

African Language Literature as a Weapon against African Language Marginalization

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1. Introduction

Experiential evidence and academic documentation of the critical importance of learning in one's own language abounds, and it is not necessary to cite the evidence here. All of the literature on multilingual education refers to the many advantages that accrue to the child and the system that take advantage of the maternal language as a medium of instruction prior to the introduction of a second or a foreign language. The history of education in francophone Africa has demonstrated that no matter how many times such studies are carried out, the skeptics remain and soon re-emerge to threaten the future of the bilingual education experiment. This has been a cyclical occurrence in many francophone African countries.

In spite of our knowledge, and the many experiments in this direction throughout Africa in both formal and non-formal education, few of the efforts have led to sustainable literacy, a print-rich environment, and the concomitant empowerment of the population. Experience has proven that it is not sufficient to simply embrace such a policy and implement it. Steps must be taken to break these cycles, and to do this the approach should include other parameters that come into play.

Here we are reminded of the importance of mother tongue instruction and of curricular content that builds on the local environment and culture.

A relevant curriculum is one that connects learning to the child's experience and environment, responds to parental expectations and demands and at the same time prepares students not for today's world but for society as it will develop in the next fifty years. In sub-Saharan Africa, connecting to the students' context means first and foremost moving to mother tongue instruction - at least in the early grades. It also means a content that builds on the local environment and culture."¹

Here a number of attributes are described, all of which become feasible when the mother tongue is the medium.

A quality education is one that seeks out learners and assists them to learn using a wide range of modalities, recognizing that learning is linked to experience, language and cultural practices, gifts, traits, the external environment, and interests. We learn in different ways, each emphasizing different senses and abilities. A quality education is one that welcomes the learner and can adapt to meet learning needs. It is inclusive. Thus, a quality education strives to ensure that all learners, regardless of sex, language, religion, and ethnicity, for example, are reached - that they have the possibility of participating in and learning from organized learning activities."²

¹Association for the Development of Education in Africa. October -December 2003. *ADEA Newsletter*. "The Challenge of Learning - Improving the Quality of Basic Education", pp. 4-7. Paris.

²Association for the Development of Education in Africa. October -December 2003. *ADEA Newsletter*. "What is Quality Education", pp. 3. Paris.

These are attributes that have not been achieved through colonizer language education programs in francophone Africa.

Regardless of the arena, or the forum in which African languages find themselves, the greatest weapon which they can wield in the face of the colonizer's language is a thorough range of documentation both academic and literary. Nothing is more powerful in the face of the rampant skepticism over the capacity of African languages to serve as vehicles of instruction than a print-rich environment in the language. Here we argue that the environment must also be culture-rich.

This paper is about what it takes in terms of documentation for a language to be adequately equipped. Obviously there are many partners and participants sharing in any form of education system. The skepticism just mentioned, may be found among any or all of the groups of partners and participants. In equipping a language for literacy and literature, the critical initial step is to engage the target population in the process of documenting their own language. Without their engagement, regardless of the level of commitment from other partners to the process, the effort is bound to fail.

Referring to recent successes in empowering African populations through the availability of meaningful literature in their own languages, this paper discusses critical strategies for combating African language marginalization. Here the success of the Pulaar language literacy movement in Senegal as fostered by the NGO known as ARED (Associates in Research and Education for Development Inc.) is examined for the lessons it can offer to other languages throughout Africa. The paper analyses the works of Sonja Fagerberg-Diallo and the results of interviews with her that have documented ARED's success in establishing a literate environment in the Pular language. Using the template which emerges from this analysis, this paper then proceeds to evaluate the kinds of literacy efforts which either fail or succeed elsewhere in Africa.

1.1. Historical trends in African language literacy efforts

In post-independence Africa, many of the so-called "francophone" countries have made efforts to integrate African languages into their formal education systems, in one configuration or another of rather transitional bilingual education. Likewise in the non-formal education sector, adult literacy efforts have frequently been carried out using African languages, as has historically been encouraged by the various directives from UNESCO in this direction.

