakry: Imprimerie Nationale Patrice Lumumba, 1972a), 51-52.

[197] Touré set up regional teaching schools instituting local language instruction: "And since Maninka can be used in Kankan's program, those who will have to teach in Maninka will graduate from Ecole Normale des Instituteurs in Kankan." Touré (1976), 183.

[198] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *La Guinée et l'Emancipation Africaine* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959).

[199] Rivière, 228.

region."[200] However, Touré found that his two objectives, decolonization and nationalism, came to blows around the language issue in independent Guinea.

Revolutionary language policy

From the outset at independence, the Guinean leadership championed the valorization of indigenous languages. Sékou Touré's writings reveal much of the ideological impetus behind the institutionalization of indigenous language literacy in Guinean education. Touré stated that indigenous languages were essential to the African personality, rejecting European languages as maladapted for Africans, who after a century of colonization, continue to resist European language literacy and fluency: "This remark underlines the ridiculousness of attaching the name francophone to an African country where at most 10 to 20 percent of the population understands French…ignoring the immense majority of the people."[201] Touré saw the new revolutionary curriculum together with the promotion of indigenous language literacy as a means to liberate Guinean people from the French colonial ontology: "Cultural decolonization, the liaison between school for life, and popular literacy are efficacious as well as decisive means for a real general promotion of the People and Africa."[202] Touré argues that the French-language exclusivity of colonial education and the assimilationist refusal to promote indigenous language literacy put Guinean at a disadvantage. He argues that French education resulted in Guinea's underdevelopment: "In effect, the non-transcription of our languages and their non-utilization in scientific and technical domains are largely the cause of our delay in scientific and technical development."[203] In order to promote the development of independent Guinea, Touré believed Guineans must empower themselves through their cultural resources: "The most appropriate weapon the People possess for the proper exercise of their power is their language, and it's in their languages that teaching should be done."[204]

In order to promote the use and teaching of indigenous languages, Guinea's Constitution recognized eight national languages.[205] Yet, the Constitution paradoxically retained French as the

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[200] Gigon, 21.

[201] Touré (1972a), 304.

[202] Ahmed Sékou Touré, *La Revolution Cuturelle* (Geneva: Kundig, 1972b), 153.

[203] Touré (1972b), 152.

[204] Touré (1976), 271.

[205] The languages recognized and subsequently taught in literacy programs were Susu, Maninka, Pular, Kissi, Guirzé, Toma, Basari, and Coniagui. Nelson, 71 and Suret-Canale, 1976: 358. Other accounts cite Oneyan and Wamey in the place of Basari and Coniagui. See Oyler (2000) and Calvet (1994).

official language. The PDG found itself in a balancing act, promoting indigenous languages to revalorize native cultures while trying to build a homogenous national identity. The government promoted conflicting language policies to simultaneously promote multiculturalism and nationalism. According to Touré, indigenous languages have cultural value: "The language of a People is part of their personality and constitutes an active element of their human identity…A People who abandons their language becomes a disabled People, accepting the most grave dependence, cultural dependence"[206]; in contrast, Touré portrayed French as practical and culturally neutral: "When we use French or another language, we do so for convenience and for the sake of efficiency in communication…but it must not be seen as a cultural choice."[207]

Touré's paradoxical understanding of language use is especially problematic considering Touré's condemnation of French language instruction in colonial schooling as a vehicle for French cultural imperialism. By the logic of the PDG, French in independent Guinea could become a neutral tool and the functional *lingua franca* to join the diverse linguistic groups into a unified nation and an efficient administration, connecting the nation to the world;[208] in contrast, indigenous languages, as cultural heritage, would serve as the cornerstones of ideological development to decolonize the citizenry. The Guinean Minister of Education under Sékou Touré stated, "It would be madness to seek the complete liberation of our people from imperialist cultural domination while continuing to use the languages of those who tried to destroy our culture and enslave us."[209] Yet, French was maintained as the official language of Guinea. French facilitated state administration and created a unified nation, but it was also part of Touré's mission to eliminate "irrational elements" like ethnic factionalism from the Guinean politics.[210] Touré encouraged multiculturalism to assert indigenous control, but control became manifest in the political homogeneity of single-party rule. Although the administration was working at opposing goals in language policy, it promoted indigenous language education and literacy for most of its 26-year reign. Despite the PDG's ideological commitment, logistical and funding issues caused Guinea's local language programs to suffer significant fits and starts from the 1960s through the 1970s.

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[206] Touré (1972b), 149.

[207] Touré (1980), 20.

[208] Oyler notes, "It seems that Touré chose the colonial language with an eye to national unity in order to avoid the conflicts that would arise over choosing one of the twenty ethnic languages as the country's official language." See Diane W. Oyler, "A Cultural Revolution in Africa" in *The International Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (2001): 587.

[209] Guinée Ministère du Domaine de l'Éducation et de la Culture, 48.

[210] Interview with Sékou Touré in Fernand Gigon, *Guinée, État-Pilote* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 21.

Guinea's Three Year Development Plan (1960) allocated 150 million FG (US$660,000) for a literacy campaign, which was not launched until 1968 and continued only through the early 1970s.[211] In 1965, the Guinean government received UNESCO funding for primary education and adult literacy programs in indigenous languages. The goal was to increase literacy in local languages to break France's cultural dominance, reassert the viability of African languages, and facilitate the dissemination of the ruling party's revolutionary edict. The Guinean government established the *Institut de Recherche Linguistique Appliqée* (IRLA), where teachers and linguists were recruited to transliterate Guinean languages using the Latin alphabet. In conjunction with the IRLA, the *Service National de l'Alphabetisation* (SNA) was established in 1967 to coordinate the national literacy campaign. In an effort to distribute teaching materials and books in local languages, as well as Party literature, the PDG established the Printing House of the Department of National Education and opened the Patrice Lumumba Printing Plant in 1961 with much fanfare. However, the plant soon fell into disrepair and bankruptcy. One report notes that just four years after its celebrated inauguration, the plant suffered high worker absenteeism, theft, neglect, and a general inability to meet production goals.[212]

The year 1968 was declared "Year of the Revolution" and in August, the leadership launched a "socialist cultural revolution" from Kankan, the Maninka capital. The PDG passed the National Language Policy, making maternal language education obligatory in the primary cycle.[213] CERs taught "school within daily life" curriculum where ethnic languages were used as the medium of instruction.[214] As in Brameld's model for reconstructing society through education, the CERs used youth campaigns to spread local language literacy to adults and rural areas. In 1976, indigenous language education and literacy training was expanded to the first year of middle school.[215]

From 1968 to 1984, primary education in African languages was the official policy of Guinea.[216] Primary schools taught in national languages, literacy campaigns spread literacy in national languages, and government officials were required to become literate in their native

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[211] Nelson, 142; Suret-Canale (1976), 358.

[212] Speech by the Director of the Patrice Lumumba Printing Plant, N'Famara Camara, on 11 February 1965. Quoted in *Afrique Express* (Brussels) no. 91 (25 March 1965): 20 and translated in Victor D. DuBois, *The Decline of the Guinean Revolution Part II: Economic and Political Expediency* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1965), 21 (f18).

[213] Oyler (1995), 89.

[214] Amara Fofana, "Education and Productive Work in Guinea," in *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Education,* vol. 12, no. 4, (1982):477-83; Margaret Binns, *Guinea.* World Bibliographical Series Volume 191 (Oxford, England: Clio Press, 1996).

[215] Touré (1976), 270.

[216] Brock-Utne, 167.

language or face dismissal.[217] However, due to setbacks, only in 1975-76 did local languages become standard in the primary cycle.[218] In the end, local-language instruction was only realized nation-wide through fourth grade, while middle school students studied national languages as electives. While indigenous language education may have been official policy until the death of Sékou Touré in 1984, it is unclear how extensively literacy programs were carried out due to a lack of pedagogical materials and weak teacher training in local languages, resulting in the widespread and long-standing unpopularity of local language education in Guinea.[219]

The efficacy of educational reform under Sékou Touré was undermined by an overemphasis on centralized control, radicalization, and inculcation of Party dogma. Through the nationalization of the school system, the ruling party dogma saturated language education along with all other curricula. The systematic curtailing of civil liberties and perennial "plots" created a culture of fear, secrecy, and distrust during Touré's reign.[220] Touré believed the crisis in Guinean society to be perpetual, imagining criticism and dissent as threats to his social revolution. Rivière (1977) notes that in periods of instability, "Sékou Touré relied mainly upon pseudo plots as a pretext for ridding himself of his opponents."[221] While Touré began his political career with enormous popular support and a "general mood of optimism for his revolutionary socialist policies,"[222] his tight grip on power, single-party politics and vicious crackdowns on traders, intelligencia and political opponents alike led to popular discontent and numerous coup attempts.

In 1961, soon after Touré began implementing curriculum reforms, a teacher's union began demanding better treatment and housing accommodations for instructors.[223] Despite his commitment to education, Touré effectively waged war on teachers by declaring the uncovering of a "Teachers' Plot" to overthrow his government. Touré accused the teachers of treason and exacted draconian punishments by expulsing and imprisoning educators in notorious gulags like Camp

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[217] Nelson, 71.

[218] Guinée Ministère du Domaine de l'Éducation et de la Culture, 49.

[219] The centralization of pedagogy and media control obscures the connection between party rhetoric and education reform. Bolibaugh came to a similar conclusion in researching Guinea education in the 1970s: "From available data, it is frequently impossible to determine the degree to which a given reform has been implemented." Jerry B. Bolibaugh, *Educational Development in Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Ivory Coast* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1972), 20.

[220] Ibrahima Baba Kaké, *Sékou Touré: Le Héros et le Tyran* (Paris: Jeune Afrique Presses, 1987). Lancié Kaba (1988) observes that Touré used the perpetual discovery of plots against critics, dissenters, and ordinary people in times economic crisis. Sékou Touré's own work *Traitors, go to hell* gives an indication of the threat the Guinea leader perceived his leadership to be under.

[221] Rivière, 123.

[222] Binns, xx.

[223] Djibril Tamsir Niane, *La République de Guinée* (Conakry, Guinea: SAEC, 1988), 169.

Boiro,[224] followed by the dismantling of the teachers' union.[225] Students went on strike and Touré reacted by imprisoning students and shutting down the entire Guinean educational system.[226] As a result of this and subsequent post-coup crackdowns, many teachers went into exile during Touré's reign, further straining a feeble educational infrastructure. Increasingly, Sékou Touré's reign became defined by "extreme concentration of the state apparatus and coercive power in the hands of the president."[227] For students, schools became incubators of Party dogma and courts of Party justice, where "traitors" and "counter-revolutionary elements" were punished and executed.[228] By the time of his death, lack of financial commitment to indigenous language education, mismanagement of national printing facilities, poor teacher training in indigenous language instruction, a paucity of teaching materials in local languages, the hyper-politicization of curricula, and the labeling of educators, students, and intellectuals as "saboteurs"[229] crippled Sékou Touré's experiment in the radical reconstruction of formal education. However, Touré's campaign was not alone in promoting indigenous language literacy in Guinea.

N'ko in independent Guinea
N'ko and the Guinean Revolution

Independence offered great hope for the reversal of French cultural dominance and the promotion of indigenous knowledge in Guinea. The revolutionary ethic of Guinea's independent leadership signaled a long-awaited prioritization of African cultures. Sékou Touré's revolutionary discourse on the radical reconstruction of education by integrating indigenous language literacy resonated with Souleymane Kanté's promotion of N'ko literacy. Having invented his alphabet at the end of the colonial period, Souleymane Kanté wanted to dispel ignorance and build on indigenous knowledge,[230] making N'ko a medium of resistance against colonial language policy and a source

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[224] For a personal reflection of the teacher's plot and the subsequent imprisonment of teachers at Camp Boiro, see Kaba Camara, *Dans la Guinée de Sékou Touré, Cela a bien eu lieu* (Paris: Harmattan, 1998): 66-71.
[225] Rivière, 127.
[226] Mahmoud Bah, *Construire la Guinée après Sékou Touré* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), 55.
[227] Lanciné Kaba, "Guinea under Sékou Touré" in Prosser Gifford and WM Roger Louis, eds., *Decolonization and African Independence* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1988), 237.
[228] The Touré government conducted summary executions against students who had committed crimes. In one incident in Conakry in October 1959, a boy accused of stealing six shirts was sentenced to death before a firing squad in a schoolyard. Noted in Victor D. DuBois, *The Decline of the Guinean Revolution Part III: The Erosion of Public Morality* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1965), 9 (f1).
[229] See Touré (1976), 270. Touré's *Traitors, Go to Hell* offers an especially vituperative attack on "counter-revolutionary elements."
[230] Oyler, (2001a), 78-79.

pride among colonized people. N'ko challenged French rule by presenting a local alternative to French literacy, education, and socio-cultural domination.

The initial teaching and spread of the N'ko alphabet corresponded with a rise in African nationalism and a drive to end colonial domination. The repressive colonial ontology imposed by French colonialism through French-language schooling served as an impetus catalyzing the drive to independence. Indigenous initiatives like N'ko fueled African cultural nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment. "The vaunted 'retour aux sources,' implying the rediscovery, reappraisal and reaffirmation by Africans…of their history and culture must therefore be considered to be a consequence of the use of French to the exclusion of African languages."[231] With independence, Maninka speakers began to embrace N'ko because of its cultural relevance and utility: "Being literate in N'ko became an important part of the cultural revival because the possession of N'ko meant the repossession of cultural integrity."[232] In independent Guinea, N'ko offered the chance to revitalize local languages and cultures. This indigenist approach to literacy education found fertile ground in the revolutionary discourse of independent Guinea. Yet, despite their similar motivations, national education reform and N'ko literacy proved incompatible. This section explores the relationship between national priorities and community literacy in the First Republic.

When Guinea declared independence from France in 1958, Souleymane Kanté left the Ivory Coast to return home to his natal Guinea. He was invited by Sékou Touré to join the Guinean revolution and help revitalize and decolonize his country.[233] While there are reports that Sékou Touré supported and may have learned the N'ko alphabet,[234] Touré makes no mention of Kanté or N'ko in his voluminous writings on education and indigenous language literacy. Yet, the ideological connection between Touré and Kanté regarding indigenous language literacy and education is strong. Kanté is remembered as promoting N'ko literacy using the same rationale and sometimes even the same rhetoric as Touré.

Kanté considered N'ko not only an effective means of learning in one's maternal language, but also as essential for protecting indigenous cultures from erosion by foreign language education: "He [Kanté] commented that those who study in a foreign language lose a good portion of their

[231] Emmanuel N. Kwofie, *The Acquisition and Use of French as a Second Language in Africa* (Hoffman-Verlang: Grossen-Linden, 1979), 13.

[232] Oyler (1995), 199.

[233] Bourama Kanté, "Souvenir de Kanté Souleymane" in *Somoya Sila: Journal Culturel de l'Association ICRA-N'KO* no. 19 (December 1996).

[234] Oyler (1995), 222-23

own culture to the profit of the language in which they are studying."[235]   Kanté, like Touré, thought that indigenous language learning promoted cultural independence.   Touré tried to reorient the Guinean education system away from French-language dependency and Kanté saw the N'ko alphabet as an alternative to both French literacy and Arabic literacy.   While Kanté had grown up learning Arabic at his father's *medersa* in Soumankoï, Kanté wanted to integrate N'ko literacy into both religious education in Quranic schools and formal secular schooling.   Touré also considered the potential of integrating medersas into his revolutionary schooling through the CERs.[236]   Both leaders considered indigenous language education as relevant to and compatible with all aspects of society.   However, their objectives for indigenous language literacy differed significantly.

After Guinea gained independence, Kanté understood the role N'ko literacy could play in the newly independent government's policy of social revolution.   In the optimism of independence, with an indigenous Maninka leader as the president of Guinea, Kanté hoped his alphabet would be adopted in the Sékou Touré's radical reconstruction of the Guinean educational system.[237]   In his writings, Touré prioritizes indigenous solutions for Guinean problems and a revolutionary education system untainted by French colonial thought: "It is just as inconceivable to conduct the revolution in a framework imposed by colonialism as to think that the revolution could be legitimately inspired by thoughts marked by colonialism."[238]   The N'ko alphabet was an apt medium for Guinea's return to indigenous values.   Through his numerous books written during the First Republic, Kanté aspired to decolonize the African mind by validating and preserving African cultures, languages, and histories through N'ko literacy.   Kanté symbolized N'ko as a light that radiates intelligence and awakens Mande and African people to their intrinsic valor.   Many of Kanté's books depict a lamp of wisdom emanating the light of N'ko.   The inscription around the lamp reads "Yelen bada kunbö. Nalimun fa kan karan di" or "The light breaking on the horizon. It's the light of knowledge of mother tongue literacy."[239]   Similarly, Touré described the importance of indigenous literacy education in terms of light: "The future and the potential of the *illuminating* and the *radiance* of our People's cultural riches are directly conditioned by the transformation of the vernacular languages into

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[235] Oyler (1995), 172.

[236] "In one word, the Medersa becomes therefore a Revolutionary Education Center where national languages, French and Arabic rub shoulders with each other." Touré (1976), 223.

[237] Bourama Kanté (1996).

[238] Touré (1959), 158.

[239] This inscription taken from Souleymane Kanté, *Nko Kafa Folo Saurama.* By contrast, the lamp inscription on the ICRA-NKO newspaper is slightly different, reading "Yelen bada kunbö. Nalimun fa kan bede di."

written languages" [240] (italics mine). In many of his writings on education, Touré describes the *rayonnement* or radiance of education in local languages.[241] This metaphor reveals a concurrence in both Touré's and Kanté's conceptualization of local language literacy as a means of enlightening Africans.

Wanting to rid Guinea of its colonial legacy, including the French language, Sékou Touré considered making N'ko the official alphabet of Guinea.[242] Touré respected the work of Kanté and he is reported to have given Kanté some financial support for his alphabet and to have solicited Kanté's linguistic knowledge to standardize Maninka for national Latin-letter literacy;[243] however, ultimately, Touré rejected the use of N'ko in national literacy campaigns due to the alphabet's national limitations and cultural implications. Practically, N'ko could not serve national unification like French instruction, since N'ko is only a vehicle for language. Speakers of different indigenous languages could write in their maternal languages in N'ko, but they would still be unable to communicate across languages. Culturally, while N'ko could facilitate the revalorization of indigenous cultures in Touré's cultural revolution, the fact that both Touré and Kanté were Maninka raised suspicions of an ethnic conspiracy among non-Maninka members of government.[244] N'ko was associated with its Maninka inventor and the Maninka community that supported it. Imposition of N'ko in non-Maninka communities might have been interpreted as ethnic imperialism and threatened the revolutionary precepts of the First Republic.

N'ko complicated Touré's already contradictory policies toward ethnicity. Touré promoted indigenous languages to erase colonial denigration of local cultures and languages: "The diversity of our languages, far from being an obstacle, must be considered as a source of richness, of necessarily complimentary cultures."[245] Yet, trying to abate ethnic tensions, Touré also promoted a national revolutionary culture based on service to the state: "Thus we see that the old negative implications of the different races, ethnic groups, languages, regions or creeds have given way to the positive and

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[240] Touré (1972), 146.

[241] For example, Touré writes, "The permanent ethic of the Revolution in education is to make education the supreme medium of the thought and the genius of the People, the radiance of all the human values which each human being possesses through the abilities and faculties that are united in him." Sékou Touré, *L'École pour la Vie* (Conakry: Bureau de la Presse de la Présidence de la République, 1976), 30.

[242] Bourama Kanté (1996).

[243] Oyler (1995), 223, 231.

