THE NEGOTIATION OF WRITING IN A PLURILINGUAL COUNTRY:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY

OF THE MALIAN LITERARY SCENE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In the West African country of Mali, fourteen languages are recognized by the constitution as official. Of these, one is French, the language of the former colonial power, and the other thirteen are indigenous African languages. These languages have traditionally been used for oral communication and storytelling, but as the technology of writing has been introduced, the languages have been codified and used by some writers in creative writing.

This thesis explores the reasons writers in this plurilingual environment select the language in which they write. It provides a portrait of how writers perceive their role in the traditionally oral culture of Mali. Through an examination of connected institutions such as education and development, my work exposes the different forces that shape the choices made by these writers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Bamako, in late March 2012, I had a hard time hailing a cab. The military coup of the previous week that unseated the president caused less people to be on the streets, and less taxis to drive aimlessly, around looking for fares. After a few minutes, I walked to the nearest taxi stand, and found a driver who would be willing to take me to my appointment in Baco Djicoroni ACI, a neighborhood close to the river. Before we set off, though, I would have to negotiate the fare. I was not traveling far, and the price for a Malian would have been no more than *kɛmɛ*, 500 CFA or about 1 dollar. The *Toubab* – or white person – tax would inflate the fare to *kɛmɛ fila*, 1000 CFA or about 2 dollars, especially since the coup and rumors of an embargo on imported goods and currency had caused taxi-men to become increasingly nervous. I poked my head into the taxi's passenger side window and asked, "*I ni tile? Somɔgɔw ka kɛnɛ*" "Good afternoon," I started. "How is your family?" After slowly moving through the Bamanankan greeting with him, I continued, "*N bɛ taa Baco Djicoroni ACI*." "I'm going to Baco Djicoroni ACI." The taxi-man started the fare bidding at 2000 CFA, I scoffed and, after a uttering a few exasperated phrases and smiling with him, we settled on my price, 1000 CFA.

The entire transaction between me and the taxi-man took place in Bambara, or *Bamanankan*, one of 14 national languages recognized by the Malian constitution and the *lingua franca* of Bamako. It is the maternal language of 40% of Mali's population, as well as some citizens of neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Guinea. An estimated 80% of the population of Mali can communicate in Bamanankan, and many people in the country use the language to communicate with

neighbors who have a different maternal tongue. While I began studying Bamanankan shortly after I arrived in Bamako in January of 2012, my goal was not to be able to communicate with members of different ethnic groups in the market or while traveling, nor to conduct interviews in the language. I studied Bamanankan to gain the trust of many of my respondents, and to demonstrate my interest and investment in their lives. Over the course of my three months in Bamako, however, I learned that an at least partial command of Bamanankan was necessary to communicate with people in markets, shops, public transportation, and on the streets.

For me, language switching became a fact of daily life. I navigated, sometimes deftly, between English, French and Bamanankan, while I tried to learn one or two phrases in Dogon in order to communicate with the guardian at my apartment building. I shared this habit with all of the Malian writers that I interviewed for this project. They, too, switched between French and Bamanankan regularly, and had been switching since their youth. For most of them, exposure to French began during primary school, and existed inside of the walls of school only. Even there, Bamanankan crept in, between friends in the hallway and sometimes even between teachers and students.

After emerging from the taxi that day, I walked into the office of the biggest publishing house in Mali, *La Sahélienne*; the building doubled as the home of the founder of the business, Ismaïla Samba Traoré, his wife and kids. A fan spun slowly above the desk as I entered, and Samba Traoré[1]'s assistant, Bintou Coulibaly began to show me some information on her computer. Within minutes, the power snapped off, a lapse that

[1]Malians hold many associations with last names, and most citizens share a handful of them. They indicate birthplace, ethnicity and historic occupation, among other things. Three Traoré's appear in this work, and for clarification, I will refer to them using more than simply their last names. Samba is not a part of this Traoré's last name but throughout the paper I will refer to him as "Samba Traoré."

was becoming more and more regular since the military coup of the previous week thrust the country into chaos. Bintou walked out to grab some tea, and Aicha Diarra walked in.