During the period of the supremacy of UNESCO's functional literacy paradigm, the priority was discussions and meetings, and linking of literacy to production. In the 1970s, Alpha Ibrahim Sow³ wrote:

... the time of international meetings, of "consultations" and diverse variations on general or specific themes of this vast domain is now over and we owe it to ourselves, instead to consecrate the available national and international resources and means to putting into action the operational programs that have been defined, repeated, confirmed, discussed and amended during the international and regional meetings of experts already organized by UNESCO or with her help from 1975 to 1976.

Ironically, most of the UNESCO-driven literacy campaigns have never been linked to the requisite documentation and development of literature that are needed to sustain a literacy effort and enable it to flourish. Though professing a preoccupation with the importance of reading material, UNESCO has rarely delivered and has yet to be the driving force in the creation of a literate environment in Africa.

1.2. On literacy efforts in the Republic of Mali

Among francophone West African countries, Mali has always been lauded as one of the most successful in African language functional literacy efforts.

Kazadi cites L.-J. Calvet in relation to the functional literacy experience of Mali, concluding that the end result was not in fact the promotion of local languages but rather an increase in agricultural and industrial production. Literacy programs functioned in a closed circle, for certain neo-colonialist

³Sow, Alpha Ibrahim. *Langues et politiques de langues en Afrique Noire*. UNESCO.

production companies, while parallel to this effort formal education continued to be carried out in French, from primary school on. Calvet adds that "literacy in Mali never concerned communication at the national level, since the country continued to be governed in French."⁴

In 1992, as a volunteer consultant, I had the opportunity to visit the Care-Mali literacy program in the town of Macina in the Bamanan language. There I found that the classes were conducted using the classical DNAFLA⁵ methodology, with the initial literacy syllabary distributed to the students. To my astonishment, I learned that these literacy manuals were not given to the students to keep, but were instead returned at the end of their initial course to be redistributed to the next generation of students, thus leaving the graduate of the program with nothing written or printed in the language upon the completion of the course. Given the absolute dearth of other reading materials, the graduate was thus left with nothing to continue reading and to sustain the nascent literacy. This is typical of many literacy efforts in francophone Africa.

1.3. On literacy efforts in the Republic of Guinea

In reference to Guinea's experience with local languages in the formal education system under Sékou Touré, Kazadi cites Arame D. Fal stating that "these languages were not fully integrated in the official life of Guinea, and that there were problems as to the insertion of neo-literates in public life."⁶

In Hutchison (1999) it is implied that the print environment surrounding the Guinean local language medium school was limited and not sufficiently diverse or rich to empower people and to convince skeptics. Indeed, much of the curriculum was based on textbooks translated from other languages, and little else. Kuruma and Touré (1981) point out that in terms of journalism, from 1972 on there was never more than a few columns in national languages which appeared in the newspaper *Horoya*. Later other literacy newspapers were produced. In brief, the print environment was impoverished.⁷

A further sign of the degree to which the print environment has been neglected appears in a 1983 interview of M. Salissou Madougou, national literacy director of the Republic of Niger. Madougou was preoccupied by questions of training personnel, and pointed out that there was a problem with attendance, and also that:

"... French being the official language, and [given] that all official documents are in French, adults are thus cut off in terms of printed material from the administration."⁸

Whether one considers these issues important or not, what is striking is that the issue of documentation and/or reading materials in the Nigerien languages is not even addressed.

2. The newfound role of the non-governmental organization in literacy

In more recent years we have witnessed a third arm of this effort to instruct people in their own languages, and that has emerged from the flourishing development of non-governmental organizations. It is in this third realm that we begin to see some success, where NGOs have been able to take the necessary steps toward the development of a print rich, literate environment of materials which show respect for the target languages, for their speakers and their language and culture.

History has shown that of the three arenas cited, the first, primary education, is the arena where proponents of African language medium education will come into confrontation with the French. In

⁴Kazadi, Ntole. 1991. *L'Afrique afro-francophone*. Institut d'Etudes Créoles et Francophone, Université de Provence. pp. 135-36. my translation from Calvet, 1974: 228.

⁵ Mali's national literacy service at the time.

⁶Ibid. 137.

⁷Ibid. 137.