[244] Bourama Kanté (1996), interview 4A.

[245] Touré (1972b), 216.

rational values of the Guinean revolution and the Guinean nation."[246] While promoting indigenous cultures, Touré simultaneously promoted a generalized, Guinean national identity free of local ethnic affiliations. "[N]ow, the Republic of Guinea no longer knows several ethnic groups—Maninka, Soussou, Peul, Guerzé, Toma, Landouma, Kissi…but only one people that belongs to the African race."[247] By separately promoting cultural identity for decolonization and revolutionary national identity for development, Sékou Touré could not adopt N'ko as the official alphabet. Instead of Kanté's N'ko literacy program, Touré established the national literacy program using the Latin alphabet to transcribe eight "national" languages. Paradoxically, he relied on the purported cultural neutrality of French for official affairs, while developing indigenous language literacy through the imported Latin alphabet.

Born from the foreign denigration of indigenous languages and cultures, national educational reforms and local N'ko literacy shared the objective to make Guinean languages the means of self-development and cultural renewal. Like Touré's radical reform of formal education, Kanté's approach was a backlash against a colonial system that taught the primitiveness of indigenous languages, creating what Suret-Canale (1971) described as "boomerang upon its initiators."[248] Yet, despite Touré's and Kanté's similar perceptions of colonial education, Touré's promotion of national revolutionary politics over community initiatives marginalized N'ko literacy. N'ko's specific relevance to Maninka people did not suit the PDG's politicization of education, which prioritized Party objectives over community concerns. N'ko literacy became relegated to nonformal and private instruction. While the Maninka political organization *Union Mandé* supported N'ko literacy in national policy, it was banned under the one-party state of Sékou Touré's PDG.[249] Although he joined the Union Mandé party in its infancy during the run-up to independence, Touré later labeled the party's ethnic agenda as reactionary and opportunist, describing Union Mandé as "trying to divide Africans in order to slow their evolution and perpetuate their misfortune."[250] N'ko, along with Union Mandé, was politically sidelined under Sékou Touré. Instead of drawing on state

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[246] Touré (1979), 475.

[247] Touré (1979), 473-74.

[248] Suret-Canale (1971), 382.

[249] Union Mandé was also known as Union de Mandé and Union Mandingue. Morgenthau (1964: 224) states that Touré helped found Union Mandé, while Kaké (1987: 36) states that Touré only joined the party for a short stint.

[250] Sékou Touré, "La Guinée au carrefour de la liberté, Réveil No 374, 25-7-49" in *Unité Nationale* (Conakry: Imprimerie Nationale Patrice Lumumba, 1977), 247. The group currently exists as a Manding fraternal and cultural organization out of Brussels, Belgium which professes to be apolitical and secular.

funding and educational infrastructure, N'ko literacy became a community initiative carried on voluntarily through the will and support of Kanté and his disciples. But, despite a lack of any foreign or government support, N'ko continued to spread in Maninka communities.

Locked out of state education channels, N'ko spread along trade routes, taught in private homes and public spaces. With no centralized management, N'ko spread informally through volunteer tutors. N'ko became a nonformal literacy movement, representing an alternative to public, formal schooling. This orientation attracted mostly male adults who had not received formal schooling and were often illiterate in European languages. N'ko literacy training was based on self-motivation and self-directed learning. N'ko spread due to individual and community interest in N'ko literacy, filling a need for literacy unmet by government initiatives. Yet, what sustained Maninka people's interest in N'ko? With no formal, state structures to fund and enforce N'ko literacy education, why did it prove more popular than state-run indigenous literacy campaigns in Latin letters? As the next section explains, the apt semiotic qualities of N'ko proved its value to Maninka communities.

Material development and the spread of N'ko

Explaining N'ko's growth necessitates both a functional analysis and, perhaps more importantly, a cultural analysis of N'ko literacy. The material development of N'ko through books written by Souleymane Kanté during the First Republic is central to these analyses. Many of Africa's first revolutionary leaders were renowned scholars, and the writings of Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, as well as the poetry of Léopold Senghor, are still read and respected today. But, in terms of sheer volume of publications, few Africans can compare with the dozens of tomes and speeches published by Sékou Touré—except, perhaps, Souleymane Kanté. The one hundred and eighty three known books Kanté transcribed and authored represent important contributions to the African literate tradition, making Kanté one of West Africa's most prolific writers (see Appendix, List).[251] While Touré's works deal mainly with political ideology and the Guinean revolution, with much

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[251] The specific number of books written by Kanté has been the subject of debate. David Conrad (2001) states that Kanté wrote more than twenty books between 1949 and the mid 1980s. Vydrine (2001a) estimates the number of books at more than a hundred. My informants also stated that Kanté wrote over one hundred books (interviews 2B, 4A). The number of books is confused by the limited availability of Kanté's books in print, the rewriting and reprinting of some of Kanté's book by his disciples, and recent writings building on Kanté's original works by N'ko teachers like Mamady Baba Diané in Egypt. According to research by a respected N'ko teacher and author in Guinea, Kanté is accredited with 183 books.

overlap between books, Kanté's writings reflect a broad knowledge of theology, science, literature, culture, and history.

The first works Souleymane Kanté is reported to have written in N'ko for publication were religious.[252] Due to Kanté's Quranic schooling and the strong interest in Islam in the Maninka community, Kanté translated the entire Quran and thousands of *Hadith* into Maninka using N'ko. Traditionally, Maninka Islamic scholars held to the belief that prayers and readings of sacred texts must be done in the original Arabic. Kanté's transliteration of the Quran circumvented this tradition, giving Maninka speakers immediate access to holy scripture and demystified these religious texts: "Souleymane Kanté's translation of the Quran into Mande language in a Mande-styled alphabet placed the access of religious knowledge directly into the hands of the masses."[253] Kanté was literate in Arabic, but he realized Arabic literacy had become monopolized by a few religious leaders and restricted to religious instruction. Kanté wrote, "Among us, most of those who master the Arab language are religious fanatics. They only want to write religious matters in Arabic and everything else written on other topics is considered paganism by them." [254] While Kanté's transcription was officially approved by the highest Muslim religious authorities and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia pledged to print 500,000 copies,[255] Kanté's effort was original met with hostility by Maninka religious leaders in Kankan. Translating the Quran threatened Arabic scholars' control over textual interpretation and threatened to diminish the status of Arabic literacy.[256] Initially, these religious leaders led a vociferous campaign against N'ko. However, the popularity of translated religious texts among Maninka people grew despite their objections.

Many Maninka people were initially drawn to learn N'ko in order to gain a better understanding of Islam. [257] Leaders of the N'ko movement stated that a desire for a better knowledge of Islam continues to act as an important motivation for many N'ko learners today.[258] Despite initial resistance, Kanté's Quran has become a magnet attracting Muslims to N'ko by popularizing access to religious knowledge: "the translation of sacred texts in Maninka had the result

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[252] Oyler (1995), 175.
[253] Oyler (1995), 218.
[254] Souleymane Kanté, *Manden dofo kunfolo men ke da Sonjada ko nye [Manding History, Book 1: That which took place before Soundjata]* (Egypt, 1991), 3. Quoted and translated into French in Vydrine (2001a): 117.
[255] Interview 12C.
[256] Oyler (1995), 150.
[257] Diane Oyler, "The N'ko Alphabet as a Vehicle of Indigenist Historiography", *History in Africa*, Vol. 24, 1997, 252.
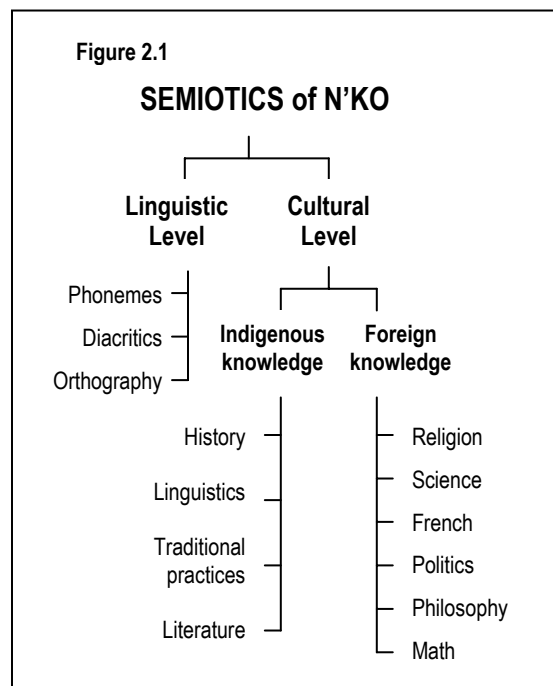[258] Interviews 2A, 4C, 8D, 10C.

of bringing the religion closer to the people…"[259] The pride I observed N'ko students display in their N'ko Qurans, by far the most attractively and professionally bound of all N'ko texts, testified to their reverence for both their religious faith and the N'ko alphabet.

During the two decades Souleymane Kanté spent in Guinea under the First Republic campaigning for national sponsorship of N'ko literacy, he translated, transcribed, and authored an impressive number of books and booklets on a range of topics. Books on social and natural sciences gave Maninka exposure to Western knowledge, made accessible outside of formal schools. Literature and poems expressed Kanté's and other African leaders' appreciation and hope for independent Africa. Works on traditional practices like marriage and homeopathic medicine recorded oral traditions and indigenous knowledge dismissed by the colonial education system. Detailed accounts of the kingdoms and cultures in Africa provided an indigenous perspective on history, reclaiming it from the French curriculum that alternately taught French history and disparaged African heroes. While Kanté wrote exclusively in Maninka using the N'ko alphabet, he introduced non-Maninka themes and histories to broaden the appeal of N'ko.

Semiotics of N'ko

Despite the rejection of N'ko literacy by Sékou Touré, relegating N'ko to nonformal and small scale teaching, N'ko spread quickly in the post-colonial environment. When Kanté returned to Guinea after independence in 1958, less than a decade after inventing the alphabet, he found N'ko had already spread across the border along trade routes back to Kankan.[260] What explains the nonformal spread of N'ko literacy after independence? A semiotic analysis of N'ko's representational capacity helps explain the alphabet's expanded popularity in the post-colonial era. The semiotics of N'ko, or the study of N'ko as a system of signs and symbols, reveals two semiotic

Figure 2.1

SEMIOTICS of N'KO

Linguistic Level — Cultural Level

Phonemes
Diacritics — Indigenous knowledge — Foreign knowledge
Orthography

History — Religion
Linguistics — Science
— French
Traditional practices — Politics
— Philosophy
Literature — Math

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259 Vydrine (2001a), 117.
260 Oyler (1995), 186.

levels at which N'ko gained popularity: the linguistic level and the cultural level (see Figure 2.1).

First, at the linguistic level, the letters, or phonemes, of the N'ko alphabet faithfully represent the sounds and tones of Maninka and other Mande languages. Latin and Arabic scripts, which Kanté tried unsuccessfully to adapt to Maninka, lack many of the vowels and tonal markers necessary to accurately represent a tonal African language like Maninka. Despite dialectical differences between Manding languages, N'ko diacritics code for eight salient vowel tones that are present in all dialects. In addition to the 27 standard letters, two abridged letters are included to represent rules of Maninka syntax and pronunciation, providing important clarity in transcribing Manding languages.[261] In this way, the orthography of N'ko is tailored to accurately transcribe Manding words and grammar. The representational capacity of N'ko on the linguistic level drew Maninka speakers to the alphabet, since they could record their own language with ease and accuracy by using the N'ko alphabet.[262]

Second, at the cultural level, N'ko is a symbol of cultural pride for Maninka. Both N'ko literate people and the wider majority of Manding people I interviewed avidly expressed this view.[263] N'ko achieves this through the transcription and recording of two types of knowledge: indigenous and foreign (see Figure 2.1). Souleymane Kanté realized that creating the alphabet was not enough to ensure its spread. While some would be drawn to N'ko for its phonemic fidelity, most would need more motivation to begin independent study of N'ko. Using Brian Street's (1993) terminology, the autonomy of N'ko needed to be buttressed ideologically through culturally salient material written in N'ko. To achieve this, Kanté devoted most of his life to the transcription of books into N'ko that would compel Maninka people to learn N'ko.

He recorded indigenous knowledge in four subject areas: history, linguistics, traditional practices, and literature. Histories related Maninka past and the histories of other West African people, including famous empires of West Africa and heroic African leaders like Samoury Touré and Alpha Yaya Diallo. Ignored and misrepresented in French colonial schooling, African historiography was an important subject for Kanté, and he dedicated the largest number of his books to West African history.

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[261] The abridged letters for *L* and *Y* change the pronunciations of these letters to *N* and *Ny* sounds respectively when the letters are preceded by an *N* or nasal sound. This morphology preserves both the correct pronunciations and meanings of the words.
[262] Interviews 2A, 4A, 13A, 26A.
[263] Even informants uninterested in learning N'ko stated that they were impressed by N'ko and proud of Kanté's achievement for Manding people. Interviews 5B, 5F, 8A, 8B, 8C, 10B, 17B, 18B.

In linguistics, Kanté broke significant new ground in his writings, becoming the first Maninka to examine and record Maninka grammar, explain the etymology of Maninka words and compile Maninka dictionaries. In these works, Kanté stresses the correct pronunciation of the *kan gbè* or "clear language" and eschews words in Maninka borrowed from French, offering traditional and invented Maninka words. For example, the commonly used word for airplane in Maninka is borrowed from the French word *avion.* In his writings, Kanté offers the Maninka-ized etymology *sanmakulun,* literally "sky canoe," as the proper usage.[264] Kanté's writings offer detailed analyses of correct Maninka pronunciation and traditional, uncorrupted idioms. Kanté's works confirm historical linguist von Humboldt's (1971) theory that written language preserves phonological features that may be infrequent or have vanished from colloquial speech.[265] Kanté takes this theory one step further by actively preserving anachronisms and even inventing new Maninka expressions to avoid imported words. Through this, Kanté advanced an indigenist agenda that proved the efficacy of Maninka and N'ko, promoting them as means to preserve authentic Maninka tradition and as cultural treasures in their own right.

In his recording of traditional practices, Kanté focused on both the meaning and uses of traditional knowledge. He wrote books on the traditional uses of kola nuts in Maninka wedding ceremonies and compiled exhaustively researched books on traditional therapy and pharmacopoeia compiled from oral tradition. His books on traditional medicine were especially influential in Maninka communities in West Africa for two reasons. First, they were a repository of secret traditional knowledge that, before its transcription into N'ko, traditional healers guarded closely. Among traditional healers, the composition of traditional medicines was obscured with a secret script (*do*) used to note their composition.[266] This script remains in use with some N'ko literate healers, seeming to satisfy their need to guard the contents of their medicines while using N'ko to

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[264] See Kanté, *N'ko kafa folo saurama,* 4.

[265] W. Von Humboldt, *Linguistic variability and intellectual development* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971. Cited in Scriber and Cole (1981).

[266] This secret script is still used today. Most informants refused to discuss the script and guarded its transcription. The secret script resembled N'ko in its right to left orientation and in its angular, geometric form. However, informants stated that it was unrelated to and predated N'ko (interviews 14A and 23B). This use of *do* literacy to obscure knowledge is similar to Bledsoe & Robey's (1993) study of Arabic literacy among the Mende of Sierra Leone. One informant compared *do* to the use of Latin terminology in Western medicine as a both a specific classification system and a means to obscure privileged information (interview 17B).

advertise their traditional knowledge.[267] The transcription of the medicines into N'ko made this knowledge available to any N'ko literate person.

Second, Kanté's scientifically quantified and categorized traditional medicines and clarified the diagnosis of illness that traditional medicines could treat. As a result, N'ko literacy was taken up by aspiring healers and traditional Maninka healers who wanted to better learn their trade.[268] N'ko became synonymous with efficacious traditional healing, which N'ko-literate healers exploited by prominently advertising their services in N'ko (see Appendix, Photo 2).[269] Today they represent some of the most visible members of the N'ko literacy movement, since their hand-painted cloth signs can be found in almost any market in Mandé language communities across West Africa.[270] I only met one Maninka traditional healer who consciously avoided using and learning N'ko. As a high school science teacher, he instead used the Latin names of the plants and minerals from which he derived his medicines. He represents and interesting schism in the N'ko movement, showing the difficulty of convincing formally schooled and Western trained Maninka of the validity of N'ko literacy. He stated that he preferred to legitimize and standardize traditional knowledge through his use of Latin letters and Western scientific categories rather than N'ko and traditional Maninka names.[271]

Currently in Guinea, N'ko is avidly supported by the organization of traditional medicine practitioners, *Association des Tradithérapeutes et Pharmacologues* (ATP),[272] whose member cards are written in N'ko and French and who often teach N'ko and sell N'ko books along side their glass medicine jars. The traditional practitioners I interviewed defined their trade in opposition to formal medicine stores that sell imported French medicine, offering not only cheaper medicine, but traditional knowledge which purports to cure illnesses that Western medicine cannot.[273]

Traditional literary works transcribed by Souleymane Kanté include 1001 Mande proverbs, N'ko poetry and riddles and "stories from the bush and the forest." Some of Kanté's history books

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[267] Interview 14A.

[268] Interviews 2B, 10C, 14A, 17B, 23B.

[269] These advertisements usually consist of white sheets with hand-painted pictures of different sicknesses and their description in Maninka written in N'ko below. The traditional healers sell their medicines on mats under their signs in rural markets and in stores in towns and cities. I saw these signs in Marché Medina, Conakry, Kouroussa, Siguiri, Fromwalia, and Djikoroni, Bamako.

[270] Interview 20B.

[271] Interview 17B.

[272] This group is also known by its Maninka name *N Ya Ba Da – N'ko Yekonkona Basila Dè*

[273] One traditional medicine clinic I visited in the Djikoroni neighborhood of Bamako, Mali was located above a large Western pharmacy, seemingly unphased by the competition. The owner purported to offer a different kind of medicine and a different kind of cure than the pharmacy below.

could be classified under this rubric as well, such as the *Legend of Djibriba* and the *Legend of Amadou Djoulbé*. Even some of Kanté's most revered historical works among Mande people, such as his three-volume *Mande History* (*Manden Dofo Kafa*), may be better classified as literature due to their "highly creative historiography."[274] Yet, all of these works hark back to the previous grandeur of the great epic of Mande history. They stir a sense of pride in Maninka people for their history that predates the denigration of French colonial rule.

By transcribing indigenous knowledge through history, linguistics, traditional practices and literature in N'ko, Kanté preserved the cultural heritage of West Africa and validated it by putting it into a permanent, accessible form. These works have led Diane Oyler (2001) to deem Kanté an indigenous Noah Webster, Samuel Johnson, Diderot and Rousseau all wrapped into one, crediting Kanté for ushering in a period of Mande enlightenment.[275] Whether Kanté can be credited single-handedly with transforming Mande cultures is debatable, but his tireless dedication to N'ko literacy is indisputable. Through his works on indigenous knowledge, N'ko became synonymous with access to specialized, revered, forgotten, and previously secret African wisdom. N'ko literate people gained access to this knowledge and consequently gained social standing. N'ko movement leaders demonstrated a depth of knowledge on subjects not taught in formal schooling, but considered culturally significant by Maninka people.[276] Recording and transmitting traditional knowledge in N'ko showed that "uneducated" people could be intelligent and articulate despite the lack of formal, French-language education.