She radiated, a toothy white smile blazing across her face, as she held her hand out to greet me. Bintou popped in and said, “Ismaïla suggested you meet Aicha. *Elle est écrivaine.* She’s a writer.” Just as quickly, she popped out again. Aicha and I sat on opposite sides of a desk in the office illuminated solely by daylight. She began to speak first, asking me what brought me to *La Sahélienne*. I explained my interest in Malian writing, which brought me to Bamako in January. Upon hearing that I was interested in the literature of her country, her smile deepened. She asked me if I knew that Ismaïla sold books from the very offices in which we were sitting. I replied that I did. Did I want to look at them? I shied away from her sales pitch, pretending like I didn’t understand, and tried to change the subject from sales to her work.

“So, you’re a writer?” I asked. The question seemed so trite, and in light of the recent events, coupled with the presence of gunfire in the city and an aggressive militia in the north, I wondered if this young woman would have any interest in discussing writing.

“Yes, I’m publishing a book soon, with Ismaïla,” she responded. Of all the things I learned about Ismaïla over the previous three months, it came as no surprise that he would have mentored this young person, encouraging her to write a book. That she was hanging out in his house, and would later descend the staircase to the courtyard to chat with Bintou, only after having tea with his sons, was equally unsurprising. The building that housed *La Sahélienne* was a home for Ismaïla and his family, but also served as a sanctuary for the many writers that passed either under his tutelage or simply came through Bamako. When Aminata Sow Fall, the Senegalese writer, was grounded in

Bamako for seven days following the coup, the *La Sahélienne* office transformed into a haven for her, a calm place behind walls, hidden from the dusty, loud and sprawling city that stretched out on both sides of *Djoliba*, the River Niger.

Excitedly, I asked Aicha the obvious questions. What did you write? What language is it in? Will you write more? She continued to smile and giggle periodically as she described her forthcoming work, a fantastical story set in Mali. She wrote it in French and has already begun working on her second book. This new one would be more realistic, also set in Mali. “Also in French,” I ask.

Aicha’s smile faded a bit. “Yes, in French,” she confirmed.

I then ask her if she will continue to write, possibly professionally, like her mentor Ismaïla. Her broad smile returned. “No,” she explained. “I would rather work in marketing or sales, where I could talk to people a lot…”

This thesis examines how a group of writers navigate language choices and the writing environment in Bamako, Mali. The paper will elaborate on the various issues they encounter, and give voice to their experiences as they encounter intervening institutions such as education and development. Chapter 2 will give a detailed description of the literary scene in this African capital in early 2012. Chapter 3 will investigate the reality of reading and writing culture in the country, and the ways that interested parties try to develop readership in an environment lacking materials, and in a culture that does not recognize writing as a legitimate avenue to success. Given the plurilingual nature of the country and the writers themselves, they also all contend with language choice in speaking and writing, a topic which will be discussed at length in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will explore and clarify the connections between publishing, writing and education,

particularly focusing on the influx of money from development organizations to produce texts for use in the school system. I will also expose the inspirations for these writers as they discuss mentors and role models, some inspired by the oral storytelling that is so important in Malian culture. Finally, Chapter 6 will suggest ways forward for the writers as well as the institutions that are involved in writing.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to uncover the multitude of reasons a Malian writer may choose to write in a Malian national language or French, while also providing a full portrait of the contemporary environment that influences these choices. At the heart of these choices is a debate about the utility of African languages in writing, and their importance as carriers of culture and identity. The environment within which these writers speak to this debate includes: cultural attitudes towards writing; the intersection of language, education and the development of readership; and the development of the country's publishing industry and the support and opportunities it does or does not supply to these writers. Finally, the oral nature of Malian culture, and its rich history of oral tradition and storytelling, provides a complex and rich environment within which these writers make choices about language.

The introductory vignette above demonstrates that Malian writers like Aicha have grown up in this plurilingual environment, switching between French, the language of the former colonial power, and Bamanankan, the Malian *lingua franca*, and sometimes a third national language, depending on their own heritage. Despite speaking a national language in almost every aspect of their private lives – with family, friends, sometimes even co-workers and teachers – writers like Aicha still write in French. This thesis will

explore the rationale behind their language choices in light of the larger debate about language use in African creative writing.

Research Questions

Three overarching questions guided my research for this thesis. These questions are:

1. In the multi-lingual context of Mali, a country where national languages are actively being scripted, written and incorporated into the education system, while French is still the official language of government and administration, in which language did these writers choose to write and why?
2. What experiences do these writers have when they interact with representatives from the publishing world? What types of perceptions do they have about publishing and economic success and recognition? What types of obstacles do they perceive may hinder them from publishing work? What successes have they experienced?
3. What are the environmental characteristics of the literary world in Bamako, and how does this environment influence these writers?