⁸Madougou, M. Salissou. 1983. "Campagne d'alphabétisation 1983: 909 centres pour alphabétiser 36,000 adultes." *Le Sahel*. Niamey: République du Niger. pp. 16-17.

most cases they have not succeeded. The second, adult literacy, is where governmental literacy agencies confront the agenda of outside organizations rather than having the right to develop their own. The third arena, that of literacy as promoted by NGOs, can work and there is evidence that there is reason for great hope in this arena.

When one analyses the track record of African languages in the formal education arena in francophone West Africa, clearly the languages have not been unleashed and allowed to fulfill their destiny. Just as there is no francophone African country which has achieved official status for African languages and been able to replace French as the official language, likewise, few African language medium education efforts have been able to result in the empowerment of the cultures of which they are the vehicle. Given the primordial importance of French in that education system, and the entire examination system based in French, local languages have made few inroads against that hegemony. The African language has served only as the trampoline that leads to the dominance of the colonizer's language. Such efforts have failed to combat the disenfranchisement and alienation of the French language education system.

From Sonja Fagerberg-Diallo we learn that since Senegal's current illiteracy rate hovers around 65%, we need to ask some fundamental questions about the French medium educational system. What do we know about education in French in Senegal today? Roughly, 62% of children between the ages of seven and twelve are enrolled each year in the French-language school system. But each year at the 7th grade entrance exam, 75% of the students taking the exam are failed and forced out of the educational system definitively. A large number of students are failed out of the system at this point in their educations simply because there aren't enough places for them in higher educational institutions.

Fagerberg-Diallo writes:

The formal educational system in French is increasingly unable to satisfy the demands of a growing population that wants an education which responds to its needs. Therefore, non-formal education in national languages has become an increasingly interesting option, going back to the early 50's when the first mass literacy campaigns promoted by UNESCO were introduced in Senegal. Fary Ka, university linguist in Senegal, calls national language education "...an alternative to the failed mirage of formal education ('schooling') which creates civil servants, *elites* and intellectuals." (Ka, 1996, p. 11) Today, in face of high unemployment amongst all school graduates—even at the university level—the alternative of national language education is emerging as an important option.⁹

What is needed is indigenous African agency in the development of literacy, and localization of the effort accompanied by the inspiration and commitment, from the target population. Local forces must be engaged in the effort and their vision must be their own interest that the program enables them to see. The indigenous non-governmental organization provides the ideal vehicle for such an effort.

Furthermore, emerging data showing the inadequacies of traditional literacy programs are not only quantitative. Qualitatively as well, we can easily see its weaknesses. In a recently published dictionary of agricultural terminology in an African language (Pulaar), the authors explain that they decided to compile this dictionary after their "frustrating attempts to transmit scientific knowledge" in an agricultural extension program. They tell the story of speaking with "...a young technician at our institute for agricultural research who was in daily contact with researchers there, who constantly spoke with them in French about every detail concerning growing cotton, who carried out experiments for them. And yet one day he admitted that until he had read the version in Pulaar, he had never understood the booklet written in French about the insects which destroy a cotton crop." (Tourneux and Dairou, 1998, p. 9) As they exclaim, "If he couldn't understand it, who else possibly could?"¹⁰

⁹Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 2001. "Learning to Read Woke Me Up!": Motivations, and Constraints, in Learning to Read in Pulaar (Senegal). Dakar: ARED. p. 1.

¹⁰Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 2001. "Learning to Read Woke Me Up!": Motivations, and Constraints, in Learning to Read in Pulaar (Senegal). Dakar: ARED. p. 1.

3. What sort of education for Africa?

Regardless of how marginalized a people and their language may be, as Anderson writes, "we are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, and our mother-tongue, ..."¹¹ Once the decision is taken to have an education system that serves the entire population, then "it goes without saying that reading and writing would have to be taught in the local language, since it is the only real vehicle for the everyday experience of village community members."¹²

Here we observe what is happening in African education.

... education has been characterized by the proliferation of institutions which correspond to real needs only slightly, if at all. The school systems that have been established have served only to train tiny élites to run a bureaucracy and the modern sector of an economy while neglecting the training of human resources capable of stimulating production in areas essential to the welfare of the majority of the population.