N'ko became a symbol of cultural pride by transcribing foreign knowledge as well as indigenous knowledge. Kanté transcribed works on foreign knowledge from foreign languages into N'ko, which fell into six categories: religion, science, the French language, politics, philosophy and math. The most significant works on foreign knowledge were translations of the Quran and over 4,000 Hadiths. These translations gave N'ko-literate people direct access to sacred Muslim texts without needing to master Arabic. Two dozen works on Western science spanned anatomy, botany, chemistry, and epidemiology, including the transcription of Medelev's periodic table. French language works included French-N'ko dictionaries, translation of French neologisms and a review of

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[274] Conrad (2001), 161.

[275] Diane White Oyler, "The Era of Mandé Enlightenment" in *Mande Studies* Vol. 3: 75-94. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

[276] Informants in Bamako stressed this facet of N'ko literacy. Mali's Director of Basic Education explained N'ko's contributions to the cultural life of Bamako through popular radio programs.

French etymology. These works, like the transcription of the Quran, showed that Kanté did not try to denigrate foreign cultures or exclude foreign languages from his N'ko library, refusing to follow the example of French colonial education. Kanté wanted all kinds of foreign knowledge made accessible through N'ko. Works on philosophy and math reiterated this objective. Political works, like a translation of Rousseau's *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*, showed the usefulness of N'ko for conveying popular political thought. Sékou Touré capitalized on popular attraction to N'ko with Kanté's translation of Touré's most famous tome, *Afrique et la Révolution*, as well as party doctrine like *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*, which were previously only available to Guineans in French.

These works gave N'ko literate people access to previously inaccessible, specialized, and esoteric knowledge. Science explained in Maninka using N'ko no longer required attending formal schools or learning French. Likewise, the transcription of the Quran made Arabic accessible without having to attend Quranic schools or study Arabic. Transcribing this knowledge into N'ko demystified these foreign scripts and proved the viability of an African writing system to transmit diverse knowledge. In this way, Maninka and N'ko were shown to be on par with French and Arabic. "N'ko revolutionized the ability of all Mande speakers to gain access to knowledge that had previously been under the control of foreign languages and alphabets."[277] The transcription of both indigenous and foreign knowledge solidified N'ko as a source of cultural pride for Maninka people. N'ko gained popularity by proving its linguistic utility and cultural relevance to Maninka and Manding speakers throughout West Africa. The semiotic, representational capacity of N'ko is a key factor in explaining its popularity and spread despite its exclusion from state formal education and literacy campaigns: "N'ko spread at the grassroots level because it met practical needs and enabled speakers of Mande languages to take pride in their cultural heritage."[278] While other indigenous scripts in West Africa remained limited to specific domains in localized ethnicities, N'ko has broadened its utility and significance in several domains across a range of Mande ethnic groups. N'ko reached people who had no access to state formal education. It proved its relevance to them linguistically and culturally, meeting needs that public indigenous language education could not.

Revolutionary education or grassroots literacy

In comparison to Sékou Touré's institutional approach to literacy education, N'ko literacy is closely tied to community needs and interests. While Touré and Kanté understood the socio-

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[277] Oyler (1995), 194.
[278] Oyler (1997), 239.

cultural relevance of indigenous language education in post-colonial Guinea, only Kanté consciously adapted his literacy campaigns to local realities and the variegated educational interests of Maninka communities. While Touré tried to embrace all aspects social life through radical reforms, his top-down approach necessitated the assimilation of all forms of education into the Party model. Sékou Touré's approach institutionalized indigenous languages in state apparatus and national political dogma. His use of the Latin alphabet limited the linguistic fidelity of national language education. The use of a foreign alphabet also limited the cultural impact of national literacy campaigns. Finally, a lack of reading material in local languages using Latin letters limited community motivations to participate in national literacy education.

Kanté, in contrast, worked at the community level, teaching individuals and creating a diverse literature to respond to the interests and needs of a diverse population. The N'ko script inspired cultural pride among Maninka, proving the validity of indigenous knowledge. N'ko tapped into foreign and indigenous learning to motivate learners. While Touré's approach became hegemonic and totalizing, Kanté's approach was decentralized and voluntary. Through CERs, literacy in national languages became a means to inculcate students with Party ideology. With the increased politicization of education through the imprisonment of students and the fingering of teachers as enemies of the revolution, the social and cultural goals of indigenous language literacy were subsumed by the dogma of the ruling party. Kanté's nonformal approach allowed greater freedom and personal empowerment through self-guided study that was outside the national goals and tight grip of the PDG. Isolating N'ko by keeping it out of formal schools and national literacy campaigns, Touré never institutionalized the N'ko script. But N'ko benefited by remaining unfettered by Party dogma. This may have been instrumental in the popularization of N'ko during the First Republic and its survival after the ousting of the PDG. Stressing the semiotic relevance of N'ko to Maninka people as well as universal applicability of the alphabet's non-aligned "positive neutrality," Kanté's approach offered N'ko as a means of personal empowerment, leaving the choice to learn N'ko to individual volition. Unlike Touré's heavy-handed and politicized use of local language education to control his socialist cultural revolution, Kanté founded a decentralized, grassroots literacy movement based on voluntary teaching and self-motivated learning relevant to Maninka people.

While Touré was able to create national campaigns that affected a large proportion of the Guinean population, he was unable to secure lasting popular support for the endeavor. By contrast,

Souleymane Kanté, the founder of the N'ko movement, took a decentralized approach based on volunteer teachers, nonformal education, and trade networks. The N'ko community grew slowly and steadily in Guinea and spread to neighboring countries with significant Maninka populations. The voluntary and decentralized nature of the N'ko movement allowed it to expand beyond the national borders that confined Touré's approach. While Touré's campaign was abandoned after his death, the N'ko literacy campaign has outlived its founder. As a vehicle for party ideology, Touré's indigenous language education only existed as long as the political dogma was supported. Regime change meant an end to Touré's socialist cultural revolution and the language policies it promulgated.

Indigenous language literacy after Sékou Touré

With Sékou Touré's death in 1984 came an abrupt end to state-sponsored indigenous language education and literacy in Guinea. Revolutionary programs showcasing national cultures, such as the annual National Culture Festival, along with Touré's discourse on the importance of culture in the Republic were eliminated under the new leadership.[279] Likewise, the state ended its role in indigenous language promotion, abandoning its cultural mission of literacy. After a bloodless military coup, Guinea restored French as the main medium of instruction of formal schooling.[280] The Military Committee de National Recovery, which assumed power after the death of Touré, named the First Republic leadership a "bloody and merciless dictatorship"[281] and blamed the promotion of indigenous languages for the country's scholastic and economic failures.[282] By the time of Touré's death, indigenous language education and literacy programs had become widely unpopular in Guinea due to poor teacher training, a lack of printed materials in local languages, and the politicization public education. In addition, indigenous language teaching confined students to their native linguistic zones for schooling.[283] This was especially problematic for Maninka trading families, Dyulas, who were already hard hit by the PDG's *loi cadre* reforms of 1964 outlawing informal commerce.[284]

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[279] Sékou Touré's publications on this subject are numerous. See *Freedom through Culture* (Belgrade: Unesco, 1980); *The Political Leader as Considered the Representative of a Culture* (Newark, N.J.: Jihad Productions, 1975); *La révolution culturelle* (Conakry: Impr. du Gouvernement, 1972); *Revolution, Culture, and Panafricanism* (Conakry, Republic of Guinea : Press Office at State House, 1978); *IXe Festival culturel national* (Conakry : Impr. nationale "Patrice Lumumba," 1975).

[280] Binns, 66.

[281] Committee of National Recovery, "Official Statement of the Military Committee of National Recovery," 3 April 1984.

[282] David D. Latin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 93.

[283] Interview 5B.

[284] For greater detail on the trade laws passed on 19 November 1964, see Victor Du Bois, *Guinea, The Decline of the Guinean Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 124. The *loi cadre* marked an important shift in Touré's rule, intended

The reforms instituted by the military committee included the abandonment of indigenous language instruction and literacy campaigns. As president of Guinea, General Lansana Conté rejected his predecessor's focus on indigenous language education and concentrated on expanding primary enrollment in accordance with international Education for All initiatives.[285] The Conté regime mandated a return to French language instruction and literacy in all grades. Over its nearly two decades in power, the military government of Guinea's Second and Third Republics promoted an agenda of national unity through French monolingualism and championed the broad applicability of European languages in international relations and trade. While occasional international donor programs after 1984 tried to revive indigenous language literacy using the Latin alphabet, including UNESCO's program for local languages and the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique's (ACCT) "Language Programme for Francophone Countries of the South," the Guinean government has eschewed the teaching of local languages.

The decision by the Conté regime to abandon indigenous language education and literacy marked the state's retreat from the cultural role it had fulfilled for 26 years. The N'ko movement initially benefited from the national discourse on indigenous culture and languages promulgated under Touré; but N'ko was subsequently marginalized by state national language education and hurt by popular distaste for hyper-politicized literacy campaigns. The subsequent abandonment of the national cultural mission after 1984 allowed the N'ko movement to reclaim its authority on indigenous language education.

For the almost two decades following the death of Sékou Touré in 1984, the N'ko movement has been the only continuous indigenous literacy campaign in Maninka communities in Guinea. While the movement has never been promoted by the state, N'ko non-governmental organizations (NGO) established in the 1980s and 1990s have proven effective in autonomously organizing informal literacy campaigns throughout Guinea. In this respect, the official termination of indigenous literacy education in Maninka areas did not result in the end of Maninka language literacy. On the contrary, N'ko literacy has spread through a groundswell of popular support, successfully reclaiming the cultural mission established at independence.

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as a measure to shore up power and control the national economy. See R.W. Johnson, "Sékou Touré and the Guinean Revolution" in Timothy Welliver, ed., *Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa Volume 3* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 358.
[285] World Bank, "Education for All – Guinea" (Washington DC: World Bank, 2000).

Conclusion

Independence in West Africa represented a unique opportunity for indigenous leaders to revalorize African cultures and reconsider the goals of education. Some heads of state of newly independent African countries, like Sékou Touré, considered the importance of indigenous cultures and languages in the development of independent nations. Indigenous scholars like Souleymane Kanté also considered African languages integral for African development. Yet, while Touré and Kanté shared a dedication to integrating indigenous language literacy into African education, different priorities caused a rupture in their détente. While Touré prioritized political goals and national unity, Kanté focused on local needs and Maninka communities. Despite marginalization, the N'ko literacy movement grew over the independence period, ultimately outlasting Touré's revolutionary language programs.

Revolutionary reform of the education system in independent Guinea was a backlash against the French education system. The school became an important part of the national mission to promote indigenous cultures through language instruction and literacy training. Sékou Touré's goals to decolonize Guinean society and promote a national political agenda were manifest in national education policy. However, contradictory stances on official and national language promotion underscored the conflicting goals of revalorizing local cultures while promoting national allegiance. The eventual failure and abandonment of indigenous language promotion on the national level was compared with the continued popular support of the N'ko literacy movement. While Touré's national language policy and the N'ko movement's goals were similarly based on proving the relevance and utility of African languages, Touré's approach proved too dominated by party dogma and repressive control to survive his demise, while the N'ko movement continued to thrive in Maninka communities as the popular expression of indigenous literacy.

Maninka language education offers an appealing alternative to public education for Maninka-speakers. Through a return to curriculum dependency and European language instruction, Guinean formal education continues the legacy of colonialism, and fails to fully adapt to the needs of local communities. While instruction was Africanized under Sékou Touré, with a brief attempt at local language education, formal education in Guinea has more recently reverted to a European standard. Such changes in educational priorities pose serious questions about the implications of education in Africa. Brocke-Utne (2000) asks "What does it mean for the development of self-respect and identity that the language one normally communicates in does not seem to be deemed fit for a

language of instruction in school?"[286] N'ko literacy education may be a means for communities to reassert socio-cultural control over education in Guinea by introducing indigenous language instruction and materials. Maninka language education is sensitive to the cultural environment of instruction: N'ko learners are able to affect the medium and the message of instruction by replacing the colonizer's language and worldview with their own.

Central to this chapter has been the question, what accounts for the growth in popularity of N'ko in the post-colonial period? An analysis of the semiotics of N'ko showed that N'ko's popularity stems from its referential power on linguistic and cultural levels. The linguistic level relates the functionality and phonemic fidelity of the N'ko alphabet. The cultural level relates to the transcribing of indigenous and foreign knowledge. While people are drawn to learn N'ko for different reasons, the semiotics of N'ko generate pride among Maninka people regardless of their motivations for N'ko literacy.

N'ko's spread is due to its local relevance, as an alphabet created for and by West Africans, and the relevance of the works written by Kanté in N'ko. Hundreds of books and several monthly newspapers [287] have been printed in N'ko since 1949, dramatically increasing the Maninka community's access to information. Of special importance and popularity are Kanté's books on the 4000 year history of Mande people, Mandé proverbs, and homeopathic medicine. These works represent a body of knowledge that connects Maninka communities across history and national boarders. Radio has proven to be another medium that has popularized and spread N'ko, with current weekly N'ko programs on Kankan's *Radio Rurale* in Guinea, on Mali's national radio station RTM*,* and on Bamako's private Radio Keledou.[288]

N'ko literacy can be understood as a modern vehicle for cultural, supra-national identity among Maninka communities. In Maninka communities across West Africa, N'ko education and literacy has created an international "cultural nationalism." [289] In 18th century Europe, the foundations of nationalism were laid upon the theoretical bedrock of one national language. During German Romanticism, Johann Gottfried von Herder helped form the modern conception of the state, theorizing that a common language is the social heart of a people, creating social order and

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[286] Brock-Utne (2000), 141.
[287] Newspapers include Somoya Sila and Yelen. Less regular papers include Djedelon, Sindjiya Fobè and the defunct French and N'ko Belentigui.
[288] Interviews 15A, 24A, 25A, 27B.
[289] Oyler (1995), 280.

unity.[290] Following the French Revolution, the Abbe Grégoire argued that monolingualism would unify the nation and allow equal access to information and education.[291] National languages became inextricable parts of national identity, tying diverse people to a single "glorious past" of the national narrative. In Africa, however, officially monolingual nations resulted from colonial occupation and education, breaking the vital link between national language and cultural identity.[292]

Maninka speakers make up a community that is not delineated by national boundaries. Separate from the unifying agenda of national leaders, N'ko's popularity unites ethnic communities across porous political borders. N'ko is a means for Maninka people to communicate between and about themselves, and it has become a symbol of Maninka culture in itself. According to Joshua Fishman (1988), language "becomes 'more than' a means of communication, even more than symbolic of the ethnic message; indeed, it becomes a prime ethnic value in and of itself."[293] Unlike previous language policies, Maninka nonformal literacy offered the possibility of an alternative to reliance on French language literacy in Guinea. N'ko teaching networks may be comparable to Benedict Anderson's view of a nation as an "imagined community."[294] This is not to imply that N'ko students and teachers are a false community in comparison to their legal nationalities. Defining N'ko learners as an imagined community means that they imagine themselves as a part of a larger linguistic and cultural network throughout West Africa. N'ko literacy builds solidarity among Mande peoples separated by political borders but united in what Anderson calls "horizontal comradeship"[295] through N'ko. The roots of this cultural nationalism are based in the shared history of Maninka people throughout *Manden*, the territory of the ancient Empire of Mali.

> Language may and has become a symbol of supralocal ethnic-cultural identification, that is, of ethnic-cultural identification at the nationality level (therefore: nationalism), just as it may and has become a symbol of contranational ethnic-cultural identification of the part of smaller groups who, resisting fusion into the larger nationality, develop a localized consciousness of their own. [296]

Maninka language literacy seems to straddle both of these categories, acting as an alternative to the national language policy of French literacy among the Maninka community while uniting Maninka

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[290] Robert Reinhold Ergang. *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism.* (New York, Columbia university press; London, P.S. King & son, ltd., 1931).
[291] M. Grégoire, *Mémoires de Grégoire.* (Paris: J. Yonet, 1840).
[292] Robert Phillipson. *Linguistic Imperialism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
[293] Joshua A. Fishman, *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, Ltd., 1988), 32.
[294] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
[295] Anderson (1991), 7.
[296] Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1968), 6.

communities across West Africa in a supralocal and supranational community. N'ko literacy has been suggested as the "catalyst"[297] for the current construction of cultural nationalism among Maninka people, since it draws together Maninka communities in their study of Maninka language, culture, and history. N'ko teachers from Guinea and Mali qualified N'ko as a "unifying term"[298] in West Africa. N'ko's representational power and relevance to Manding language communities throughout West Africa has broadened its popularity in the independence period and far outstretched the objectives of indigenous language literacy promulgated by Sékou Touré socialist cultural revolution. Whether it can facilitate the creation of an articulate and viable alternative to state-based nationalism is yet to be proven.

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[297] Oyler (1995), 37.
[298] See Mahamadou Sangare, "Les Langues Locales et L'Identité Africaine" and Mamadi Keita, "Le N'KO" in *Méthode Practique d'écritiure N'ko.*

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY

This chapter examines the recent shift in N'ko literacy education from nonformal teaching to formal schools. Conventional nonformal N'ko literacy is contrasted with public formal schooling, showing the challenges posed by the shift to N'ko formal schools. Six N'ko formal schools in Guinea are reviewed and assessed in terms of their transitions to formal schooling. N'ko formal schools are shown to significantly contribute to N'ko literacy through mobilizing community resources, creating innovative pedagogy, and encouraging more equitable access to literacy for girls. However, significant challenges threaten the shift to formal schooling, namely limited finances, textbook production, and coordination between N'ko schools. In light of these successes and challenges, the viability of incorporating N'ko into the Guinean national education and development programs is explored through a "top-down" perspective. Although N'ko formal schools mark a rapprochement with national education policies, key national stakeholders remain unconvinced of N'ko literacy's value in national education and development. Opinions of N'ko as a rural, adult literacy movement with religious, political, and ethnic affiliations continue to argue against N'ko's inclusion in national initiatives. This analysis concludes that increased "bottom-up" coordination and dedication to formal schooling may be the best ways to prove N'ko literacy's relevance in education and national development.

Reorienting N'ko literacy:
N'ko formal schools

<u>Introduction</u>

The use of indigenous languages in formal education has a long history in independent Guinea. Since 1958, the revolutionary language policies of Sékou Touré formalized indigenous language instruction and literacy in Guinea. However, the N'ko alphabet has been largely marginalized in this history. As a self-directed literacy, N'ko originally spread through individual teachers. As N'ko gained popularity and became better organized through N'ko associations, N'ko literacy gained momentum as a social movement; but it continued to employ a nonformal approach to literacy education. Thus, a shift in N'ko literacy from nonformal to formal schooling is a new development that merits closer study. This chapter examines the recent creation of formal schools to teach N'ko literacy in Guinea. Through site visits and interviews, I review N'ko formal schools in terms of their function and social implications. The functional analysis examines school infrastructure, pedagogy, teaching materials, class makeup, and student performance. The social analysis examines the implications of N'ko formal schools for Maninka communities, the N'ko movement, and the nation.

Preceding chapters explained how, excluded from national language programs, N'ko literacy has developed as a nonformal, community-based social movement. Souleymane Kanté instituted a nonformal pedagogy for N'ko literacy that stressed individual, self-motivated learning. State control over education and Kanté's dedication to the nonformal approach led to the creation of an indigenous pedagogy with nonformal literacy training at its heart. With the end of Touré's educational experiment in Guinea came the elimination of indigenous languages from formal education, signaling a return to exclusively French-language literacy as first promulgated under French colonialism. The state's abandonment of its national language program left N'ko the only indigenous alternative for Maninka literacy in Guinea. Still locked out of national formal education and further isolated by the state's rejection of indigenous language instruction, N'ko supporters turned to their communities for support. Shortly after the death of Sékou Touré, N'ko supporters in Guinea created an N'ko promotional organization to take advantage of the state's retreat from indigenous language literacy by spreading N'ko nonformally and voluntarily at the community level.