My primary method of data collection was through interview questions (see Appendix 1). The questions began with basic demographics, asking about childhood and language use in various environments such as home, school and among friends. The questions also aimed to collect basic information about the interviewee's history and evolution as a writer. These questions included, "When did you start writing? What sparked your interest in writing? Talk about authors and works that have inspired you and why? Can you describe your process as a writer? Currently, how often do you write?"

The purpose of these types of questions was to create a base from which I could compare these authors.

The second portion of the questionnaire focused on more open-ended questions whose goal was to have the interviewee expose his or her perceived place as a writer in his or her local community, and in the global publishing marketplace. Examples of these questions include: “Do you identify yourself as a writer to others? Do your parents, teachers, friends or schoolmates support your ambitions to write? What role do you see yourself or your work playing in Malian society?”

The final section of the questionnaire focused on language selection and the rationale behind selecting French, their maternal language or Bamanankan, the most widely spoken and written African language in Mali, when writing. The purpose of this section was to encourage the interviewees to talk about their view of French vis-à-vis their maternal language, as a tool for producing literature but also for interacting with the world.

In Mali, a country with a long legacy of orality, the publishing industry has grown slowly, but purposefully. Publishers and writers in this West African country work for many of the same reasons as writers anywhere else, despite the different issues they face. Since many of the national languages in the country have been codified, some of the publishing houses work to develop only national language works, in the genres of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and even technical writing. Others work solely in French while most seek to publish work in both French and national languages. *La Sahélienne* functions in this third way, recruiting and publishing work in national languages and French. The way

these languages intersect in the production of text at *La Sahélienne* mirrors the way French and national languages interact every day in the lives of people in Mali.

Language preservationists and national language writing advocates are at work in Mali, producing texts solely in national languages. A goal of this thesis is to situate the activities occurring in contemporary Mali in the context of the larger debate about language use in African literature and the role of local publishing in a globalized world.

Methods

In order to gain insight into the struggles faced by Malian writers, I sought to meet as many writers and interested parties as possible. Before arriving in Mali, I identified Samba Traoré as a key figure in the literary world in Bamako. His publishing house, *La Sahélienne*, is the number one publisher of national language texts in the country, but they also produce fiction in French and technical textbooks. I began to assemble the group of writers that would become my research sample when I attended an event in early January, before I had fully experienced the diversity of languages and complexity of language use in the country.

The event, a book club meeting co-hosted by the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) Mali Director, Rebecca Black and Samba Traoré, was conducted entirely in French. Ironically, the novel to be discussed was written by a translator, Hanane Keïta. Egyptian-born, Keïta was married to a Malian and had lived in Mali for many years. She specialized in translating between Arabic, French and Bamanankan. After having children, she began writing a book. The finished manuscript, *Femmes Sans Avenir*, or *Women without a Future*, was not submitted to an editor or agent; rather, she showed it to a friend, and through a series of personal and professional

connections, it landed in the hands of Samba Traoré. Eventually, *La Sahélienne* published the book. While it was written in French, the story followed the lives and struggles of a woman in Mali, and the courageous choice she made to divorce her husband following his disregarding of their marriage contract.

I learned of this book club through an expatriate listserv. Many of the attendees were USAID or U.S. Embassy staff, both Malian and American, along with the author and many of her family members. I observed Samba Traoré introduce Keïta and animate the meeting. After two hours, when the meeting finally started to disperse, I put myself in front of him. He and his assistant both misunderstood my awkward French and, for almost two months, they thought that I was German. Given that language choice in writing was my topic of interest, this misunderstanding seemed ironically appropriate. I walked away at the end of the night with a few contacts, Samba Traoré and Moussa Traoré being the most important among them, and my first taste of the literary scene in Bamako.

Through these two contacts, I was introduced to the writers who would participate in my study. While Samba Traoré's connection to these writers was mostly professional, Moussa Traoré had developed personal friendships with a number of writers, due to his interest and investment in education and the development of writing in Mali. Both relationships proved to be invaluable. Through Samba Traoré, I was invited to a number of literary events and meetings, while Moussa connected me to most of my interview sample. Moussa is an activist, advocating for education and political engagement among young people in Mali. We met because he was employed by Samba Traoré, but we

ultimately developed a deep friendship. Upon leaving the country following the coup, Moussa assisted me in completing interviews from afar and conducted two in my stead.