... financial resources are becoming depleted and ... the present educational system is demonstrating that it is incapable of contributing substantially to satisfying peoples' needs and meeting the goals of autonomous self-reliant development ...¹³

... the real levers of development lie not so much in the bureaucracy or the modern sector as in the traditional agrarian sector. ... the masses are not in a position to embark on the social and economic change that is indispensable for endogenous self-reliant development.¹⁴

Basic education can be 'integrated' only if it is part of community life. Its design, geographical location, administration and functioning will stem from the grass-roots level.

... The fundamental objective of any educational system is to endow the nation with the human resources that must unite their efforts to ensure its socio-economic and cultural development, taking into account the social, cultural and political factors intrinsic to the country and the development objectives set by the political authorities.¹⁵

From this we learn that a truly democratic and empowering education system must be rooted in the locale, and that adult education should take place within the primary community itself.

4. The Pulaar language in Senegal

Senegal houses around 23 different ethnic groups, among which most speak West Atlantic languages, and a smaller portion, Mande languages. Of these languages, two of them are transnational (Mandinka and Pulaar), and others are transborder languages (several West Atlantic languages and Creole between Senegal and Guinea Bissau).¹⁶

¹¹Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso. p. 10.

¹²Raymaekers, Erik and Myriam Bacquelaïne. 1985. "Basic education for rural development." *Prospect*, Vol. XV, No. 3. Paris: UNESCO. p. 455.

¹³Ibid. p. 461.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 457.

¹⁵Ibid. p. 459.

¹⁶Wone, Daouda. 2001. *Etude du Marché du livre en pulaar en vue du renforcement du partenariat avec les revendeurs des produits de ARED établis dans la zone de Dakar*. Dakar: Département Planification Economique et Gestion des Organisations (PEGO), Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée (ENEA).

ethnic group	% of population	% of population speaking language
Wolof	42.7	49.2
Pulaar	23.7	22.2
Sereer	14.9	12.2
Diola	9.3	-
Mandekan	5.2	_17

Clearly Pulaar is not a majority language in Senegal, but it is indeed the second most important language in the country.

5. What is ARED?

In this setting, after a long history of literacy efforts in Senegal by many different organizations, NGOs and government bodies, it was not until 1989 that a group of five Pulaar authors and linguists came together over having recognized that what was missing were books and new readers for all the literacy classes. They founded the Groupe d'Initiative pour la Promotion du Livre en Langues Nationales (GIPLLN). Given both the successes and weaknesses of GIPLLN, the Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED) was founded late in 1990 as a non-profit publisher. The two NGOs have combined forces, and share founders. ARED depends upon donors to cover the cost of developing books. Books are sold, but the prices consist only of the costs of printing plus distribution¹⁸ Sonja Fagerberg-Diallo is one of the original founders, and is the source of much of the documentation of the process that the Pulaar-speaking people of Senegal are engaged in. ARED branched out into a training institution, in addition to publishing.

ARED works strictly in African languages (especially Pulaar), aiming at an audience of rural readers who are new literates. They work closely and extensively with communities to identify the types of materials which they would like to have, or those that would be of interest to them and meaningful publications that honor the languages and their speakers are then produced.

5.1. "Constructive Interdependence"

In an article entitled "Constructive Interdependence", Fagerberg-Diallo quotes Archer, stating: "In order to achieve some of these benefits (to make the literacy programme a "cause") it is necessary to have two parallel and interweaving processes: a literacy process and an empowering process, based on people-centered grassroots development. These can become mutually reinforcing, with empowerment creating uses for literacy and literacy providing practical skills for advancing empowerment." (Archer, 1996, p. 18) In describing the Pulaar literacy program, Fagerberg-Diallo writes that the model is based on an integration of the autonomous and ideological models, since new literates themselves ... identify both the cognitive and the social gains they have made through becoming literate. But this model also emphasizes the importance of a cultural dimension in which becoming literate becomes a medium both for knowing better one's culture and for supporting that culture in a time of rapid social change. ... While some of the gains of literacy are seen as having access to what is "new" and from the "outside", somehow new literates have also transformed literacy in Pulaar into a tool to discover and transmit the

¹⁷Wone, Daouda. 2001. Etude du Marché du livre en pulaar en vue du renforcement du partenariat avec les revendeurs des produits de ARED établis dans la zone de Dakar. Dakar: Département Planification Economique et Gestion des Organisations (PEGO), Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée (ENEA).