However, in the 1990s, N'ko supporters began to shift away from N'ko literacy' conventional nonformal pedagogy and reorient the literacy movement's resources toward private, formal primary schooling. This shift represents an important change in the N'ko movement in terms of its objectives, its audience, and its relationship with national educational planning. This chapter explores this shift. By reviewing six formal N'ko schools in Guinea, this analysis tries to answer the question: Can N'ko literacy become a viable national education initiative in Guinea? To answer this question, this chapter explores two perspectives: one 'bottom-up' and the other 'top-down.' The bottom-up perspective is based on Maninka community support for N'ko literacy. The top-down perspective is based on state and donor perceptions of N'ko literacy. N'ko supporters theoretically position the shift to N'ko formal schooling at the center of these two perspectives as a new means of mediating the 'dialectic' of contrasting educational objectives between 'top' national policymakers and 'bottom' Maninka community members (see Appendix, Figure 2).

From the bottom-up perspective, interview data shows that N'ko supporters perceive formal schooling as a historic opportunity for N'ko literacy to gain new ground. Instead of being relegated to self-help and ethnic nationalism, N'ko-based bilingual education is proving its functionality as a vehicle for community mobilization and development. Formal schools reverse the conventional relationship of opposition between N'ko nonformal education and public schooling. In this respect, the shift to formal schools reorients N'ko promulgation to 'rapprochement,' or collaboration, with national education policies. However, the top-down perspective shows that N'ko teachers and leaders still needs to address key concerns in order to prove viability of N'ko formal education, including financial support, infrastructure, material development, and coordination with national education planning.

Research

Motivations: New developments

The recent opening of N'ko formal schools in Guinea represents a significant departure from previous methods of N'ko dissemination which relied on nonformal adult literacy teaching. Since its inception, N'ko has been taught one-on-one and in small groups to adults who generally lacked formal schooling. N'ko learning has been mostly a rural, village phenomenon, supported by volunteer teachers. As students learned the script, they became teachers themselves and spread the

alphabet to others.[299] The inception of formal primary schooling changes this dynamic. Formal primary schooling makes children the focus of literacy training instead of adults. Teaching is done to large groups instead of individuals. Formal schooling requires the investment in inputs previously unnecessary for nonformal literacy training: school buildings, teaching materials, children's textbooks, uniforms, formal curriculum, full-time teachers, and exams to name a few. These changes represent daunting logistic and financial challenges for a decentralized, community-based movement. What is driving the N'ko movement to make such a radical shift? By what means could an independent literacy movement support such a change? My research allowed me to explore why and how the N'ko movement is making this transition to formal schooling, particularly in relation to the local support for N'ko schools and the quality of education students received.

Methodology

The data collected on formal N'ko schooling was carried out in five sites in Guinea (Conakry, Kankan, Kerouané, Touyin-Oulen, and Siguiri) and one site in Mali (Bamako).[300] Sites ranged from large urban city to small rural village. Research in Bamako, Mali allowed me to compare the N'ko movement between Manding groups separated by a political boundary.   Bamako shares the geography, history, culture, and language of the Maninka research sites in Guinea; however, despite the presence of an active N'ko community, research in Bamako provided only information regarding N'ko nonformal schooling since, according to my informants, there were no formal schools teaching N'ko in Bamako.[301]   In Guinea, my research was mostly confined to semi-urban areas, with one trip out to a village school in Siguiri Prefecture. I spent about one week at each location, with the exception of shorter stays in Kerouané and Touyin-Oulen. I visited and observed a total of six schools and I conducted dozens of interviews in settings ranging from education ministries to auto depots.   Research sites centered around several locations that promoted N'ko literacy: N'ko bookstores, NGO offices, traditional medicine shops, radio stations, and schools.

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[299] This is how I was taught N'ko in Siguiri in the mid 1990s and other reports corroborate my experience (see Oyler, 1995).

[300] In Conakry, I collected data regarding the development and history of formal N'ko schooling in Guinea. There were no operating formal N'ko schools to visit, but the president of *l'Association Guineenne pour l'Education, le Developpement, et l'Enseignement* (AGEDEL) showed me a modern classroom of a planned N'ko-Français primary school located behind the AGEDEL offices in Sagoya (Matoto), Conakry.

[301] Interviews 26A, 27C. Bamako informants were less helpful than N'ko informants in Guinea. My brief experiences with the N'ko community in Bamako resonated with Jean-Loup Amselle's description of being "grillé" by his Bamako N'ko informants. See Jean-Loup Amselle, *Branchements: Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 123-24.

As primarily exploratory research, I conducted my study through semi-structured interviews and both direct and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews (SSI) create a flexible discussion framework that is adaptable to specific times, places, and people. Instead of using pre-determined queries or questionnaires asked in a controlled setting with rigid roles of interviewer and informant, SSI allows the researcher to focus questions on central research themes and follow the logic and flow of the conversation to elicit rich and contextualized information from key informants. [302] SSI also allows the researcher to incorporate into the interview visual objects like diagrams and books which are present on-site. In this respect, SSI was especially useful for interviewing N'ko teachers and students using N'ko texts. SSI allowed me to discuss informants' N'ko reading material, NGO training materials in N'ko, and N'ko lessons on primary school blackboards. This approach elicited rich information regarding reading habits, N'ko teaching, and N'ko school curriculum. I grounded my SSI questioning on the theme of formal N'ko schooling, but allowed informants to elaborate on aspects of N'ko literacy that they felt were pertinent to my research.

I used direct observation in surveying classes in N'ko formal schools. This took the form of classroom visits and extended observation and note-taking on the teaching of N'ko formal classes. But, due to the rarity of a *toubabou,* or foreigner, in the N'ko classroom, direct observation sometimes gave way to participant observation. Participant observation allowed me to interact more closely with the N'ko community. Called "the central and defining method of research in cultural anthropology,"[303] participant observation immerses the researcher in the phenomenon under study, gaining insight into what is being done as well as how it is done in relation to specific cultural patterns.[304] The objective of participant observation is to gain a deep understanding and produce what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called "thick description" [305] of a cultural phenomenon. Through participant observation, I gained detailed knowledge on N'ko teaching and N'ko learning in Guinea and Mali.

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[302] SSI are included in many tool kits on participatory field research mehtods. For example, see Karen Schoonmaker Freudenberger*, Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal Manual Volume I: Introduction, Field Research and Methodology* (Baltimore: Catholic Relief Services, 1999).

[303] Kathleen M. Dewalt, Billie R. Dewalt with Coral B. Wayland, "Participant Obersvation" in H. Russell Bernard, ed., *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998), 269.

[304] The depth of participation is not necessarily consistent in participant observation. According to Michael Quinn Patton's (1986) five dimensions of participant observation, research can vary according to the researchers' level of participation, their disclosure to other participants, their explanation of research objectives, the duration of the observation, and the focus of the observations. My research was generally partial observation, full disclosure, full explanation, limited duration, and expanded focus.

[305] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture" in *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

My principal research sites for participant observation were N'ko bookstores and schools.[306] In bookstores, my interest and "participation" in reading N'ko books allowed me to explore what N'ko books were sold in specific research sites, while providing a forum for informal interviews with booksellers and customers. Participant observation in educational venues resulted in my joining nonformal adult N'ko literacy classes as a student and, at the teachers' requests, leading N'ko formal primary school classes in their lessons. These experiences allowed me to see from both sides of the desk as an N'ko student and as an N'ko teacher. This "double vision" provided insights into N'ko teaching methodology and student performance not immediately apparent from observation alone. This approach also aided my research in two ways. Firstly, learning N'ko while studying N'ko literacy as a social phenomenon gave me literacy skills pertinent to my research and useful for deciphering textual data in N'ko. Secondly, identifying and proving myself as an active student of N'ko showed my interest in N'ko literacy and engendered a sense of respect and camaraderie with my informants. Informants were not so much subjects of my study as teachers and fellow students of N'ko. This approach was important in creating an atmosphere of trust in the interview setting, helping overcome a pervasive attitude of suspicion toward foreigners in Guinea cultivated under the reign of Sékou Touré.

Due to the scarcity of research on N'ko in academia, much of my study was devoted to exploration, fact checking, and seeking out key informants. Through my research, I have been able to sketch a composite of the organizations and individuals involved in promulgating N'ko literacy, the resources available for achieving their goals, and the organizational capacity of NGOs supporting N'ko literacy. Spending much of my time observing N'ko primary schools and talking with N'ko teachers, these methods allowed me to examine how the N'ko literacy movement has changed in recent years through the formalization of N'ko literacy in primary schools in Guinea.

Background on nonformal N'ko literacy education

As the preceding chapters have documented, the pioneering work of Souleymane Kanté founded and spread N'ko literacy in West Africa through the creation of the N'ko alphabet, the transcription of a numerous of books, and the nonformal teaching of N'ko. Yet, the most significant spread of N'ko is attributable to Kanté's disciples, who established non-governmental

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[306] I was also a participant observer at the Radio Télévision Malinne station (ORTM) in Bamako, where I was interviewed on the weekly N'ko radio program.

organizations (NGOs) for the promotion of N'ko literacy. A year before his death in 1986, Souleymane Kanté founded the first and most active N'ko organization to advance the teaching and dissemination of N'ko in and around Kankan, Guinea.[307]

Called *l'Association pour l'Impulsion et la Coordination des Récherches sur l'Alphabet N'ko* (ICRA-N'KO), it was granted official status as a national Guinean NGO in 1991. Since its establishment, ICRA-N'KO has opened regional offices in every prefecture and most sub-prefectures of Guinea.[308] The NGO has established international networks promoting N'ko in West African countries with Mande speaking populations and created broad international networks of N'ko supporters in Egypt, Israel, the US, Europe (Belgium, Sweden and Russia), and Asia (Thailand, Malaysia and Japan)—just about anywhere sizable Mande populations have settled.

Other more recent N'ko NGOs, such as *l'Association pour la Vulgarisation et la Recherche en Alphabet N'ko* (AVRA-N'KO), *l'Association Guinéenne pour l'Education, le Developpement et l'Enseignment dans nos Langues Nationales* (AGEDEL), *Association pour la Récherche, l'Alphabétisation et la Formation* (ARAF) and *Movement Culturel pour le Développement de N'ko* (MCD N'ko)[309], have also added to the spread of N'ko over the past decade. Dedicated to the dissemination of N'ko, these NGOs have carried out their missions with no state-sponsored funding and very limited international donor assistance. Relying on community support and volunteer commitment, these N'ko NGOs have continued Souleymane Kanté's small-scale, nonformal teaching techniques in the promotion of N'ko. Focusing literacy campaigns in rural areas, ICRA-N'KO has built up an impressive roster of N'ko literate villages through nonformal education.

Gender and N'ko

According to informants, personal observations, and ICRA-N'KO literacy statistics for Siguiri prefecture (see Appendix, Table A), this nonformal effort has primarily benefited adult men. The vast majority of the leaders of the N'ko movement, its supporters, and N'ko students are adult males. More than fifty years of nonformal literacy training seems to have made N'ko a predominantly male literacy movement. My site visits during my research also indicated a

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[307] Oyler (1995) 259.

[308] Interview 2A, 5D. Informant at ICRA-N'KO office in Conakry stated that there are currently more than 800 ICRA-N'KO branches in Guinea.

[309] This Malian organization has gone through several confusing permutations. Despite the small core of N'ko supporters in Bamako, their organization has many conflicting names, including *Mouvement pour le Développement de l'Alphabet N'ko* (MDA N'ko), *Association pour le Rayonnement du Manden*, and N'ko *Recherche et Rassemblement*.

predominance of men in the N'ko movement. Nonformal N'ko classes I attended in Kankan, Siguiri, and Bamako in 2002 were almost exclusively made up of adult men. I witnessed only one adult female learning N'ko and only heard about one female N'ko teacher during my site visits.[310]

While this study does not offer a definitive explanation to account for this trend, my research indicates that nonformal N'ko education may require time and resource commitments that women generally cannot spare. Alternately, women may not consider N'ko nonformal education a good allocation of their time and resources. Stromquist (1999) explains the obstacles women face in attending literacy classes around the world in terms of the gendering of literacy acquisition: "The process of literacy acquisition is gendered because women face more problems becoming literate than men: failure to receive their husband's approval for attending classes, their need to be at home to perform continuous domestic chores, and their responsibility vis-à-vis children and sick family members."[311] The paucity of N'ko literate women according to literacy statistics from Siguiri (Appendix, Table A) indicates that N'ko literacy may not be as accessible or relevant to women. Based on my analysis of the semiotics of N'ko (see Chapter 2), N'ko should appeal to Maninka regardless of gender. Linguistically, Maninka women should be drawn to N'ko by the alphabet's phonemic fidelity to sounds in the Maninka language. Culturally, as well, the vast literature in N'ko should appeal to women as cultural resources and as sources of cultural pride. Souleymane Kanté seems to have tried to appeal to women by writing books on topics that would be of special concern for women, such as pregnancy and child weaning.[312] While it is difficult to explain the low level of female literacy in N'ko, official literacy rates in Guinea and Mali seem to reflect a general trend of low literacy levels among Maninka women.[313] As with French and Arabic literacy, nonformal N'ko literacy does not seem to reach many Maninka women in Guinea; however, as discussed later, the

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[310] One of the three teachers at Siguiri's Sir Samaké school was reported to be female, although she did not teach and was not present during my site visits.

[311] Nelly Stromquist, "Gender and Literacy Development" in Wagner et al., Eds., *Literacy: An International Handbook* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 272.

[312] While I did not see these books in circulation during my research, they are noted in N'ko publication lists.

[313] 1997 literacy estimates for Guinea show a significant disparity between men and women. While the overall illiteracy rate was 62 percent, male illiteracy was only 48 percent while female illiteracy was 76 percent. See UNESCO, *World Education Report 2000* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000). More recent statistics for Mali show the same disparity. In 2000, Mali had an illiteracy rate of 74 percent, where 64 percent of men were illiterate and 84 percent of women were illiterate. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Estimates and Projections of Adult Illiteracy for Populations Aged 15 Years and Above by Country and by Gender 1970-2015* (Paris: UNESCO, 2002). While these statistics are not limited to Maninka women in Guinea and Mali, they represent the literacy trend found in these communities.

shift to formal N'ko literacy seems to be redressing this problem by creating gender equity in N'ko formal school classrooms, as will be discussed later.

Contrasting nonformal and formal education

Nonformal N'ko education has been positioned as an alternative to state-run formal education. During the colonial period, N'ko provided an alternative to monolingualism and indigenous language denigration of French colonial schools. After independence, N'ko's exclusion from national education reforms and Touré's suppression of ethnicity-based social movements relegated N'ko to nonformal education. The end of Touré's reign offered new possibilities for N'ko literacy; but the military leadership's rejection of African languages in national formal schooling again sidelined N'ko education to nonformal, small scale education. This history made N'ko and formal schooling seem at odds, providing separate education with distinct methodologies and goals.

Table 3.1: Contrasting N'ko and state education

N'ko nonformal education	Guinean formal education
Adults	Children
Self-motivated	Obligatory
Individualized study	Group study
Unstructured curriculum	Standardized curriculum
Any teaching location	School classroom
No set grade levels	Grade promotion
Grassroots organization	Official policymaking
Decentralized	Centralized
Religious study	Secular curriculum
Some opposition party support	Ruling party control
Regional / ethnic (Maninka)	General (French)
Spread throughout West Africa	Confined to Guinea
Volunteer teachers	Paid civil servants
Life-long learning	Six years of primary school

N'ko nonformal education contrasts with Guinean formal education in many ways (see Table 3.1). N'ko nonformal education's principle audience is adults, while Guinean formal schools cater to children. Adult learners are self-motivated to take up N'ko study nonformally, while formal schooling is obligatory for children. The "each-one teach-one" method of N'ko literacy education pioneered by Souleymane Kanté makes nonformal literacy a largely individual study, while formal schooling takes place among often exceedingly large groups in Guinean primary schools. The curriculum for teaching N'ko nonformally is usually based on one of a series of beginner books, such as *N'ko Kafa Folo Sairama* or *N'ko Sebesun Djiyama*. While it may follow the same patterns, starting with basic letters and progressing to accents, there is no set curriculum to be mastered. Formal schools, in contrast, have a standard national curriculum that students are expected to learn before

passing to the next grade. For the most part, there are no grades in nonformal N'ko

teaching. [314] N'ko nonformal education is organized through local communities through decentralized planning, while formal schooling is centralized through official policymaking. Likewise, formal education is centralized through classrooms and schools, while nonformal study locations range from a cement–brick room to the shade of a tree. Much nonformal N'ko study is centered around religious study through reading hadiths and the Quran translated into Maninka. Christians in Ivory Coast, as well, use N'ko translations of the Bible to study and propagate N'ko literacy.[315] Guinean public schooling, in contrast, does not incorporate religion into the curriculum. As a mainly Maninka literacy movement with a large constituent base in Upper Guinea, N'ko study has sometimes become part of Maninka opposition parties that draw their constituents from the same geographic area.[316] In formal schooling, the state ruling party retains uncontested control. Formal education, similarly, uses French as the medium of instruction, removing regional and ethnic affiliations from public schools. As national schooling, Guinean formal education is confined by the nation's political boundaries. As Mande community literacy, nonformal N'ko education has spread to at least nine countries in West Africa. As a decentralized, community endeavor, N'ko nonformal education relies on volunteer teachers, while formal schools employ salaried civil servants as teachers. Lastly, N'ko nonformal education is part of an adult's life-long learning, while primary education is limited to just six years of school. While other contrasting aspects of N'ko nonformal education and Guinean formal education can be imagined, this list provides the most salient and striking differences between the two approaches. These differences reveal the challenge of reorienting N'ko literacy from nonformal to formal education.

Until recently, the disciples of Souleymane Kanté continued the nonformal approach to N'ko literacy education that he pioneered. Kanté taught N'ko one-on-one through an "each one, teach one" approach.[317] Kanté propagated this nonformal pedagogy by encouraging his students, after gaining proficiency with the script, to teach as many as seven others individually. [318] Throughout his life, Kanté remained dedicated to the promotion of N'ko through nonformal education. Kanté saw his nonformal approach and state formal schooling as worlds apart. Kanté

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[314] The weekly nonformal classes at Bamako's *Institut National des Arts* were divided into three classes by ability, but these were rather arbitrary divisions, not transferable to other nonformal classes.

[315] Interview 1A, 25A.

[316] The *Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen* (RPG) party was especially popular among Maninka in Upper Guinea in the 1990s. The Union Mandé party's Maninka affiliations at independence were discussed in Chapter 1.

[317] Oyler (1995).

[318] Oyler (2001).

presented the following analogy when comparing nonformal N'ko literacy and formal schooling: "N'ko and school are like the sky and the earth. They do not have the same objective, and they are of a different nature."[319] The recent shift to formal primary schooling using N'ko required a re-evaluation of Kanté's nonformal approach.