While writers and professionals involved in publishing were the focus of this study, I found that education played an important role in this world as well. The underdevelopment of a literate reading class was an important obstacle addressed by many of my respondents, and they all pointed to education as the source for fixing this problem. Additionally, the Malian education system is pioneering the use of national languages in early schooling. Samba Traoré in particular identified this development as an opportunity for *La Sahélienne*. Therefore, I sought out education and development workers who focused on national language text development in order to gain further insight into possible connections between these two fields, education and publishing.

I conducted this research using primarily ethnographic methods, in order to collect qualitative data. I conducted structured interviews with writers, and observed a number of formal events and informal meetings. I also participated in a number of these events and meetings. The respondents all spoke a Malian national language as their maternal tongue. I was able to observe how members of this sample navigated the young and recently established publishing industry in the country, as they encountered issues related to language choice and education, among others. This thesis narrates their experiences in an attempt to expose their struggles and successes at this moment in Malian history.

Importance of the Study

Mongo Beti; Aminata Sow Fall; Wole Soyinka; Chinua Achebe; Mariama Ba; Yambo Ouloguem: all of these African writers were born prior to the African

independence movements of the 1960s. I have encountered the works of these writers in the handful of courses offered on the topic of African Literature that I have been able to take. Within the Western Academy, these writers, and a handful of others, have been selected to represent the creative literary output of an entire continent to eager students of literature in the universities of Europe and the United States. This continent, Africa, is home to over one billion people – a seventh of the world's population. They inhabit over 50 diverse states and speak over 2000 different languages (Heine 1).

Contemporary writers from Africa produce work in colonial languages and African national languages, orally and in written form. The category of African literature can also include literature from writers living in the African Diaspora. Yet, the formal study of African literature inside the legitimizing forces of the Western academy seems to omit many of the popular writers of contemporary Africa, as they compete for recognition and struggle with categorization. The reasons for this omission are contested. Some scholars pointedly argue against the inclusion of these writers in literature classes (find that article) while others approach the topic with ambivalence, becoming mired in the argument. The debates about inclusion and exclusion are many and varied. Do Diaspora writers belong to the same group as their peers in the "World Literature" category? Should writers from francophone Africa be included in the same category as French literature, or are they separate? What about writers that elect to compose work in an African national language? And storytellers that compose work orally?

While intellectuals and consumers of literature are vocal in debating these questions, the voices of the writers themselves are often missing. The driving inspiration for this research was a desire to understand how a small group of writers living and

working in Bamako, Mali perceived the challenges they face as writers in contemporary Malian society, and how they navigated these challenges. I hypothesized that the sample would identify low literacy rates among Malians and a lack of access to publishing as two major roadblocks to becoming a successful writer. I also anticipated that many of my interviewees would identify the debate between the colonial language and Malian national languages as a point of personal conflict in their writing.

I have read the works of none of the writers from this sample in any class that I have taken or survey of African Literature that I have done. One of them, Ismaïla Samba Traoré, is a well-known writer from the country, but every other interviewee is not widely known inside of the country as a writer, much less has that status outside of it. But they all write, and list writing as a component of their identities. Through this research, I sought to uncover the struggles and successes of writers that have not been legitimized by inclusion in education or have not received large capital profits from their work, in order to understand why they have not gained popularity or recognition. Through their experiences, I hope to say something meaningful about the current institutional practices for legitimizing African literary work, and share the perspective of the writers themselves as they continue to write with little hope of recognition or financial success.

Research Frame

This inquiry was inspired by the conversations taking place among literary scholars, who debate many aspects of African literature. This thesis is intended to contribute voices from a specific group of writers who speak to the issues discussed in this debate. While the literature on some of these subjects is rich, very rarely do scholars

focus on specific linguistic or geographical categories in Africa, while none of it focuses specifically on the Malian situation.

The Language Debate in African Writing

The debate about language choice in African writing is largely binary and polarized. On the one hand, some writers and theorists argue that using national languages in writing is the only way to shirk colonialism and embrace nationalism and love for one's culture (Ngũgĩ 1986; Wali 1963). The most vocal among these theorists is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and political activist. His 1986 book, *Decolonising the Mind*, was a benchmark work that detailed the demoralizing effects of continuing to write in European languages.