¹⁸Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 1997-a. "Constructive Interdependence : The Response of a Senegalese Community to the Question of Why Become Literate", in *The Making of Literate Societies* edited by David Olson and Nancy Torrance, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 153-177.

"soul" or core of their own culture. The debate is not either/or, but rather one of *constructive interdependence*."¹⁹

The key to its success is the link that has been forged between *cultural identity, language and literacy*.²⁰ Fagerberg-Diallo cites the need to revitalize their culture as the main reason for becoming literate. This goes against the usual assumption that functionality and economic incentives are essential to motivate learners. Rather, it shows what can be accomplished when culture and education become partners.²¹ Rarely have they been partners in Francophone Africa.

Education, in this context, is based in community enterprise and locally based ownership over education. It is not a foreign system that requires displacing people when students change levels. The Pulaar literacy experience in Senegal has enabled committed individuals like Yero Dooroo Jallo and Mammadu Sammba Joob to emerge as Pulaar language activists, poets, writers, radio broadcasters and more, as extremely important cultural models that stimulate new readers because of the cultural content of their works. Their efforts in Senegal have spawned a new form of government aid to the non-formal education sector – one that acknowledges local languages, and provides funding to encourage publishers, to train people, and to purchase publications for training and literacy. This is remarkable.

With this kind of literacy, education no longer means alienation from the community. What seems to be the key element in all these activities is that *education in Pulaar has found a cultural echo*. The skill of learning how to read and write is not perceived of as an alienating factor, but as something which can help local initiatives move forward in both preserving and understanding the culture, and in the integration of new ideas into the existing system.²²

ARED works strictly in African languages (especially Pulaar), aiming at an audience of rural readers who are new literates. By working closely and extensively with communities, we are able to identify the types of materials which they would like to have, or those that we estimate would be of interest to them.²³ We either find an outside author or develop the manuscripts using ARED's staff members. If an author provides a manuscript, ARED staff develops a "pedagogical approach" for the book, develops new vocabulary if necessary, and carries out all page layout work to make the books as readable and attractive as possible.²⁴

However, we do find that our field trainers have played a tremendous role in helping to promote our books. Trainings in the field play two primary roles. Either we test comprehension of new materials (especially training guides) by working with a group of up to 20 new literates; or we respond to a request by a local group to be trained to teach one of our books. At the same time, our trainers provide the first model that most people have ever heard of a text read fluently and for meaning, as opposed to the system of dividing words into syllables and reading without voice intonation.²⁵

ARED's only activity is education and trainings. We never offer an accompanying development activity such as digging a well, constructing a health hut, providing credit, etc. While many NGOs offer literacy training (whose costs may or may not be covered by the NGO), they associate literacy with an economic or developmental activity.

¹⁹Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 1997-a. "Constructive Interdependence : The Response of a Senegalese Community to the Question of Why Become Literate", in *The Making of Literate Societies* edited by David Olson and Nancy Torrance, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 153-177.

²⁰Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 2001. "Learning to Read Woke Me Up!": Motivations, and Constraints, in *Learning to Read in Pulaar (Senegal)*. Dakar: ARED. p. 2.

²¹Ibid., p. 2.

²²Ibid., p. 2.

²³Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 2001. Report to the Department for International Development. Dakar: ARED. page 1

²⁴Ibid. p. 2.

²⁵Ibid, p. 1.

Associations which come to ARED, however, know that they will receive nothing else in addition to the training. They must be motivated by the training alone, or they wouldn't approach ARED.²⁶

5.2. ARED's publication record

Fagerberg-Diallo (2001) talks about ARED's publishing strategies. Here she is talking about a book about reading, and what kind of publications should be produced:

One of our projects this year is to write a book about how to read a book! We've found that people pick up a book and start reading with the first word on the first page, without looking at the text on the back cover, the table of contents, reading the introduction, etc. to see if the book would be of interest to them.

Our books are in general very complex and sophisticated, even though we know our audience are new literates. We try to make our text very clear and complete, but not necessary simple. We publish in seven different "collections" or "series". The table below gives an indication of how many books exist in each series, and how each series sells.²⁷

Literacy materials in local languages in Africa whose content has been dictated by forces from outside are often oversimplified and dumbed-down in their language since they are often translations of a dumbed-down version in French or English. Such materials do not honor the target language, nor do they attract readers.