Formal primary schools – A new departure

Formal primary schooling in N'ko is the most recent thrust of the N'ko movement in Guinea. The shift to formal schooling came in the mid-1990s in Upper Guinea. Yet, due to the decentralized nature of N'ko literacy education, it is difficult to pinpoint this shift historically. Diane Oyler's research into N'ko in the 1990s discusses N'ko education efforts. While significant and pioneering, her research fails to distinguish between formal and nonformal education approaches, which have fundamental differences in student body, pedagogy, and infrastructure.[320] Similarly, she makes no distinction between basic education and literacy training in N'ko. Furthermore, her informants' accounts of N'ko schools are presented as fact without deeper exploration through site visits.[321] Throughout my research, informants stated that N'ko formal schooling is a recent phenomenon in West Africa, citing the N'ko-Français school established in 1994 in Touyin-Oulen as the first N'ko formal school in Guinea.[322]

While nonformal schooling and literacy training has been carried out for several decades through the support of the national NGO ICRA-N'KO, formal schooling represents a distinct change. Formal primary schooling reorients the traditional, nonformal methodology in several ways. In its most basic sense, formal schooling puts demands of time and place on education. Classes are held regularly on a daily basis, at set hours, in a special structure, with particular rules and regulations. This necessitates many inputs lacking in nonformal training, including an allotted location, classrooms, desks, blackboards, personnel, and teaching materials. Other standard inputs for formal schooling in Guinea include student uniforms, notebooks, textbooks, and a Guinean flag. N'ko

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[319] Oyler (1995), 236-7.

[320] See Manzoor Ahmed, "Literacy and Nonformal Education: Overlap and Divergence" in Wagner et al., Eds., *Literacy: An International Handbook* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 324-328.

[321] Oyler's informants note several N'ko 'schools' in Guinea, but they are predominantly small, nonformal, and temporary classes for adult literacy training. She provides records of an N'ko school in the Senkèfra neighborhood of Kankan which recorded 258 students in 1981 (Oyler, 1995: 253), but the structure and pedagogy of this 'school' remain unclear. My informants in Kankan made no mention of this school.

[322] Interview 2B, 4A, 20A. The elders of Touyin-Oulen presented me with a signed testimonial stating that their school was the first N'ko formal school in Guinea.

teachers and supporters interviewed expressed both their pride in the development of formal schools and their difficulty in making the shift from nonformal to formal schools.[323]

Only recently, through the reorientation of the social movement toward formal schooling, has N'ko literacy begun to reach children and balance literacy education between girls and boys. The recent formalization of N'ko schooling represents an important shift in the N'ko movement that has the potential to greatly increase the spread of N'ko literacy by tailoring N'ko education to children. The shift to formal schools is an attempt to streamline N'ko education in accordance with national pedagogy by introducing curricula taught in public schools, reorienting N'ko education toward national formal schooling.[324] Instead of positioning N'ko as an alternative to public education, formal N'ko schooling reorients N'ko literacy toward national pedagogy. Kanté's metaphor comparing N'ko and school to the sky and the earth puts nonformal N'ko education in opposition to public schooling. The shift to formal schooling demands a reorientation of N'ko literacy and a reassessment of Kanté's metaphor, since N'ko formal schools are modeled on national primary schools. N'ko formal schools adopt the form of public schools by building schools according to national architectural plans, fully equipping schools, and following school protocols for testing, ceremony, and discipline. N'ko formal schools also adopt the content of public schools in curricula. This shift shows a rapprochement between local and national education objectives, and community support for integrating N'ko education into the Guinean national education plan. However, in order to evaluate the feasibility of this union, the following section takes a closer look at the kinds of education Guinean formal N'ko schools are offering.

N'ko formal primary schools – A closer look

The six sites visited ranged from schools in large semi-urban areas to remote rural schools in villages. All of the schools conformed generally to the state model of formal schooling. The school directors interviewed expressed the desire to match more closely state-run formal schools.[325] All of the schools I visited were recognized officially by national and local authorities as private primary schools. Their enrollments and student records were reported to the Prefectural Education Directorate and included as part of national primary schooling figures in Guinea. Yet, there were significant differences between the schools in terms of educational infrastructure and curriculum.

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[323] Interviews 1A, 2C, 4A, 5D, 8D, 9A, 10A, 10C, 12B, 12C, 13A, 15A, 16A, 17A, 19A, 19B, 20A, 23B, 25A, 26A, 27C.

[324] Teachers and directors at every N'ko school I visited described their schools in this manner. Interviews 4A, 8D, 10C, 13A, 16A, 19C, 20A.

[325] Interviews 8D, 10C, 13A, 19B, 20A, and 20B.

The following analysis separates the six N'ko schools into four groups based on their conformity to public schools: village schools, rural formal schools, limited formal schools, and model formal schools. The categories represent degrees of differentiation from the state formal school model, with the village school the farthest removed. This is by no means an absolute ranking, but just a means of considering N'ko schools from the perspective of formal education. This vantage point allows for comparison along standardized criteria to evaluate the possibility of N'ko literacy's use in public schooling. However, N'ko schools are not limited to these categories and this analysis does not pretend to explore these schools' social value and cultural salience in their entirety. To achieve this, a detailed and long-term ethnographic study of each school within its socio-cultural context must be undertaken.

This section reviews each school to provide an understanding of the challenges posed by transitioning from nonformal to formal schooling for the N'ko movement. This section evaluates the success of the N'ko movement's transition to formal schooling according to the kind and quality of education provided based on short site visits at each school. Each group is introduced with a brief diary excerpt to give the reader an idea of the school site and to highlight important characteristics of the educational environment. A final section evaluates the successes and challenges of N'ko formal schooling. (See Appendix, Tables A-G for each school's quantitative data. See Appendix, Photos 2-6 for pictures from each school.)

Kerouané – The village school

The school director was waiting for me on his porch, standing in front of a large blackboard filed with a cross-section of N'ko curriculum: addition, subtraction, multiplication; Arabic, French, English; grammar, accents, punctuation — all written in N'ko. As he packed up his briefcase, students came and greeted him with "Peace be with you", a standard greeting among N'ko learners. We left his courtyard, walking around the block to the Sanoussy fiman Diané N'ko primary school. Scores of students were huddled several rows deep under a thatch roof supported by tree branches. Students had moved the few desks and unrolled their mats, performing ablutions despite a lack of water. Pointing behind the students, the director said, "We have a new schoolhouse, but it is incomplete and too small to accommodate all of the students." The director began class by leading the students in the morning prayer.

This diary entry from my visit to Kerouané provides a portrait of the most under-resourced and over-populated N'ko primary school I visited. In its lack of adequate infrastructure, plethoric class sizes, and connection to Islam, it resembled a village Quranic school more than any other N'ko school I surveyed. However, despite its lack of resources and curriculum, large classes attested to the strong local support for N'ko education. Situated in the remote but sprawling town of Kerouané,

it drew its students from the predominantly Maninka and Konyanka families in town. Student ages ranged from five to ten years old and periods of study also varied from a few years to just a few months. According to school records, over 600 students were officially enrolled, although there were less than one-third present during my visit (see Appendix, Table B). Students were grouped into one large class led by a single energetic volunteer teacher, who was also the school principal. Both official and observed attendance levels showed a preponderance of male students(between 65 and 75 percent).

On the positive side, a lack of learning materials did not seem to diminish student enthusiasm to learning N'ko in Kerouané. Students generally did not wear uniforms and few had N'ko textbooks, but they were equipped with notebooks and showed a great facility for reading and writing N'ko. The director reported that students from the N'ko school were awarded top prizes in a literacy tournament held in Kerouané.[326] A survey of students' notebooks showed an emphasis on religious education through transcribing Hadiths in Maninka. However, students' notebooks also showed the variety of the subject matter taught at the school. Classes mixed religious and secular content, with subjects ranging from French to math and from Maninka history to biology. The fact that schooling is free makes it popular and competitive with public education.[327]

On the negative side, strong community support for free N'ko education has forced N'ko formal schooling beyond its means in Kerouné. Classes conform in some respects to formal schooling, with scheduled daily classes and a diverse, basic curriculum; however, large class-size and an emphasis on religious education make this school diverge from the national model for formal schooling. While the director shows tremendous drive, perseverance, and volunteerism, serious questions must be raised about the quality and access to education in this environment. This school responds to community support of N'ko schooling, but it cannot provide an adequate education for all students without tuition or financial support to reduce class sizes, complete school infrastructure, and secure teaching materials and primary school textbooks for students.

Touyin-Oulen – The formal school in a village

Crossing the Tinkissou River in a wooden canoe, I left the outskirts of Siguiri town and crossed into a rural farming village. I went up the dirt road to the village, where a crowd of school children waited to greet me. A teenage girl emerged from the crowd and directed me to the school in French. It looked like a government village school until I

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[326] Interview 11A

[327] This sentiment was made all too clear in the afternoon class when a concerned parent forcibly brought his son to class, hands bound behind his back, and proceeded to flog the boy mercilessly before his classmates for having skipped class.

noticed the large cracks cleaving the mud-brick walls. Part of the veranda had already given way, making one classroom too dangerous to use. All of the children and village elders assembled into a classroom, some of them still carrying their hoes, taking a rare break in the busy planting season to study N'ko. Students began to read from the N'ko text written on the board next to a painting of Souleymane Kanté.

As the above diary excerpt notes, the village of Touyin-Oulen is an isolated N'ko village school located outside the city limits of Siguiri. A small village of farmers, Touyin-Oulen's inhabitants credit themselves with establishing the first formal N'ko primary school in Guinea.[328] While the village already had a public primary school, the village elders decided to build the N'ko-Français school to teach their children N'ko literacy without making students sacrifice learning French and other standard curricula.[329] Upon visiting the school, it was unclear whether classes were currently being held on a regular basis due to the poor condition of the building.[330] But two N'ko teachers were in attendance and, upon engaging the students in reading exercises, it became clear that students were proficient N'ko. The boy-girl ratio seems to reflect a bias for boys in school (see Appendix, Table C). Yet, the head teacher made a point of introducing their star pupil, a girl proficient in N'ko and French who had graduated from the N'ko school and continued her studies at the public school. This community made sure to point out the girl's French fluency and N'ko literacy as an example of the functional bilingualism that formal schooling in N'ko can produce.

This N'ko school enjoyed the support of the village and the presence of many children to fill its classrooms. The French-N'ko curriculum had proven valuable to students by giving them a basic education in maternal language and the N'ko alphabet, but also giving them the ability to transition to the public school system through French language education. Despite the financial constraints and the seasonal incompatibility with the formal school calendar during the summer harvest season, the community expressed their value of teaching their children N'ko *and* the standard national curriculum.[331]

However, a lack of financial resources to sustain formal schooling constrained the community's access to N'ko education. While the villagers modeled their school on the national rural primary school plan, a lack of funding limited their building to sub-standard materials like mud bricks instead of cement. At the end of my visit, the elders stated that they wished to rebuild their

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[328] Interview 20A.
[329] Interview 20A.
[330] The class register showed that 189 students had graduated from the school since 1994.
[331] Interview 20A.

N'ko school to conform to the model of state-run rural primary schools.[332] Touyin-Oulen shows that strong community support is not always enough to develop and sustain formal N'ko schooling.

AVRA N'ko schools – Limited formal schools

Stepping gingerly over puddles, I heard students' voices rising at the end of the alleyway. Set back behind a small veranda, two red metal doors opened onto a class full of students in blue uniforms snapping their fingers and waving their arms to get the teacher's attention. They filled the room all the way to the back wall, on which a chalk map of the world was written in N'ko. The room was simple and dark, but the large blackboard and numerous chalk drawings on each wall made it come alive with animals, plants and diagrams of the human body, all detailed in N'ko. Students shared bright green textbooks from which they enthusiastically read aloud.

AVRA-N'KO schools represent an educational approach that borrows heavily from formal schooling, while creatively improvising to tailor N'ko education to children. The two AVRA-N'KO schools in Kankan and Siguiri were small establishments of one or two rooms. As recently established schools with an NGO support base, they were better organized than the N'ko schools in Kerouané and Touyin-Oulen; but they had smaller classes and fewer students and teachers than the ICRA-N'KO schools (discussed in the next section). According to my observations, their small, independent leadership allowed them to create unique and effective methodology for N'ko education. The AVRA-N'KO schools used formal school teaching methods, including uniforms, 'modern' classrooms, formal teaching techniques (lecture, recitation, transcription), tuition, morning and afternoon classes, and formal school ceremony (flag raising, teacher greeting). Importantly, these schools advertised themselves as *N'ko-Français* schools, integrating French language instruction into the elementary classes. In addition to their adoption of formal school methods, these schools also took novel approaches to formal primary schooling in terms of pedagogy and teaching materials, making them a vanguard in the N'ko movement's foray into formal schooling. The above diary excerpt captures the unique energy and excitement that made AVRA-N'KO schools stand out among N'ko formal schools in Guinea.

Tucked along an alleyway off the Grand Marché, the AVRA-N'KO school in Kankan was a blur of activity. Sixty students, ranging from pre-school aged to girls old enough to be in second grade, were actively learning N'ko. This school had more girls than boys enrolled and in attendance; on the observed day, there were 62 percent more girls in attendance than boys (see Table D,

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[332] Interview 20A.

Appendix). This seems to reverse the trend of male-centered literacy that has characterized N'ko nonformal education.

Students seemed generally well-prepared. They were mostly in uniform and almost all students had notebooks which they used during class to copy from the blackboard and read past lessons. Students also showed a remarkably high level of N'ko textbook use in class for a Guinean classroom, where even public school textbooks are exceedingly rare. N'ko books are relatively scarce in Guinea, and, based on my observations, introductory N'ko books comprise only about one-quarter of the N'ko books in circulation in Guinea. Yet, almost half of the AVRA-NKO students had an N'ko textbook for practicing recitation and writing in N'ko during the observation period. This can be explained by the school director's concerted efforts to equip his students with N'ko textbooks. To this end, the director has authored several books in N'ko, including one of the few, if not only, N'ko books tailored specifically to the primary school classroom: *N'ko Karan Nya Dansudun Folo*. While there are many introductory books available for studying N'ko, the AVRA-N'KO textbook is the only example I have seen where the text is tailored to primary school-aged children and written as part of primary school curriculum. The director explained that students are told to buy his textbook at the beginning of the school year, and many books are given to students who cannot afford to buy one.[333] The textbook follows the progression of the primary school curriculum, with clear and simple examples for first-grade students. Two-teachers alternated morning and afternoon classes, creating very low student-teacher ratios. Textbooks and small classes make this school the best serviced of the schools surveyed, despite its limited means. The active and dynamic learning environment made it stand out among N'ko schools I visited.

In Siguiri, another AVRA-N'KO supported school was established in 1999. Similar in set up to the Kankan school, it has a small classroom for primary school students teaching half the day in Maninka and N'ko and the other half in French with N'ko. While the Siguiri school does not use the same original textbook used in the Kankan school, its teachers employ a variety of pedagogical materials and teachers' aids in class. These range from N'ko books to USAID produced visual aids adapted from the radio teaching program to teach N'ko. The small class size and two-teacher staff created a low student- teacher ratio (see Table E, Appendix). Observed class also showed age-grade concentration, ranging from 6-8 years old, creating a single-level classroom. As in Kankan, the Siguiri class had high female attendance. The class showed equal access according to gender, with

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[333] Interview 8D.

classes evenly divided between boys and girls. The curricula spanned a wide variety of topics, such as reading and writing N'ko, elementary math in N'ko, French, oral multiplication in Maninka, "civic instruction", and singing. All students had notebooks and personal mini-blackboards, although the presence of N'ko textbooks was rare.

Both of the AVRA-N'KO schools are small in scale, allowing teachers to give ample attention to students while giving teachers the freedom to try innovative teaching techniques. Low student-ratios, equitable girls' access to schooling, and effective use of textbooks and teaching materials creates a stimulating and exciting learning environment. These schools are able to work within the formal school model but bring unique materials and approaches to supplement for a lack of official, formal N'ko pedagogy. Both schools are able to function as nonformal literacy centers in the evenings as well, allowing adults to participate in N'ko literacy and fostering an intergenerational education campaign.

ICRA-N'KO schools – Model formal schools "on the road"

Grey clouds were forming as I pedaled my bike down the newly paved road through the Siguiri market. When I rounded the corner heading past the post office and out of town, I saw the new ICRA-N'KO school I had heard about even before my arrival in Guinea. It was a three-room building on a large plot of land with a Guinean flag raised in the school yard. It was identical to public primary schools I had seen in many villages in Guinea, except for its distinctive blue and white colors. As I approached the school, raindrops were popping as they hit the shiny, solid corrugated-metal roof. I could see that all three classrooms were full of students in uniform writing diligently at their desks. For all intents and purposes, the school looked like a public primary school, except when I entered a class and found that everything was written in N'ko.

As the above diary excerpt suggests, the ICRA-N'KO schools were well equipped, private versions of public formal schools. Of all the schools surveyed, the ICRA-N'KO schools adhere most closely to state-run public school model. ICRA-N'KO school are "on the road" in terms of following the path of national education planning to develop functional N'ko formal primary schools. They are literally "on the road" as well, being centrally located in large Maninka towns. Both schools are built to the specifications of the national primary school building plans, which call for a school of three classrooms and an office, including all the necessary accoutrements in terms of doors, blackboards, desks, tables, and bureaus. Students wear uniforms, pay tuition, and follow public school rules, such as classroom discipline, performing the morning flag raising ceremony, and greeting teachers at the start of each class.

The ICRA-N'KO schools' curriculum, grade-structure, and teaching methods are also modeled on public schools. The class schedule for the upper grades, especially, showed a tremendous diversity in curriculum, perhaps surpassing public school in variety of course offerings.[334] Grammar and elementary mathematics (*jatéli*) are taught in the first grade using N'ko, second grades introduce compositions and recitations (*karangbè*) in N'ko with a transition to French study in the higher grades to facilitate transition to public school. Like the AVRA-N'KO schools, ICRA-N'KO's formal schools are *N'ko-Français,* highlighting the utility of N'ko education and its connection to national public schooling. Students are grouped according to age, allowing for promotion between grades and eventual segue into public primary schooling. The schools are composed of a first, second, and combined third-fourth grades, as are rural public primary schools. Both schools employ one teacher for each grade, keeping class sizes manageable.[335]

The Sir Samake school was the best attended and organized N'ko school I observed in Guinea. This school most closely resembles a government public primary school in equipment, staff, and student attendance. With multilateral donor support through the United Nations Development Programme, the school was solidly built according to the national model for rural primary schools.[336] Its class sizes are smaller than most over-crowded public primary school classes in Siguiri town, with between 11 and 26 students per class (see Table G, Appendix). During the observation period, classes were well attended and students came in uniform and with their study materials. Students showed less use of notebooks and textbooks than AVRA-N'KO students, however, especially in the first grade. The reported enrollments and observed attendance statistics from the end of the semester differ only slightly, showing a high retention rate.[337] Teachers seemed to follow the public school exam schedule, since, during my visit, the teachers tested students orally and checked notebooks as part of the end-of-semester evaluations.

In terms of gender equity, the Sir Samaké school performed well. The attendance figures show that proportions of boys and girls were almost the same, with slightly more female students.

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[334] The Sir Samaké third grade class schedule noted 15 different subjects: physical education, lecture, writing, song, mental calculation, mathematics, written calculation, numeric notation, educational labor, morality, language, geography, geometry, religion, and observed study.

[335] Class sizes are in comparison to public primary school class sizes. In Siguiri, the Principal Primary School had as much as twice as many students in each class than the Sir Samaké N'ko primary school.

[336] A Malian program officer, after whom the school is named, at the United Nations Development Programme office in Conakry funded the school as a last act before retirement. He was convinced of the importance of developing and spreading N'ko through formal education as a means of community development. Interview 3A.

[337] About 92% of the enrolled students were in attendance, despite the fact that my observation came at the very end of the school year.

The percentage of boys grew from grade one to two. However, in grade three, the girls became the majority, due to a sharp decrease in the number of boys in third grade. This suggests that boys are moving out of N'ko school to public primary schools sooner than girls. Some of the oldest students in the school were girls, suggesting that girls may start N'ko schooling later than boys, perhaps after it is too late to enter public primary school.