In it, he identifies the use of European languages as a neo-imperial act, a legacy of the colonial era that continues to shackle the spirits and minds of Africans. He writes that the "biggest weapon wielded…by imperialism…is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage…and ultimately in themselves…It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own" (3). The use of colonial languages by writers, for Ngũgĩ, is self-alienation, and causes a disruption between writers and their culture, their tradition, their homeland, that will ultimately be disastrous. Because language is "both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (13), transmitting values and beliefs along with meaning, the use of foreign languages in order to write alienates the writer from his belief system and home country. Given the low literacy rates in most francophone African countries, the use of these languages also confines the work of these

Malian writers to a mostly external audience. In Mali, the fact that the European language – French – is not spoken or understood widely outside of major cities mean that these writers are also disconnected from a large portion of the Malian population by writing in French. Ngũgĩ clarifies this conundrum by saying that "not a line by even the best of African poets in foreign languages will be known by any peasant anywhere in Africa" (87).

While Ngũgĩ cannot find a way to justify the use of colonial languages in African language writing, some argue that European languages can be Africanized by writers, used to the writer's advantage, molded into something new (Achebe 1975). Chinua Achebe understood the conflict very well. He writes, "The real question is not whether Africans *could* write in English but whether they *ought* to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling" (102). The Nigerian writer, long considered the father of African literature, argued in his book of essays, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, that "the English language will be able to carry the weight of [his] African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (103). During a writing career that has spanned 60 years, and is still going, Achebe has yet to publish a single work in his native language, Ibo (Larson 46).

Many related questions emerge from this debate. First, the question of language and its importance to culture may impact the language choice a writer makes. Language is one of the most potent tools that humans have to understand their world. As Prah says,

> A language serves as a tool for differentiating and dissecting reality into areas of experience which are socially collectively confirmed as constant or relatively

> constant points of reference. The use of language to order our thought processes or relate and communicate with others always implies that we accept a particular set of codified signs; 'a particular division of reality into segments which the vocabulary and grammar of that particular language impose' (26).

It's no small wonder then that so many theorists would advocate for the use of African languages in government, education and writing, especially when, in the case of Mali, they are used in most other spheres. He goes on to say that, "Knowledge of a language opens the door into the culture of its users," (28). This statement suggests that we will never fully know or understand the text of an author in translation, underscoring Ngũgĩ's argument. Osundare echoes this assertion, problematizing Achebe's notion of "Africanizing" European languages. He says, "no matter what the extent of the African writer's proverbialization of a European language, no matter how much stylistic acrobatics he employs in an attempt to bend the borrowed language, there are innumerable aspects of African experience that defy rendering in a foreign medium" (341).

For all of the authors in the sample, producing work in French is itself an act of translation, because French was the maternal language for no author in this sample. So, if their ideas are expressed through translation, can they be fully expressed in any other language than the untranslated maternal tongue? As the debates suggest, many writers identify struggling with language choice, and weigh the benefits of using a global language against the drawbacks of writing in a foreign tongue. The driving force of this study was to illuminate how writers in the Malian context navigate this dilemma.

The Malian Context

"As a secret heritage, as a precursor of europhone literature, orality is dispatched to an inaccessible world; it is, to be precise, expelled from History, only to represent an indigenous world that is harmonious but obsolete" (Kemedjio and Mitsch 126)

The text quoted above reflects the tension felt by many authors and creative writers from primarily oral cultures. In southern Mali, writing is a technology that was introduced in the mid-19th century when the French colonized the region. According to Brenner, "the evolution of education in French West Africa has ensured that an educated elite that has been socialized in European values and norms will inherit power, and the technology associated with that power (including the technology of writing and literacy)" (95). Using this logic, creative expression in the form writing over oral storytelling in itself is a selection that is dissonant from Malian culture and heritage, in a similar way that selecting French over a local language could be.

According to Watt, in his seminal work on the rise of the Western novel, "the novel is…the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel, as it is therefore well-named" (13). He goes on to describe writing a novel as an individual quest, for truth and for originality, whereby the writer produces something that is wholly his or hers. Alternatively, Furniss and Gunner, when discussing orature, argue that, "in performing these and other functions many speech acts, and the text that flows from them, present a picture of individuals and groups in society and the relationships of power between them…people producing oral literature are not just commentators but are often also involved in relationships of power themselves, in terms of supporting or subverting those in power" (3). Oral stories do not become literate simply by writing them down.