ARED now has more than one hundred titles in print. One of their earliest publications was the Pulaar version of *l'Aventure Ambigue*. They contacted the author of the French novel, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and he, together with a team of senior Pulaar speakers, translated the novel into Pulaar. It is a compelling story of a young Fulani boy who grapples with the exigencies of the Koranic education system and the classic French school. They began selling it for 1500 f CFA in Senegal. Today they have organized their many publications into the rubrics shown below for the various series:

1. Basic literacy and mathematics aptitudes
2. Planification and leadership
3. Civil Society
4. Fula Culture
5. Health
6. Scientific and Technical Information
7. Religion

Clearly there are those rubrics that are purely functional in orientation, others that are more for pleasure reading and self-enlightenment, and others are a mixture. In the year 2002, of the 36,000 books sold by ARED, 28,000 of them were sold to projects and non-governmental organizations, whereas 8,000 were sold to individuals. Of the seven series cited above, the orders by projects and NGOs came from nearly all the rubrics, whereas, nearly 100% of the titles purchased by individuals came from the fourth rubric, that of Fula Culture. This is an extremely important statistic, in that it reveals that people are more ready to spend their own money on reading materials that are culturally meaningful to them. In the Fula Culture series, the introduction points out that the series treats cultural aspects and systems of traditional knowledge, i.e. what people already know, how they express it, and how they transmit it. People are always fascinated by reading history, both their own and that of others. ... based on history as expressed through epics, tales, novels, and poems.²⁸

Here are the titles that have been published under the rubric of Fula Culture by ARED:

Series 4. Fula Culture

²⁶Ibid. p. 6.

²⁷Ibid. p. 1.

²⁸ARED. 2001. Catalogue of Associates in Research and Education for Development. Dakar: ARED.

Seek Haamiidu Kan. The Ambiguous Adventure.
 Mammadu Njaay. Tales of Fuladu.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. Ndikkiri-the older brother and his one-string guitar.
 Fari Siilat Kah. The epic of Samba Gueladio Diegui.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. The epic of Silamaka and Pulu.
 Mammadu Njaay. Tales for a Fula child.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. Marriage in the Fula milieu.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. Circumcision in the Fula milieu.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. The livestock raiser's book: The life of Ferlo.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. The livestock raiser's book: The diseases of livestock.
 Fari Kah. Thematic dictionary: Trees and Plants.
 Abuubakri Dem, Fari Kah, Yero Dooro Jallo. Thematic dictionary: Environment, agriculture, animal husbandry)
 Adrian Adams-Sow. Fish and fishing in the Senegal River.
 Abuubakri Dem. Tales and proverbs.
 Mammadu Njaay. History of Fuladu.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. The epic of Mamadu Mbuldi Jallo.
 Yero Dooro Jallo. Binndand'e Nguurndam Ned'd'ake.

6. Shortcomings of traditionally published adult literacy reading materials

Most attempts at the creation of an African language literature have primarily been conceived and implemented by adult literacy services. In francophone Africa, such services are normally based in or linked to a Ministry of Education or a Ministry of Continuing Education, based in the capital city, and the service is staffed by those educated in the French medium education system, many educated overseas, and in general no longer strongly linked to the rural communities which constitute the heartland of their maternal language. The mentality that may emerge entails:

- a) lack of recognition of traditional knowledge;
- b) loss of the literacy agent's mastery of his/her maternal language
- c) awkward literal translations of Euro-centric terminology
- d) subject matter in literacy materials: functional orientation, production, technical subjects; curriculum as conceived by outsiders
- e) failure to consult and collaborate with members of the target population
- f) mediocre translation of literacy materials often inspired by the agenda of sources outside of the target country, e.g. UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.
- g) dumbing down of literacy materials due to the influence of the Europhone attitude toward the African language
- h) inferior quality, illustration and production of African language literacy materials
- i) translation involving the cultural models of other societies with which the target population cannot connect
- j) misguided terminology creation for technical areas by civil servants in the capital city, without implicating members of the target population

The experience and the success of ARED provides a welcomed alternative model for the promotion and advancement of adult literacy.