The Ladji Sidafa Sanoh school was the main ICRA-NKO formal school in Kankan and the largest N'ko school in the prefecture. In terms of infrastructure and grade-levels, Ladji Sidafa Sanoh resembled a small public primary school. It was composed of three classrooms for four grades with separate teachers assigned to each grade. Lower grade subjects concentrated on basic N'ko literacy, grammar and elemental mathematics. Higher grades learned composition, more grammar, geometry, morals, and French as a second language. For teaching manuals, teachers explained that they transcribed public school textbooks from French to Maninka in N'ko and used locally produced N'ko books in their classes. They also reported using an N'ko teaching program called *Karan Niwala* for N'ko instruction.[338]

During the observation period, Ladji Sidafa Sanoh students came to class in uniform and most had some study materials. However, unlike the Sir Samaké school, there were some discrepancies in function and attendance at the school. No classes were held during the week before the observed class when I paid surprise visits to the school. During the observation period, there was a disparity between the reported enrollment and the observed attendance. Only 26 percent of the enrolled class was in attendance and no first grade class was held (see Table F, Appendix). The directors of the school attributed low turn outs to the end of the year testing period; however, other informants gave conflicting explanations.[339] In observing the classes, however, it was clear that the students in attendance had a strong knowledge of N'ko, shown by their in-class performance and their notebooks full of past lessons.

The ICRA-N'KO formal primary schools best conformed to the infrastructure, organization, and pedagogy of public schooling of all the N'ko formal schools observed. These schools represent the most successful attempts to integrate N'ko literacy into the model of state-sponsored public education. While schools lacked the energy of the AVRA-N'KO classrooms, ICRA-N'KO schools

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[338] Interview 13A.

[339] Other members of the N'ko teaching community in Kankan stated that ICRA-NKO's opposition party political affiliations had forced their school to close before the June 30th, 2002 legislative elections. Interview 12A

most closely imitated public schools in terms of grade-promotion, student age-grouping, infrastructure, organization, and curriculum. Like AVRA-N'KO schools, ICRA-N'KO formal schools were able to attract and retain female students, creating gender equity that sorely lacks in nonformal N'ko education. School facilities and teaching environments provided an educational experience similar to public schools, easing student segue into formal public schooling. Both school management committees stated that their students have successfully transitioned to public, French-language primary and secondary schools, because N'ko education "opens their minds" (*hakili bada laka)* and gives students a better intellectual foundation than French-only schooling.[340]

Both schools' board members expressed a desire to enlarge their primary schools. This, they explained, would serve to better imitate public primary schools and respond to community desire to increase access to N'ko formal schooling.[341] In Kankan, the N'ko school board affirmed that they have already obtained another parcel of land for their expansion. In Siguiri, N'ko school board members also expressed their desire to expand their school to six classes and planned to build an N'ko middle school in the Siguiri Koura neighborhood. These efforts show the ICRA-N'KO members' determination to create N'ko formal education on par with public primary schooling. Their emphasis on French language education in the higher grades and the successful transition of N'ko students to public schools shows their intention to work with and not against national educational priorities.

N'ko formal schooling – Successes and challenges

The opening of formal N'ko formal primary schools represents the most recent and, I argue, a significant development in the N'ko literacy movement. N'ko formal schools are significant because they expand N'ko literacy to children, create gender equity in education, and respond to community support for both N'ko literacy and formal school curriculum. Formal schooling is a distinct departure from previous modes of nonformal N'ko literacy training. The shift to formal schooling requires a reorientation of priorities and resources of the N'ko movement. This research shows that formal schooling is still in a transitional phase of development in Guinea. However, the strides made in this endeavor show the potential of N'ko formal schooling in expanding the dissemination of N'ko literacy among children, creating more gender equity in access to N'ko

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[340] Interview 13A, 19B.
[341] Interviews 13A, 19B.

literacy, and making N'ko relevant to national educational priorities through the development of teaching materials and bi-lingual education.

The six schools I visited represent different stages in the development of formal N'ko schooling. While rural formal schools like Kerouané's Sanoussy fiman Diané school have a strong support base and high enrollment rates, they have not been able to provide adequate formal schooling due to a lack of resources. Despite strong community support for N'ko formal schooling, these schools have been forced, due to limited means, to retreat to nonformal village schooling in the case of Kerouané or to limit access in a structurally compromised school in the case of Touyin-Oulen. The small, start-up schools run by AVRA-N'KO are examples of a limited implementation of public formal schooling. Instead of trying to match public primary schools in structure and content, AVRA-N'KO schools borrow from public schooling's formal structure and improvise pedagogical content through the development of unique teaching materials and strategies for N'ko literacy. These schools showed how innovative teaching techniques and provision of N'ko textbooks can foster a dynamic learning environment. They demonstrate that, despite limited resources, N'ko literacy can provide relevant, bilingual formal education specifically for children. The model formal schools established by ICRA-N'KO show how an N'ko-based curriculum can drive a functional formal school. Through both school structure and student performance, ICRA-N'KO N'ko formal schools have proven that N'ko education can be conducted in conjunction and not at odds with state-run formal schooling.

Based on the six site visits, it would seem that N'ko formal schooling can claim several successes. My research indicates that N'ko formal schools increase educational access as official private primary schools approved by the education ministry of Guinea. The plethoric class size in Kerouané's N'ko school dramatically illustrates N'ko schools' contributions to educational access. N'ko formal schools also expand N'ko literacy. Since nonformal literacy primarily benefited adults, N'ko formal schooling shifts the focus to fostering child literacy in N'ko. The schools visited all had strong community support, evidenced by the low drop out rates, the often voluntary commitment of teachers, the mobilization of community resources to fund school construction, and voluntary contributions of land parcels for the creation of N'ko schools. N'ko schools have also shown success in creating dynamic learning environments with low student-teacher ratios. AVRA-N'KO and ICRA-N'KO schools have been successful in rectifying the gender bias of traditional nonformal N'ko literacy education. Most obviously, N'ko formal schools have been successful in providing a

general curriculum with French language education without sacrificing local language instruction, indigenous literacy, and African themes in education. They clearly demonstrate that "modern" formal schooling is not predicated on abandoning Maninka culture. Maninka and N'ko can effectively be used to promote the acquisition of non-traditional knowledge through modern formal schools and national curriculum.

In addition to these successes, N'ko formal schools also provide a few caveats for the reorientation of N'ko literacy through formal schooling. In all of the schools surveyed, financing posed a serious challenge to the function and expansion of N'ko formal schooling. Unlike the small-scale, occasional and voluntary nature of nonformal N'ko literacy advocated by Souleymane Kanté, formal schooling demands many more inputs. The 'provider' costs are high for the school infrastructure, including land, building construction or rent, desks, teacher salaries and teaching materials. N'ko formal schools have been able to offset some of these costs through community donations of land, community financing of buildings, volunteer teachers, and student purchase of desks. The 'user' costs are also high for N'ko formal schooling, including tuition, uniforms, desks, and study materials like notebooks, textbooks, and pens. N'ko formal schools have also been able to offset these user costs through delaying or waiving tuition fees, distributing free textbooks, and remaining lax in the enforcement of school uniforms. These adaptations show the strong community support and volunteer will of both N'ko learners and teachers. However, the lack of steady financial support risks to limit N'ko education to a precarious and small-scale initiative. If communities are currently having trouble meeting costs with their initial efforts at N'ko formal schooling, they may have trouble expanding on their own. As the Touyin-Oulen school demonstrated, strong community support does not necessarily result in sustainable community schooling.

The affiliations of N'ko education also present some challenges and potential conflicts with public school objectives. Many of the N'ko schools surveyed incorporated religious education to varying degrees in the curriculum. In Kerouané, the school day was scheduled around Muslim prayer times and classes began with a group prayer. Other schools used Hadiths as N'ko study material. While this does not pose a serious problem in Maninka communities that are almost exclusively Muslim, it does run counter to secular public education. Similarly, support for opposition political parties among N'ko supporters also has the potential to lead to the exclusion of N'ko from public schooling on political grounds. Lastly, the inescapable link between N'ko

education and Maninka culture poses a problem for broadening and incorporating N'ko literacy in national education planning. Sékou Touré is reported to have rejected N'ko for incorporation into his Revolutionary education reform because of the alphabet's affiliation with Maninka ethnicity.[342] The Conté government may follow the same logic and eschew the nationalization of N'ko formal schooling if a larger, multi-ethnic support base among other ethnic groups is not created.

These three affiliations—religious, political and ethnic—need to be carefully considered in the N'ko movement's promotion of formal schooling. N'ko supporters I interviewed resoundingly denied any factional affiliations of N'ko, attesting to its "positive neutrality" and broad functional applicability.[343] Supporters showed me both the Quran and the Bible transcribed into N'ko,[344] explained the abandonment of political affiliations after the outlawing of the Union de Mandé,[345] and shared personal correspondences, books, and articles written in other African and foreign languages.[346] Yet, these affiliations are still present in the minds of many people I interviewed regarding N'ko.[347] They threaten to sideline N'ko formal education as a strictly Muslim, opposition party, and Maninka endeavor and to diminish the broader social objectives of the N'ko literacy movement.

The creation and provision of textbooks is one of the most ubiquitous hurdles for N'ko formal schools. In Guinea, textbooks are scarce even in public schools. After independence, Sékou Touré's government had difficulty standardizing and producing primary school textbooks for indigenous language instruction. After the abandonment of Touré's National Language Program in 1984, Guinea has continued to have difficulty providing school textbooks in French. In the case of N'ko, a variety of cheap books in N'ko are available in most towns in Upper Guinea and Conakry. Yet, since N'ko books are geared toward adult, self-directed study, there are very few textbooks for children suitable for N'ko primary schools. Unlike public school textbooks, which can be imported from France or neighboring francophone countries, N'ko textbooks must be produced by the small network of N'ko teachers locally and in the diaspora.

The schools visited showed a variety of responses to this curriculum crisis. Many teachers adapted texts by Souleymane Kanté while few wrote their own textbooks. There was no

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[342] Bourama Kanté (1996).
[343] Interviews 1A, 2B, 4A, 5D, 8D, 9B,11A, 12B, 13A, 14A, 16A, 19B, 19D, 20A, 23B, 25A, 26A, 27C.
[344] Interview 2B.
[345] Interview 2C.
[346] Interviews 2B, 8D.
[347] Interviews 2A, 5B, 5E, 5F, 8C, 24A.

coordination of teaching material between N'ko schools in Guinea, leaving a patchwork of disorganized curricula. Clearly N'ko NGOs need to mount a concerted effort to create teaching material not only relevant to primary school students, but equal in quality and content to public school curriculum. AVRA-N'KO schools showed the greatest attention to creating an N'ko curriculum specifically tailored to primary school students, especially with the writing, printing and use of *N'ko Karan Nya Dansudun Folo* in their Kankan school curriculum. Baba Mamadi Diané's recent series of introductory work books are also important attempts to integrate primary school lessons with introductory N'ko literacy.[348] If N'ko schools are to prove their relevance to national education programs, N'ko teachers need to coordinate the creation of N'ko primary school curriculum with local Education Directorates and national education ministers.

The curriculum crisis in N'ko formal schools raises important questions regarding N'ko supporters' coordination and collaboration with national education policymakers. N'ko has been shown to be a grassroots movement with strong community support for formal schooling, but how do other important state actors, such as education ministers and foreign donors, perceive N'ko education? In order to effectively evaluate the N'ko literacy movement and N'ko formal schooling, they must be compared to national and international education policies. The preceding analysis of six N'ko schools explored the "bottom-up" grassroots support for N'ko formal schooling. However, to evaluate the effectiveness of the N'ko movement's reorientation toward formal schooling, the "top-down" state and donor perspectives of N'ko must be explored. The top-end stakeholders include education ministries, bilateral aid agencies, and multilateral donor institutions. Examining how these stakeholders agree or clash around the issue of N'ko formal schooling with the bottom-end supporters of N'ko is integral to evaluating the success of N'ko formal. This comparative analysis of top-end educational objectives and bottom-end community initiatives can aid in predicting what will be the future of N'ko formal schooling: Will the development of formal N'ko schools result in a private school system separate from public schooling, like the Franco-Arab schools in Guinea? Or can N'ko prove a useful, localized branch of national primary schooling? Can N'ko formal schooling serve as a model for indigenous literacy education in Africa?

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[348] The first three volumes of the six volume set are especially suited for primary instruction. Their workbook format with space to practice writing is useful for both independent and intermediate guided study. Vol 1: *N'ko "Karan ni Sebeli"*; Vol 2: *Karangbè ni Kumaden*; Vol 3: *N'ko Sebesun Jiyama*. Diané also made an introductory series in the mid 1990s called *N'ko Sebesun Jiyama (Kono Sansan Kono).*

Attitudes toward N'ko education– Top down

This chapter has argued that N'ko literacy movement has undergone an important shift in the establishment of N'ko formal schools in Guinea. These schools are evidence of the N'ko community's rapprochement to state and desire to work within the national educational framework. This shift could permit the spread of N'ko literacy through official channels, providing there is support for this partnership from the state and international actors. Presenting a top-down perspective of N'ko, this section explores how N'ko is perceived by government officials, international donors, and development NGOs in Guinean and Mali. In this analysis, N'ko formal schooling is positioned as the nexus of interaction between local supporters of N'ko literacy at the "bottom" and policymakers at the "top" (see Appendix, Figure 2).

Government officials

Working under the Ministry of Education, the National Directorate of General Primary Education (DNEPG) is responsible for shaping primary school education policies in Guinea. The Director of DNEPG explained that since the fall of Touré and the PDG, Lansana Conté's government has rejected indigenous language formal education. However, he also explained a new education initiative. In 2002, the Directorate began a twelve-year plan to introduce a new curriculum for the use of indigenous languages, including Maninka, in the first two years of primary school.[349] When instituted, this plan will overturn the Conté administration's two decades of French-only primary schooling. This plan represents an important admission by the Conté government that indigenous languages have an important role to play in formal schooling. The current structure of N'ko formal schools, such as the ICRA-N'KO schools, support the national initiative by using Maninka in the first two years of school and introducing French in the upper grades. However, the Section Chief for Pedagogy stated that the government presently has no plans to integrate N'ko into public primary education.[350] Instead, Maninka will be taught using the Latin alphabet. Instead of promoting indigenous literacy in N'ko, the DNEPG plan uses Latin letters in a methodology called *Convergent Pedagogy.*

This methodology is a new approach for learning languages in bilingual and multilingual contexts to achieve functional bilingualism. Tested in trial schools throughout Mali since 1979, convergent pedagogy was fully introduced in 1987 as a method to improve French literacy through

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[349] The three other languages will be Pulaar, Soussou, and Gerzé. Interview 5A.
[350] Interview 5B.

instruction in a national Malian language.[351] Based on its success in Mali, the Guinean government and international donors initiated a program to test convergent pedagogy in Guinean primary schools.[352]   In the new program, national language literacy will not be an end in itself, but a means for better learning French.   Thus, through convergent pedagogy, the cultural component of indigenous language instruction, which infused Touré's revolutionary education and Souleymane Kanté's promotion of N'ko, is eliminated. Indigenous language literacy is used as a tool to facilitate better French comprehension in higher grades.   While Latin letters are the planned means of promoting local languages under Convergent Pedagogy, the Section Chief for Pedagogy offered that N'ko could be introduced where the population proves already literate in the script.[353]   He maintained the possibility that N'ko formal schools may have a place in the new indigenous language education plan.   However, if Mali continues to serve as a model, N'ko may be excluded from national language education in Guinea. Despite the prevalence of community schooling in Mali, which gives local communities the legal right to manage schools and administer curriculum reforms, all language education is done in Latin letters. The newly appointed National Director of Basic Education explained that Mali has no plans to use N'ko in primary education.[354] He qualified that those who use N'ko are not the target of the education ministry, alluding to N'ko's affiliation with adult nonformal literacy.

While the national education ministries in Guinea and Mali were not very supportive of N'ko formal education, local government representatives in Maninka areas of Guinea were much more amenable to N'ko formal schooling. In Kankan, the Prefectural Director of Education explained that local language education is important for students who were hurt by the return to French curriculum. Despite his support, he stated that N'ko is not envisioned to be used in public schools, but it is strongly supported by local communities in Kankan prefecture.[355] The Prefectural Director of Education in Siguiri also expressed his support for the expansion of formal but private public schooling in N'ko, declaring Siguiri a leader in N'ko education.[356] While supportive of N'ko formal

[351] Samba Traoré, *La Pédaggoie Convergante: son Expérimentation au Mali et son Impact Sur le Système Éducatif*. Monographies Innodata 6, (Paris: UNESCO, 2001), 3.
[352] Standardized tests have shown that Malian students learning convergent pedagogy perform better in math and languages than students taught in French. See Morifing Cissé, Abel Diarra, Sékou Traoré, & Jacques Marchand, *Les écoles communautaires au Mali* (Paris: UNESCO Institut international de planification de l'education, 2000), 89.
[353] Interview 5B.
[354] Interview 24A.
[355] Interview 8A.
[356] Interview 8B.

schools, neither directors envisioned the incorporation of N'ko schools into public schooling due to N'ko's affiliation with Maninka culture and language.

Thus, in both Guinea and Mali, education officials were familiar with N'ko and its role as a native script. They expressed appreciation and pride in the cultural mission of N'ko literacy. However, none of the education administrators saw a role for N'ko in the current public school system. Among these administrators, N'ko's status as a popular cultural asset does note justify its viability or importance in attaining national educational and development goals.

Donors

In Guinea, donor agencies surveyed showed some recalcitrance in funding N'ko literacy projects. The Education Sector chief at USAID, Conakry explained that USAID has not funded N'ko literacy projects since its mission focuses on sector wide reforms, not local community initiatives.[357] The Chief of Small Projects Assistance Program (SPA) at the US Embassy likewise explained that the Embassy has never funded N'ko literacy education in Guinea. Though a Maninka originally from Siguiri, he personally expressed ambiance to the importance of N'ko literacy both culturally and functionally in Maninka communities.[358] The Chief Education Specialist at the German development organization GTZ expressed interest in local languages for projects but admitted he had never heard of N'ko. Citing Guinea's problems with national language instruction under Sékou Touré, he explained that GTZ has no intention of funding local language literacy except for gaining French competency through convergent pedagogy.[359] The US Peace Corps, which has a reputation for supporting and financing local initiatives for community development, has never funded N'ko literacy and does not include N'ko in its local language training for volunteers. While the Associate Peace Corps Director for Education in Guinea supported the return to local language instruction as a positive valorization of indigenous culture, he doubted whether the state sponsorship of N'ko formal education could effectively spread N'ko literacy. He stated that local language literacy must be a grassroots movement to be successful, not a state or donor-led policy.[360]

Of the donors surveyed, only the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) showed support for funding the development of N'ko. UNDP informants were supportive of their

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[357] Personal correspondence.
[358] Interview 5E.
[359] Interview 6A.
[360] Interview 5F.

financing the construction of the Sir Samaké N'ko-Français school in Siguiri. They qualified the project, however, explaining that Siguiri's N'ko school was not a result of institutional policy supporting indigenous language literacy; rather it was the product of an UNDP officer from Mali who personally supported N'ko.[361] Informants stated there were no plans to fund additional N'ko schools in the future.