Writing is a different practice than oral storytelling, and in a world where the production of oral stories is a connective act and an act which can define power relations, writing may not have the same social function, despite the fact that the storytelling

function seems to be the same. Expressions of orature are not mere utterances or demonstrations of linguistic competence. Rather, they are seen in terms of social and political situation, and in relation to an audience. The content is often as important or even less important than the power relations between the performer or storyteller and the audience.

None of the members of this sample have identified oral literature as a path they want to pursue. While I did not question them deeply about this topic, it could be related to the work roles that have traditionally been defined in Mali. Historically, one becomes a storyteller or griot because of they are the son or daughter of a griot. Their training begins in their youth, and includes memorization of stories, learning how to play music, and developing a sense for “time binding” or giving meaning to new words. In addition to griots, Malian culture is filled with *conteurs*, or storytellers. These people are known to tell a good story or tale, and are considered to be gifted orators as well.

Writers who live in this oral culture have to deal with the tension created by the conflict between oral storytelling as an indigenous practice and writing as a foreign or imported one. But Ong’s investigation of orality and literacy demonstrate that shifting from orality to literacy has some negative effects. People in primary oral cultures process information much differently than people in primary literate cultures. According to Ong’s analysis, words acquire meaning from their use, rather than their existence on paper (47). Understanding takes place different, in concrete, real life applications rather than abstract understanding. Writing is difficult for someone from a primarily oral culture because the audience is missing. The author has to fictionalize the audience in order to have a context

for his text. If his fictionalization is inaccurate (i.e. the fictionalized audience differs from the actual audience), the writer is unable to react as he or she could in oral delivery (102). Therefore, literacy is not the problem-free solution to creating a readership for African writers, whether they write in the Europhone language or the indigenous language. Blanket programming to provide literacy education opportunities or the development of a reading culture can deny the fact that not all cultures are (or should be) literate. Even if there were significant infrastructure for the development of publishing houses, how can these publishers come to terms with literacy versus orality? Writers like Wole Soyinka and China Achebe include the lyricism, rhythm and repetition of orality in their work, but can truly oral work be published, and if so, how?

Audience and the Development of Readership

> Who is the audience? What is the sense of written literature in French in a country where four out of every five citizens is illiterate, who don't even hear French, where the official language isn't even used for popular communication, where even most of the literate population doesn't have the financial means to buy books? (Le Potvin, 22)[2]

One of the main considerations for writers everywhere is audience; who will read their writing, and purchase their books, once they are published? This consideration influenced language choice for writers in this sample. African writers face startlingly low literacy rates and an underdeveloped reading culture. 26% of Malians are functionally literate in French, with many fewer able to read literature in the language. The literacy statistics in national languages are not available, but are considerably lower. Therefore, the question of audience becomes paramount. However, Mali is an interesting case to

[2] "Quel public? Quel est le sens de l'art littéraire écrit d'expression française dans un pay où presque quatre habitants sur cinq sont illetrés, qu'ils sont davantage encore à ne pas entendre le français, qui pour être la langue officielle n'en est pas pour autant la langue populaire véhiculaire, et que peu d'entre les lettrés ont les moyens financiers d'acheter des livres?" (Le Potvin 22).

study the development of national language writing for two reasons. As mentioned in the section above, *The Malian Context*, Mali's oral heritage puts these writers in a transitional space, between orality and literacy. Writing, whether in the national language or French, is itself a choice that may cause feelings of departure or alienation from indigenous culture.

In terms of language choice, a shift in the school system could generate a large audience for national language books for those storytellers who do choose to write. Post-independence, Mali's public education system continued to use instruction in French, French resources and French methods. These schools have come to be known as *écoles classiques*, or classic schools. After the failure of the Education for All initiatives in the 1990s, the Malian Ministry of Education forged different methods of instruction in an effort to improve student retention and drop-out rates, as well as lessen the number of grade repeaters. Through the foundation of the *Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale* in 1994, a key methodological shift was the addition of *écoles expérimentales* to the types of schools available to the Malian student (Skattum 124).