7. Criteria for developing a sustainable publishing strategy

In describing the Pulaar literacy, Fagerberg-Diallo writes that the model is based on; an integration of the autonomous and ideological models, since new literates themselves ... identify both the cognitive and the social gains they have made through becoming literate. But this model also emphasizes the importance of a cultural dimension in which becoming literate becomes a medium both

for knowing better one's culture and for supporting that culture in a time of rapid social change. ... While some of the gains of literacy are seen as having access to what is "new" and from the "outside", somehow new literates have also transformed literacy in Pulaar into a tool to discover and transmit the "soul" or core of their own culture. The debate is not either/or, but rather one of *constructive interdependence*."²⁹ Maternal language literacy thus serves as an anchor linking people to their culture, and empowering them.

7.1. What is literature and what is the goal of your literacy program?

Sonja Fagerberg-Diallo describes the etymology of the term for 'literature' in Pulaar³⁰, where the Fulb'e involved chose the term *conce*, meaning 'harvesting that which is rich in milk or honey' rather than the more transparent and obvious term *binndi* 'writing/text'. The lesson here is that terminology should come from the target population and not from the adult literacy agent isolated in the capital city and translating terms from a list in French which s/he has been assigned. It has to be meaningful. Literature also must be that 'milk and honey' for the population.

She goes on to point out that the themes of the first books being published, show an overwhelming preoccupation with *Fulb'eness* and very little interest in Europe, European (or Arabic) language writing and themes, or in the impact of European language literacy on Africa, in spite of the fact that these first authors have all had to struggle with these issues in their personal lives. They write about being Fulb'e, addressing their monolingual Fulb'e audience. She notes that the choice of Fulb'e themes, characters, plots and settings is extremely interesting given the complex multicultural and multilingual context in which the Fulb'e find themselves.

She continues:

So far, all Pulaar-language writers are focusing on their heritage, making it a central theme in their writing; and many do indeed write about it in highly glorified terms.

However others look critically at their "past", developing characters who live in disaccord with what their culture and social group prescribes for them.

She indicates that their thematic focus is directed "inward", a word which she deliberately uses in distinction to "traditional" because their themes, plots and character development can be very different from traditional narratives or oral performances. She adds that in all of the novels written for ARED, "Fulbe characters struggle with internal cultural values, alternatively accepting and glorifying them, or refusing them and exposing them to scrutiny."

7.2. What do people want to read?

Interestingly, Fagerberg-Diallo compares the sales history of the Pulaar version of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* to the sales of other novels that were actually conceived in the Pulaar language. The former addresses a bicultural and bilingual reality - but as a translation from French into Pulaar, not as a novel which was originally conceived of in the Pulaar language, and is found problematic by Pulaar readers on any number of levels. In 1995, the GIPLLN sold ten times the number of copies of *Ndikkiri Joom Moolo* (the first available novel written in Pulaar) than it did of the *Ambiguous Adventure*.

²⁹Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 1997-a. "Constructive Interdependence : The Response of a Senegalese Community to the Question of Why Become Literate", in *The Making of Literate Societies* edited by David Olson and Nancy Torrance, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 153-177.

³⁰Fagerberg-Diallo, Sonja. 1995-b, "Milk and Honey: Developing Written Literature in Pulaar", in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, #43. Bloomington: Indiana University.

7.3. A strategy for selecting subject matter and the conception of literary works

The following are suggestions for improving the success of publishing strategies for African language literacy efforts:

- conceive proposed work in collaboration with the target population
- involve target population in writing and editing
- conceive the work in the target language (more natural than in translation)
- initiation of writing production by the target population

8. Conclusion

What ARED has accomplished demonstrates an array of simple truths, self evident, which we must all take into account when approaching the question of African language marginalization and literacy issues in Africa. Here is a summary of the points that have been raised in this paper:

- rich documentation contributing to a print-rich environment is critical for any language regardless of the forum in which it will be used;
- rich documentation functions as an important weapon against language marginalization and a tool for convincing partners to e.g. an education system who are skeptical about the capabilities of a given African language;
- there are readers and a potential market for African language literature provided that meaningful reading materials are available at affordable prices;
- people will spend their money to read something worthwhile;
- African language publishers can sustain themselves in "francophone" Africa;
- a literacy program is meaningless without meaningful literature.

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