According to these interviews, international donor support for N'ko literacy in general and N'ko formal schooling in general is weak. While the Sir Samaké school in Siguiri benefited from multilateral support of N'ko literacy, donor support of N'ko seems to be an anomaly rather than a trend. For donors to take notice of N'ko's potential in national education and development, formal N'ko education must prove to have a large support base and be relevant to national education and development priorities. N'ko formal schools demonstrate both of these characteristics. But, N'ko may seem too small-scale to merit donor funding. In this respect, self-sustaining education initiatives like the AVRA-N'KO schools may be good models for spreading and developing N'ko formal schooling in the absence of international aid.

Development NGOs

Foreign NGOs in Guinea seem to have a mixed reaction to N'ko literacy in Guinea. Some NGOs support N'ko literacy education in their projects, although their funding base is not as large as bilateral and multilateral donors. In Kankan, an NGO funded by various US donors including CARE proved to be a strong and dynamic supporter of the use of N'ko literacy in development initiatives. The Association for Community Initiative Development Funds (ADIC) has been carrying out its rural development mission for several years by promoting N'ko literacy. Since 1995, ADIC has printed materials in N'ko to conduct consciousness-raising sessions among rural villagers. They have promoted many different themes through posters written in N'ko, including women's rights, voting, cooperatives, and environmental protection. A trainer explained that N'ko is the key to their work, since villagers are motivated to learn N'ko and the materials that are distributed in N'ko are used in literacy training and kept as a source of cultural pride in the alphabet.[362] This greatly contributes to the dissemination of ADIC's messages and ensures the reading of ADIC materials long after the end of the ADIC training sessions. In comparison, Latin-character literacy projects are not well received in villages. According to the trainer, rural projects using Latin letters

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[361] Interview 3A.
[362] Interview 12A.

for Maninka language literacy tend to lose their audience and have a short project life.[363] ADIC has shown how N'ko can be used as a community development tool, promoting important development issues though a familiar and popular script.

The Kankan-based agricultural NGO, Center for Agricultural Professional Organization Funds (CAOPA), was reviewing the possibility of switching from Latin-based literacy instruction to N'ko literacy in its agricultural training in Siguiri during my visit. The regional director in Siguiri explained that CAOPA spends 45 days on intensive literacy training sessions; yet this time could be saved by using N'ko literacy since many of the trainees are already literate in N'ko.[364] In contrast, the Assistant Chef of Micro-credit in the food resources development office of the Rural Development Adventist Association (ADRA) in Siguiri did not support N'ko literacy education. He explained that all ADRA projects teach literacy in abridged Latin letters based on UNESCO's universal alphabet and the ADRA preferred to adhere to an international standard for literacy rather than a local derivative.[365]

This survey of development NGOs in Maninka areas of Guinea shows the difficulty of integrating the community support for N'ko literacy with foreign-donor initiatives. Many literacy policies are formulated by the home offices and local development practitioners are obliged to follow the funders' policies. Field offices and Maninka trainers who are most aware of the community support for N'ko literacy and its utility in rural development projects are often not consulted in literacy policymaking. However, locally based NGOs like ADIC are best positioned to recognize the utility of N'ko education and implement small-scale projects to promote N'ko literacy through formal and nonformal means.

Reaching the top

Government officials, foreign donors, and foreign NGOs represent strategic partners for N'ko literacy education. While the N'ko movement has begun a shift to formal education, national policymakers hold much of the power and financing for formal education in the local-national dialectic. My field research indicates that N'ko schools as private, community-based institutions are having trouble maintaining and expanding their infrastructure and pedagogy. N'ko formal education

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[363] Interview 12A.

[364] The director began learning N'ko during my stay in hopes of using it in future projects. However, he explained that CAOPA's funding came from France and the literacy materials are printed in Europe; so he expected it might be difficult to switch to N'ko literacy training, especially given France's historic resistance to indigenous language education in Guinea. Interview 18B.

[365] Interview 18A.

needs to prove its value to the initiates and priorities of the 'top' in order to support N'ko literacy in general and sustain the movement's reorientation to formal schooling. Current changes in national education policy present the possibility of N'ko formal schools' incorporation into the national education system. However, with the national focus on Latin-based literacy and convergent pedagogy, it is unclear whether the N'ko movement can meet national educational goals.

Foreign donors have supported N'ko education, but general donor attitudes seem to dismiss N'ko schools as local initiatives and to show ambivalence regarding the value of N'ko literacy. Local NGOs are the most accessible to the N'ko community, since they are based in their communities, work in rural areas that support N'ko literacy and are composed of local Maninka trainers. When N'ko literacy is incorporated into NGO development initiatives, as with ADIC, the utility of N'ko in education and development become strikingly apparent. However, changing NGO literacy campaigns requires policy changes in foreign offices with people who are often unconvinced or unaware of N'ko literacy. Despite their local accessibility, reaching the top of NGOs can be as difficult as changing donor perceptions or changing national education policies in support of N'ko formal schooling. While this analysis can offer no surefire strategy to ensure N'ko's acceptance at the 'top,' sustained community support for N'ko formal schooling is an important means of continuing the spread of N'ko and proving the functional utility of N'ko literacy in formal schooling.

Conclusion: Meeting the challenge

This chapter has examined the recent shift to formal education in the N'ko literacy movement in Guinea. N'ko formal schools build on strong community support for N'ko literacy while promoting public school objectives of French fluency and a basic education curriculum. These schools represent an important shift in N'ko literacy education, where N'ko formal schools have become the prime mediators in the dialectic between local literacy and national education policies. Rebuffing conventional nonformal N'ko education as a marginal alternative to public education, formal schools assert N'ko as a meaningful and socially relevant method for primary education. In essence, N'ko formal schools affirm Street's ideological model of literacy by insisting that N'ko be put at the heart of the socialization process in basic education. The shift to N'ko schools proves the "cultural embedded nature"[366] of N'ko literacy in Maninka communities.

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[366] Brian Street, "Literacy and Social Change: The Significance of Social Context in the Development of Literacy Programmes" in Daniel A. Wagner, Ed., *The Future of Literacy in a Changing World* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1998), 56.

But how complete has this shift to formal schooling been? Six schools showed the range of N'ko formal schooling in comparison to the national primary school model. Village schools were shown to suffer most direly from a lack of financial support, causing a limit in the access and quality of education. Unable to fully meet the demands of formal schooling, these schools rely on village school and Quranic school models in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and infrastructure. Small AVRA-N'KO schools show strong borrowings from public school structure, with important innovations in teaching materials and curriculum. This approach increases access to schooling in general and N'ko literacy specifically, especially for girls. ICRA-N'KO schools match public primary schools most closely in terms of infrastructure and pedagogy. Of the sites visited, these schools are the most visible and successful attempts at the movement's reorientation to formal schooling. They show that N'ko can successfully be integrated into formal schooling while continuing to promote national educational objectives.

These schools are doing much to prove N'ko's value to national educational development. However, this research concludes that the state education ministries and international donors are not convinced of N'ko literacy's importance in education and national development. N'ko has been popularized historically as a means for self-development, enrichment, and Mande pride. However, N'ko has not been adequately developed as a tool for national development. The recent move toward formal N'ko schooling is an important step in proving the functionality of N'ko within a state-based paradigm for development, namely primary education. Small scale community development projects, like ADIC's rights and responsibilities campaigns, have shown the utility and power of N'ko in rural development. Yet, national initiatives continue to refuse to incorporate N'ko education due to its popular affiliations with Islam, opposition parties, Maninka language and culture, nonformal adult education, and rural populations. These affiliations bear some truth, but they are no means representative of the extent of N'ko literacy. The variety of subject matter in N'ko and range of uses of N'ko literacy throughout West Africa attest to the mutability and diversity of N'ko, embraced by people of different religions, ethnicities, political parties, nations, ages, and livelihoods.

The N'ko movement needs to gain more financial and political support by proving its effectiveness as a development tool. In the regions where I conducted my research, N'ko's cultural mission was understood, but N'ko's functional utility was less well appreciated. While N'ko may not be able to overcome its socio-cultural affiliations, its community support may prove its usefulness in Maninka community development. The growth of formal schools modeled on public schools is

important in signaling the N'ko movement's desire to gain official status and approval from the state. This reverses the traditional role of N'ko literacy as an alternative to state schooling which rejected the hegemony of French language education. Instead of separating N'ko education and public education into a dichotomy of "sky" and "earth" as Souleymane Kanté argued, N'ko formal schooling is a rapprochement with public school objectives. N'ko-Français formal schools direct community resources and support for N'ko into the mainstream priorities of national education policy.

However, the success of this reorientation is contingent on the marshaling of community resources for formal schooling, coordinating curriculum with education ministries, and committing N'ko NGO's to creating a standardized N'ko pedagogy for formal primary schooling. If the N'ko movement is to convince national policymakers and international donors of N'ko's relevance to education and development, N'ko literacy education must not remain a piecemeal, local endeavor. N'ko NGOs like ICRA-N'KO have proven their ability to disseminate N'ko and establish regional offices throughout Guinea. Now, NGOs need to coordinate the efforts of the N'ko community to dedicate resources and energy to their new priority of formal education.

Conclusion

This paper has examined N'ko literacy in relation to the social history of changing national language policies and education programs in the Republic of Guinea. By focusing on the socio-cultural context of N'ko literacy's development among Maninka, this analysis has paid close attention to how N'ko is positioned in the dialectic between official power and community-based initiatives. This paper focused on how N'ko mediated this dialectic during three periods: colonialism, early independence, and the present. N'ko was shown to prioritize local relevance of literacy and education over national policymaking in each period, due to the embedding of N'ko in specific, culturally salient literacy practices.

During colonialism, N'ko literacy was characterized by resistance to French colonial language policies and the French colonial social hierarchy taught in colonial schools. This hierarchy was discussed in this paper in terms of a dominant worldview, referred to as the French colonial ontology, that denigrated Maninka culture and marginalized Maninka language. N'ko rejected the denigration of Maninka culture and language, presenting an alternative literacy based on indigenous knowledge. This indigenist approach offered an alternative to colonial associationist and assimilationist approaches defined by European powers, overturning the European monopoly on literacy, education, and 'civilization' in West Africa. N'ko built on local knowledge, local networks, and local priorities to make literacy relevant to Maninka communities.

N'ko's resistance to the colonial social hierarchy became part of an African backlash against European colonialism that gained momentum in the drive toward independence. Sékou Touré and Souleymane Kanté shared an indigenist approach centered on cultural valorization and manifest in indigenous language literacy and instruction. Yet, while Kanté promoted N'ko as a means of nonformal, self-directed education, Touré used indigenous literacy in Latin letters for nation-building and political propaganda. Kanté's dedication to creating a library of books in N'ko made the script a source of cultural pride for Maninka. A semiotic analysis of N'ko revealed that Kanté's works provided access to both indigenous and foreign knowledge, proving the relevance and sophistication of the Maninka language by putting it on par with imported languages like French and Arabic. This made N'ko a culturally relevant literacy for Maninka people, preserving indigenous history and practices while also permitting access of foreign knowledge without submitting to foreign authority or undergoing socialization in foreign-language schools.

Currently, N'ko organizations are reorienting N'ko to respond to community support for both basic education and N'ko literacy. No longer marginalized by national political objectives, N'ko supporters are reassessing Kanté's nonformal approach. Instead of separating N'ko literacy from formal education, N'ko teachers are integrating N'ko literacy into formal school pedagogy. This shift to formal schools broadens the reach of N'ko literacy to children without sacrificing their access to basic, public school curricula, including French. This shift marks a rapprochement between community-based literacy priorities and national education policies. A review of six N'ko formal schools revealed varying degrees of transition to formal schooling, highlighting many of the successes and challenges of this shift. On the one hand, Maninka communities provide strong support for the shift to formal schooling through school attendance, paying fees, donating land and infrastructure, and volunteerism. N'ko schools show evidence of rectifying the common male bias in N'ko literacy by providing more equitable access to literacy education for girls. On the other hand, N'ko formal schools suffer from lack of financing and curriculum coordination. While these schools have gone to great lengths to prove N'ko's relevance to public schooling and national development, national policymakers and international donors remain hesitant to include N'ko in Guinean public education.

Despite continued disengagement between national policies and Maninka community priorities through N'ko literacy, N'ko has remained an important means of articulating Maninka cultural priorities and community control over literacy education. While N'ko literacy is not a large-scale or well financed initiative, it has gained broad-based support among Maninka people. The number of N'ko-literate people remains relatively small, but community support of the expansion of N'ko literacy education has proven strong in Upper Guinea. In this respect, Souleymane Kanté's N'ko alphabet has achieved remarkable success in promoting cultural literacy, or, in Street's terminology, advancing an ideological model over an autonomous model of literacy. But in order reach beyond the cultural constraints of this ideological model, promoters of N'ko literacy since Kanté have tried to overcome the ethnic limitations of cultural literacy. While cultural literacy stresses the 'fit' of a specific literacy within a specific culture, it can make this literacy seem unsuited to any other ethnicity. N'ko promoters have tried to overcome this by stressing the broad applicability of the N'ko script and the diversity of information available in N'ko. While Maninka have been the strongest supporters of N'ko, literacy in the N'ko script has spread beyond Maninka

communities to various Mande ethnic groups. This spread marks a broadening of N'ko literacy across related but separate ethnic groups and across national boarders.

In comparison with other popular scripts for indigenous languages in West Africa, N'ko's scale of promotion is unique. Vai has a long history in Mande border communities in northwest Liberia and southwest Sierra Leone.[367] It is reported to have spread throughout many communities in these areas both informally and through some organized, formal education efforts, responding to local "societal needs." [368] Despite these similarities to N'ko, Vai has not transcended the confines of Vaiyinka language and Vai communities. Its promotion and spread remains limited to its cultural context.   Similarly, Adjami, an Arabic-derived script, has gained widespread popularity among Peuls in Guinea. To transcribe their language It is taught through a regimen of childhood Arabic literacy training, but it remains an exclusively Peul literacy.[369]

In a more removed comparison to N'ko, the Ol Chiki script created for the Santali language of the Indian state of Orissa likewise built on community support for literacy. Like Souleymane Kanté, the inventor of the Ol Chiki alphabet, Pandit Raghunath Murmu, tailored his script to his native language and culture. [370] Also like Kanté, Murmu wrote over 150 books on a wide range of subjects to make a variety of knowledge available to Santals in their native language.[371] But, as with the previous examples, Ol Chiki remains confined to Santal communities as an exclusively Santali cultural literacy.

As a decentralized, community-based literacy movement that has benefited from no government support and little international aid, N'ko has achieved a remarkable spread across cultures, nations, and languages. To further its dissemination, N'ko promoters face their biggest challenge in downplaying the narrow ethnic, political, and religious affiliations popularly associated with the script.

In Upper Guinea, N'ko has achieved broad popular support by remaining a vehicle for community expression of literacy education in the face of state policies and power. Maninka communities have promoted N'ko literacy to fend off colonial denigration and post-colonial

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[367] David Dalby, "A Survey of the Indigenous Writing Scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa" in *African Language Studies* 8 (1967).

[368] Scribner and Cole (1996), 267-68.

[369] Diallo (2001).

[370] Ol Chiki characters are derived from Santali culture and adapted specifically to Santali phonetics.   Norman Zide, "Scripts for Munda languages", in Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, eds., *The World's Writing Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[371] See "A Portral for Santals: Ol Chiki" at http://wesanthals.tripod.com/santals/id39.html, accessed 12/15/02.

marginalization of Maninka culture. In examining the portrayal of agency among marginalized peoples, post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1988) asked the famous question "Can the subaltern speak?"[372] Maninka N'ko supporters might resoundingly respond "Yes, and more importantly, we can read and write, too!" Locally directed and culturally relevant literacy is an important "voice" that often goes unheard in national education strategies and international development projects. N'ko literacy expresses community education priorities and provides an alternative means of instruction. Paulo Freire (1972) theorized that an alternative, "liberation pedagogy" would develop a critical dialogue for self-development. Freire envisioned this critical dialogue would result in the development of new political and educational configurations to challenge and change the way a society is structured.[373] This paper has analyzed N'ko literacy within a socio-cultural framework, arguing that N'ko is central to a dialogue on self-development in Maninka communities. The shift to formal schooling is the latest approach to facilitate self-development through N'ko, promoting a broader societal change in public education to incorporate indigenous literacy. However, the bottom-up change to formal education promoted by the N'ko literacy movement requires the collaboration of national and international policymakers, who prove difficult to reach for a community-based initiative like N'ko.

Field visits to N'ko schools in Guinea showed that, despite strong community support, N'ko formal schools suffer from a lack of financial resources. However, my fieldwork also revealed that Maninka communities have effectively built on limited international financing for N'ko schooling. This finding suggests that a little help goes a long way when there is strong community support for specific, culturally relevant literacy education. Souleymane Kanté promoted N'ko as "the light on the horizon" which would spread knowledge across Africa through indigenous languages. The shift to formal schools presents new opportunities and perhaps a new dawn for N'ko literacy. However, it is yet to be seen whether this reorientation of N'ko can produce a "liberation pedagogy" by mustering national support for culturally relevant literacy education or if N'ko's *rayonnement* will be limited to private, under-funded, community-based schools.

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[372] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the subaltern speak?" in Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

[373] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

Figure 1: The N'ko Alphabet

The N'ko alphabet has 27 letters or phonemes. There are 7 vowels, 19 consonants and one diphthong (*ng* sound). N'ko is a phonetic script, so the letters represent sounds, as in English (Latin script). Each letter corresponds with one sound.
However, accents (diacritics) above and below letters can change their pronunciation.

The English pronunciation of each letter is given in the row below the N'ko letter. Capital vowels refer to a long vowel sound in English (**A** = long a, as in **a**te).

♀	⊐	∪	∧	Y	o	|
aw	**O**	**uh**	**eh**	**E**	**A**	**ah**
†	⋒	1	⌐	b	⅂ or ?	F or ⨍
r	**d**	**ch**	**j**	**t**	**p**	**b**
∆	9	⅄	♂	▽	▢	♯
m	**l**	**k**	**f**	**gb**	**s**	**rr**
⁊		φ	⊐	⅃	⅂	? or ?
ng		**y**	**w**	**h**	**n**	**ny**

Figure 2: Dialectic between state and community education

N'ko formal schools as a new nexus in the dynamic between 'top-down' educational policymaking and 'bottom-up' support for N'ko education.