Experimental schools differ from classic schools in a key way: language of instruction. Whereas the classic school utilizes French as the language of instruction immediately, despite students' backgrounds in language, ethnic origin or mother tongue, experimental schools utilize one of Mali's indigenous or "national" languages as the medium of instruction for early grades, while also instructing French as a foreign language. At grade CM2 (equivalent to grade 6 in the U.S.), students go through a period of convergence from the national language to French curriculum. During this time, students are tested to ensure proficiency in reading and writing in the national language,

and then begin to receive instruction in French, while also learning a third language (usually English). This experimental approach could potentially increase literacy in French and indigenous readers, creating a new population of literature consumers in the next few decades.

Research (Prah, 2002; Alidou-Ngame, 2002; Traoré, 2009; Benson, 2004) supports the claim that foundational literacy in a learner's indigenous language produces better learners further down the line. The native tongue is the language through which a student experiences and understands the world and everything that is in it. The same idea holds true for learning French. It is through literacy in the native or indigenous language that French becomes comprehensible, and ultimately becomes a tool, rather than a barrier. That over 30% of Malian schools now build their curriculum from this idea is a significant move forward, especially considering that these schools have only been developing for 15 years, and serve almost half of the schoolchildren in Mali (Skattum 122).

The development of *école éxpérimentales* is relevant to the study at hand because many respondents indicated that they would write in a national language if there was a literate audience to read their work. Others reported that despite their literacy in French, they desired to gain literacy in Bamanankan, as a matter of pride and of better understanding their own culture. These schools can also serve as a place for national language writing to be read. For example, Samba Traoré, whose publishing house produces Bamanankan children's books, recognized the opportunity to market his product to these schools for consumption by elementary school students.

Challenges and Limitations

While this thesis provides an accurate and informative ethnography of a group of Malian writers, the project was limited by various factors and as the researcher, I was challenged by my position as a white, Western women. I was often viewed as an outsider and had to consistently prove my level of investment and interest in the subject at hand. This disadvantage led to more difficulty in securing interviewees. Without the unflagging support of my research assistant, I would not have been able to interview as many writers as I did.

The selection of these writers occurred in an unscientific way. After my initial, intentional meeting with Ismaïla Samba Traoré, I was introduced to other writers through networking. Without a doubt, many more Malian writers are working and writing in even deeper obscurity, and the discovery of them is one of many ways that this project can be furthered in the future.

Language was a significant obstacle in this work, both during the secondary research phase and during the fieldwork. While I made every attempt to search for literature specific to francophone West Africa or Mali in particular, the work that has been done in French or other European or African languages was more difficult to obtain. Any omission of existing but difficult to obtain literature is therefore possible. Language also played a limiting role during the interview process, but hopefully my collaboration with my research assistant helped clarify points that were confusing or misinterpreted because of language.

Finally, the duration my stay in Bamako was cut in half by political unrest that ended in a military coup[3]. I stayed in Mali following the coup, and conducted two interviews in that time, but the instability of the financial and political situation of the country left me vulnerable and I decided to leave in early April. This decision affected my study in two ways. First, while I conducted some interviews over Skype and through a research assistant following my departure, the quality of those interviews was lower and influenced by the general sense of uncertainty and excitement following the coup. Secondly, the size of my sample became smaller. Instead of interviewing 20-25 writers as I had initially planned, I was able to collect data from 8 writers.

Despite these various limitations, this study still provides an important portrait of those writers living, working and writing in Bamako, Mali in the months leading up to the civil unrest that still plagues the country today. This unrest will likely be an important turning point in the history of Mali, and my work will provide definitive insight into this culture previous to this event. It can also serve as a template, encouraging others to study this phenomenon at the local level in order to serve as a counterpoint to pan-African theorists.

[3] A detailed description of the coup and how this work is dated following the coup follows as an Appendix.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY SCENE IN BAMAKO

We sat outside *La Médina*, a new cultural event space near Point G Hospital in North Bamako. For a while, I was the single non-African sitting on the porch with people that I did not recognize. The poetry reading was scheduled for 7:30 but we all sat outside until 9, waiting for attendees to arrive and the event to start. While a few other non-African attendees arrived, the majority of the people in attendance at this event were writers from francophone West Africa or Diaspora writers from France. An entire contingent of Senegalese writers had been invited as guests of honor.