TOP

| *Government* | -- | *Foreign Donors* | -- | *NGOs* |

Public Education System

N'KO FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

N'ko Literacy Education

N'ko Associations -- N'ko Teachers -- N'ko Learners

b o t t o m
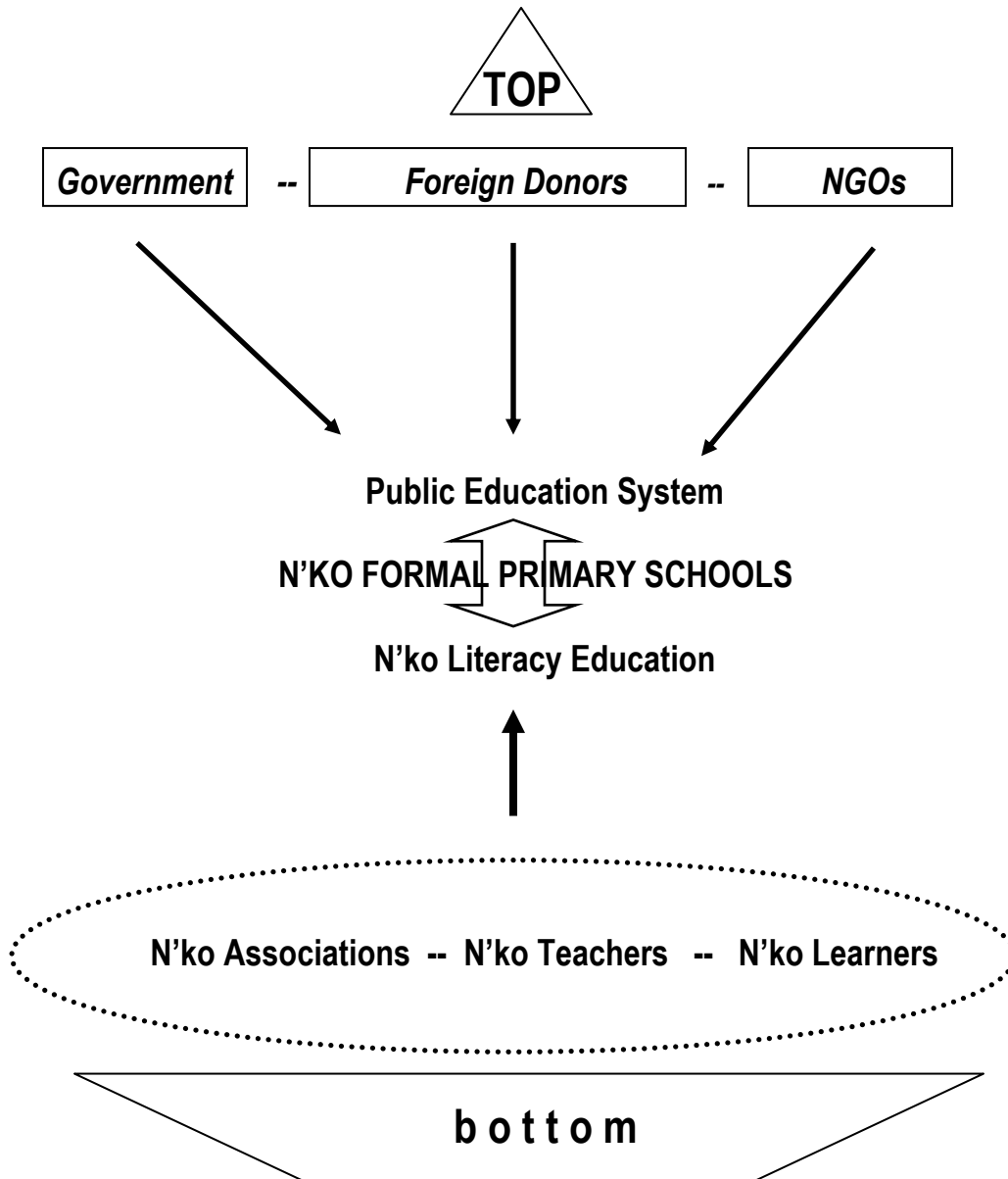
List - Works Written by Souleymane Kanté:

Over 38 years, the scholar Souleymane Kanté wrote 183 works in N'ko on a variety of topics, including books on history, linguistics, traditional practices, literature, religion, science, politics, philosophy, and mathematics. Kanté's most impressive works include the translation of the Holy Quran, 4393 *hadiths* of Prophet Mohamed, a dictionary of 32,500 Maninka words, and Rousseau's *Declaration of the Rights of Man.*

HISTORY
The legend of Djibriba | History of Foloningbè | History of Djankana | The two Wattara Kingdoms | Songhaï history | The Empire of Ghana | Summary of Manding history | First book of Manding history | Second book of Manding history: from the Queen of Narémagan to the death of Soundiata | Manding history: the reign of Soundiata | History of Sierra Léone | How the Peuls settled in the Fouta Djallon | Summary of Peul history | Yadjoudjou and Madjoudjou | Mossis kingdoms | History of Rabé | History of Bamako | History of Almamy Samoury Touré | History of the best known Maninka family names | Summary of Akhan history | History of the Kabas of Baté | History of the Fouta | The charter of Kouroukanfouwa | First knowledge of Manding history | Deep knowledge of Manding history | History of Alyamounoun | History of Peuls from Macina | History of Traorés from Sikasso | History of the Bambara kingdoms (Ségou et Karata) | History of the Peul from the Wassoulou | History of the Fouta-Djallon | El Hadj Oumar and Tidjani Waoudou | The Dioulas from Gbidiko-Mandén | History of Liberia | History of the Susso kingdom | Construction of Mecca | History of the sharpened stone period | History of the polished stone period until the arrest of A. Samoury Touré | Legend of Amadou Djoulbé | Summary of the legend of Condé Bourama | History of Elhadji Oumar Tall | The routing of Soumaoro and the victory of Soundiata | History of Alfa Yaya Diallo | History of the Hausa | How the Maninka story began

LINGUISTICS
First book of readings, 1949 edition | First book of readings, 1957 edition | Second book of readings, 1958 edition | First book of readings with pictures, Kankan 1961 | First book of readings, The light on the horizon, Conakry 1970 | Second book of readings, The homeland illuminated, Conakry 1970 | Third book of readings, Bamako 1979 | N'ko-French, 1960 | N'ko grammar, 1976 | First book of grammar, 1979 | First notions of grammar | Second book of grammar | Superior grammar of N'ko | Solid arguments for N'ko, 1950 | N'ko Dictionary, 1962 | Translation difficulties from N'ko to Latin script | Maninka-French dictionary in Roman letters | French-Maninka dictionary | N'ko-French dictionary | Reasons for borrowing certain Arab words in Maninka | Relation between writing and language | Etymology of Maninka family names | Simple manual for learning introductory N'ko | Elementary book of N'ko: simple practice manual for learning N'ko | Base for learning N'ko | Rules of language | Reading lessons in N'ko | Syllabary: simple practice manual for learning syllables | Principal manner adverbs in Maninka

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES
The importance of kola nuts in tradition | How kola nuts were used in Maninka marriages | Organization of the society and rules for neighborliness | Traditional therapy and pharmacopoeia | Remarkable pharmacopoeial practices

LITERATURE

Great Mande proverbs **|** 1001 Mande proverbs **|** Literature: comedy **|** The canoe paddler of hope: poetry **|** The poetic city of N'ko **|** Simple manual of poetry **|** Big book of N'ko poetry **|** N'ko riddles **|** Stories from the bush and the forest **|** How the story was created in Manding

RELIGION

Readings on Hatè, Abidjan 1982 **|** 44 general benedictions and blessings **|** First book of knowledge of Islam **|** Second book of knowledge of Islam **|** Third book of knowledge of Islam **|** The vigil for the Prophet Mohamed's birthday **|** Big book of introductory religion **|** The way of Prophet Mohamed (1st volume) **|** The way of Prophet Mohamed (2nd volume) **|** The Holy Quran: part 1 **|** The Holy Quran: part 2 **|** Draft of the translated Quran **|** The school and the Mosque **|** Without religion, no divine recompense **|** Postscriptum of the Holy Quran **|** Explanation of the religion of Hassim **|** He who understands this book will seize religion **|** Rules of Muslim marriage **|** Importance of reciting the fathiha in prayer **|** 3 proofs of the unity of God **|** Childhood of the Prophet Mohamed **|** Religion of Akadra **|** Palms of the Prophet David (the book of David) **|** Dialogue between God and Muslims in prayer **|** How the Tahiya was introduced in prayer **|** Practices of prayer **|** Performing a sacrifice for a death: is it recommended? **|** The liturgy of Muslim baptism **|** Importance of the call to prayer **|** The five pillars of Islam: the pilgrimage **|** Manual of the division of the Muslim tithe **|** Generosity of the Prophet Mohamed **|** Muslim unification **|** Difficulties of translating the Quran **|** Qualities of the Prophets **|** Summary of the method of construction of the Kaâba **|** Conditions of prayer **|** Sermon of Muslim marriage

RELIGION / MORALS

Leisure shouldn't prevent responsibility **|** How to be liked by one's fellow man **|** Acknowledgment of a good deed is more valuable than the deed itself **|** Multiplications of salutations and the happiness of fraternity **|** Questions and answers for newly-weds **|** Coitus **|** Advice from Kanté Souleymane

FRENCH

Translation of French neologisms **|** N'ko-French, 1960 **|** Maninka-French dictionary in Roman letters **|** French-Maninka dictionary **|** N'ko-French dictionary **|** How the French language was created

SCIENCE

The brain and its functions **|** The different scientific disciplines (1st book) **|** The different scientific disciplines (2nd book) **|** The different scientific disciplines (3rd book) **|** Glands and viscera **|** Botany Big book of science **|** The kidneys **|** Physics and chemistry **|** Motor function **|** The periodic table of Mendeleev in N'ko **|** The human body **|** Knowledge of the automobile's motor and its functions **|** Functions of the human body **|** Botanical tables **|** Natural sciences: chemistry **|** Natural sciences: living things **|** Little book of weaning **|** The structure of the brain **|** Symptoms of diseases **|** Diseases and their remedies **|** Manual for treating plant diseases **|** Therapy for animals (and for humans) **|** Sources of vitamins and their explanations

SCIENCE / PUBLIC HEALTH

Advice for African wet-nurses **|** First knowledge of reproduction **|** Good methods for weaning babies **|** Hygiene and health

POLITICS
Declaration of the Rights of Man (Rousseau) **|** *Africa and the Revolution* (Sékou Touré) **|** *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain party* (R.D.A.) **|** Translation of political neologism **|** Political economy

PHILOSOPHY
Legend of the miracle child (Philosophy) **|** Reflection and retrospection **|** Branches of philosophy **|** Differences between the brain and the soul **|** 50 philosophers before and after Jesus Christ

MATH
Book of calculations **|** Multiplication tables

OTHER
N'ko students' evaluations **|** 12 months of the year and 12 uses for aspirin **|** If Batè isn't taught, who else can be? **|** Qualities of the first Guinean airplane **|** Origins of the birthday **|** The introduction in public discourse **|** Basis of the sand game

PHOTOS

1. Example of scripts used in Guinea

Poster showing three common scripts used in Guinea: Adjami for Pulaar (top), N'ko for Maninka (middle), and Latin for French (bottom).

2. Traditional medicine signs in N'ko

Traditional healer and N'ko teacher in front of his store. Siguiri, Guinea

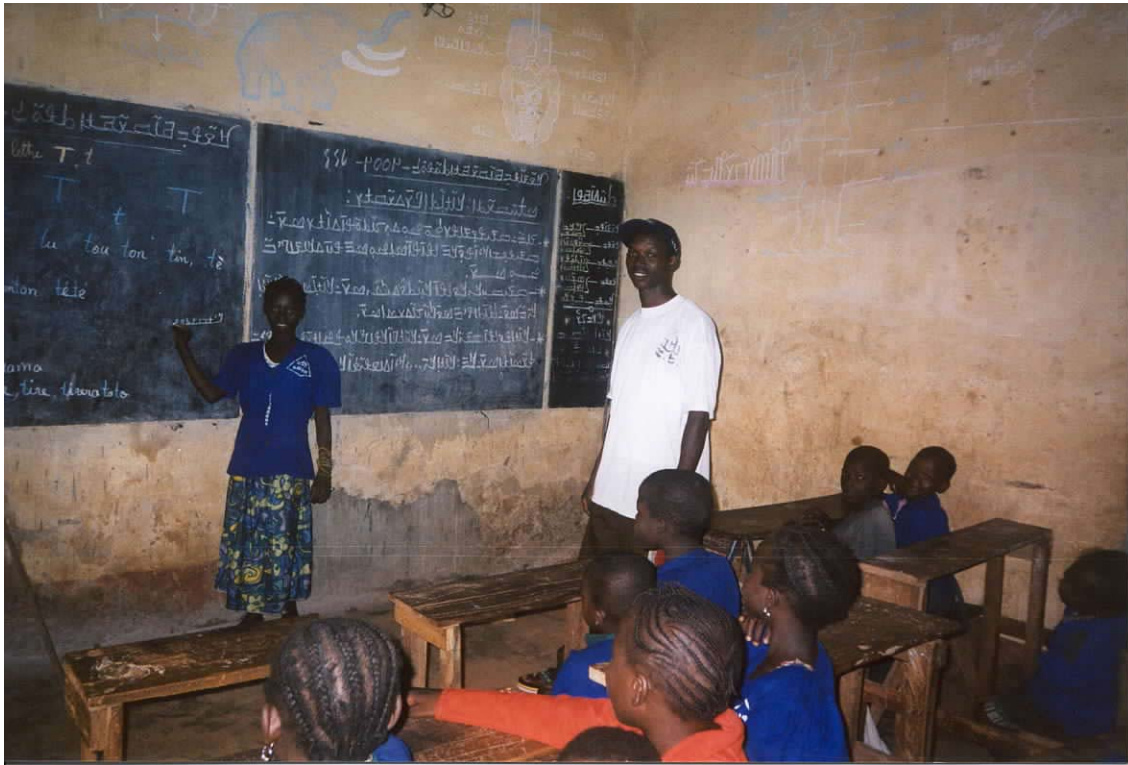*Traditional medicine pharmacy. Kankan, Guinea.*

3. N'ko formal schools, June 2002

Sanoussy fiman Diané village school. Kerouané, Guinea.

Formal N'ko school in a village. Touyin-Oulen, Guinea.

AVRA-N'KO school. Kankan, Guinea

Souleymane Kanté N'ko school. Siguiri, Guinea

Ladji Sidafa Sano third grade class. Kankan, Guinea.

Sir Samaké third graders. Siguiri, Guinea.

Tables - N'ko literacy and schooling statistics in Guinea

A. 2002 N'ko learning in Siguiri prefecture, Guinea

Statistics provided by ICRA-N'KO Siguiri.

Sub-prefecture	Number Female	Percent Female	Number Male	Percent Male	Total
Siguiri	750	14%	4,689	86%	5,439
Siguirini	370	8%	4,550	98%	4,920
Norasoba	380	8%	4,400	92%	4,780
Kintinya	150	4%	3,750	96%	3,900
Maleya	150	4%	3,600	96%	3,750
Doko	250	8%	2,700	92%	2,950
Nyagasola	180	7%	2,400	93%	2,580
Kinyabakuda	180	9%	1,850	91%	2,030
Nabon	60	4%	1,532	96%	1,592
Faranwaliya	85	5%	1,500	95%	1,585
Nyandankodo	35	2%	1,500	98%	1,535
Bankon	70	5%	1,300	95%	1,370
TOTAL	**2,660**	**7%**	**33,771**	**93%**	**36,431**

B. Survey location: École Sanoussy fiman Diané - Kerouané, Guinea
     Teacher Observed: Kaba Kanté, Director of École Sanoussy fiman Diané
     Survey date: June 7-8, 2002

École Sanoussy fiman Diané

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Enrolled	193	29 %	473	71 %	666
Passed	70	26 %	200	74 %	270
Observed (6/7/02)	12	26 %	34	74 %	46
Observed (6/8/02)	65	36 %	115	64 %	180

Number of teachers: 1
Number of classes: 1
Cost of enrollment per student: free
Number of years school has operated: 4 (1998-2002)
Age range of students: 5-10
Students with notebooks in class ~ 2/3
Students with books printed in N'ko in class ~ 1/3

C. Survey location: École Primaire N'ko - Française de Touyin-Oulen **-** Touyin-Oulen, Guinea
   Teachers Observed: Amadouba Sylla and Mamadi Fofana
   Survey date: June 20, 2002

École Primaire Privée N'ko-Française Souleymane Kanté de Touyin-Oulen

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Observed (6/20/02)	16	34 %	31	66 %	47

Number of teachers: 2
Number of classes: 2
Cost of enrollment per student: n.a.
Number years school has operated: 8 (1994-2002), 1st N'ko formal school in Guinea
Age range of students at school: 3-11
Students with notebooks in class: 20%
Students with books printed in N'ko in class: 10%

D. Survey location: AVRA-N'KO bookstore and École N'ko-Française AVRA-N'KO - Kankan, Guinea
   Teachers Observed: Ishimael Diaby, Director of École N'ko-Française AVRA-N'KO
   Interview date: June 6, 2002
   AVRA-N'KO – Association pour le Vulgarisation de Recherche en Alphabet N'ko

École Privée N'ko-Française AVRA-N'KO

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Enrolled	39	52 %	36	48 %	75
Observed (6/6/02)	37	62 %	23	38 %	60

Number of Teachers: 2 (plus one adult literacy teacher)
Number of classes: 1
Cost of enrollment per student: $0.83 per month, $2.50 (5,000 FG) per three months
Number of years school has operated: 4 (1998-2002)
Number of adult member of AVRA-N'KO: 104
Age range of students: 5-12
Students with notebooks in class: 95%
Students with N'ko books in class: 45%

E. Survey location: École Primaire Privée N'ko-Française Souleymane Kanté - Siguiri, Guinea
Teachers Observed: Alama Keita and Amadouba Sylla
Interview / Survey date: June 19, 2002

École Primaire Privée N'ko-Française Souleymane Kanté*

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Enrolled	17	50 %	17	50 %	34
Observed (6/19/02)	16	48 %	17	52 %	33

* School also had night classes for adult literacy. Observed 8 adult students 6/9/02.

Number of teachers: 2
Number of classes: 1
Cost of enrollment per student: $2.00 (4,000 FG) per month
Number of years school has operated: 3 (1999-2002)
Age range of students at school: 5-15
Students with notebooks in class: 100%
Students with books printed in N'ko in class: 10%

F. Interview / Survey location: École Ladji Sidafa Sanoh - Kankan, Guinea
Teachers Observed:
Survey date: June 10 & 13, 2002
ICRA-N'KO - Association pour le l'Impulsion et la Coordination des Recherches sur l'Alphabet N'Ko

École Ladji Sidafa Sanoh

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Enrolled	60	33 %	120	67 %	180
Total Observed (6/13/02)	21	44 %	27	56 %	48*
Observed (Class 1)	*n.a.*	*n.a.*	*n.a.*	*n.a.*	*n.a.*
Observed (Class 2)	*6*	*43 %*	*8*	*57 %*	*14*
Observed (Class 3)	*15*	*44 %*	*19*	*56 %*	*34*

*Teachers attributed low turn out to end of academic calendar and testing (compositions). Class 1 did not meet on the pre-arranged day of observation.

Number of teachers: 2
Number of classes: 3
Cost of enrollment per student: $0.50 (1,000 FG) per month
Number of years school has operated: 5 (1997-2002)
Age range of students at school: 5-15
Students with notebooks in class: 100%
Students with books printed in N'ko in class: (few observed)

G. Survey location: École N'ko-Française Sir Samaké - Siguiri, Guinea
   Teachers Observed: Mamadi Sawané, school director, and ICRA-N'KO Siguiri board members
   Interview / Survey date: June 15 & 17, 2002

   ICRA-N'KO - Association pour le l'Impulsion et la Coordination des Recherches sur l'Alphabet N'Ko

École N'ko-Française Sir Samaké

Students	Number Girls	Percent Girls	Number Boys	Percent Boys	Total
Total Enrolled	69	52 %	63	48 %	132
Enrolled (Class 1)	23	47 %	26	53 %	49
Enrolled (Class 2)	23	49 %	24	51 %	47
Enrolled (Class 3)	23	64 %	13	36 %	36
Total Observed (6/15/02)	63	52 %	58	48 %	121
Observed (Class 1)	22	48 %	24	52 %	46
Observed (Class 2)	19	45 %	23	55 %	42
Observed (Class 3)	22	67 %	11	33 %	33

Number of teachers: 3
Cost of enrollment per student: $1.50 (3,000 FG) per month
Number of years school has operated: 3 (1999-2002)
Age range of students at school: 5-15
Number of classes: 3
Students with notebooks in class: 50% in lower grades, 97% in upper grades
Students with books printed in N'ko in class: 10%

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