Once we were all seated in the room set up for the reading, invitees took turns coming up to read from their work. They read, untranslated, in Bamanankan, in Tamashek, in Wolof, in French. They told stories, read poems and recounted tales heard in childhood, sometimes by reciting text from books, other times by reciting from memory. These authors performed their work, addressing the audience, almost interacting with us. Mid-way through the group reading, it was an older man's turn to read.

Gaoussou Diawara and an invitee from Senegal helped the old man, dressed head to toe in a flowing white *boubou*, to the front of the room. I was surrounded by famous writers from Senegal and Mali, all of whom had or would read at some point during the night. But right then, Albakaye Ousmane Kounta was going to read from his book, *Sanglot et Dédains*[4]. After he was assisted to a chair in the front of the room, a film student held a microphone near his mouth, and he began to read poems. The room was silent, breathing suspended. We sat and listened to a man who, born in northern Mali in

[4] While the book of poems is not translated into English, the English translation for the title is *Tears and Scorn.*

the 1930s, had gone to school in Mali and abroad, had written beautiful poems in French about Malian life, and who had taught many of the writers present in the room. Malian literature is alive, and has been for some time. It lives and breathes with the men and women that write on paper and utter words.

This event was one of many that took place during *Rentrée Littéraire*[5]. Samba Traoré and his publishing house have organized the *Rentrée Littéraire* event every other spring for the last ten years, and during 2012, took place during the second week of February. Modeled on similar events in France, the *Rentrée* was a week-long event that included workshops, readings and a closing reception with a prix littéraire. Some of the workshops included visits by schools to one of the *Rentrée* conference sites. The workshops took place in a variety of locations, from the University – easily accessible since classes weren't taking place – the National Museum and Park, the National Library, and the French Cultural Center. Events took place over the course of one week and covered the following subjects: Writing in Africa; Creative in Writing in Songhay Language; Writers and Social Realities; Literature and Politics; Islam and Education in Mali; The Journalist and the Writer.

Rentrée was a major event for the literary world in Mali, covering topics that are also covered in this thesis – such as education, language, the high cost of books – while also covering other important areas such as politics and the role of Islam in the country. Invitees attended from Western Europe and Western Africa, while university and high school students populated workshops. The breadth of scope of these workshops demonstrates the interconnectedness between many seemingly disparate topics, and their

[5] Literally translated as *Literary Season.*

impact on writers in contemporary Mali. From the outside, some of these subjects may not appear directly related to literature, but the subtlety of the relationship between them goes a long way in explaining the complex web within which writers find themselves enmeshed.

The second type of event that was regularly held in Bamako and contributed to the vibrancy of the literary scene was called, "*Les Nuits de la Francophonie*." Based on the name, it's clear that these events were not particularly concerned about national languages! The events were open to the public at large, attendance was free, but generally events at the French Cultural Center attracted a particular type of audience, expatriates or interracial/interethnic families; these populations were generally the aim of marketing efforts as well. The event that I attended was a *bilan*, not quite a debate but a bit more than a simple discussion, between the Malian writer Hanane Keïta and Senegalese writer Aminata Sow Fall. The goal of these nights was to give the stage to a representative of the francophone world outside of French, usually in the field of literature. Showcasing writers in Mali is much less common than other types of artists, including oral storytellers whose work is more integrated into the fabric of everyday life in the country.

The West African country of Mali has many claims to fame in popular culture. Malian music is well known and beloved outside of the country, and its influence has helped to forge many relationships between Malians and outsiders. If someone has not heard of Mali through music, and they draw a blank when I describe the country, I can simply mention Timbuktu. This ancient city is known as one of the most distant and hard-to-reach places on Earth. Among religious scholars, Timbuktu is recognized as an important location of Islamic scholarship and learning, while being the gateway to the

Sahara and North Africa. Recently, Mansa Musa I – a Malian – was exposed as the richest person in history (Hall, "Meet Mansa Musa I of Mali). The country is now gaining a negative reputation as a possible hotbed of terrorist activity, thanks in part to misrepresentation in the media and to the longstanding reality of civil unrest and a terrorist threat in the north.

Thomas Hale, with his work *Griots and Griottes,* has spent a good deal of time with West African praise singers and storytellers, working with them to legitimize their work, clarify its importance in West African culture and unpack the ways that griots pass down history and values while connecting to people and their families in the present day, addressing contemporary issues and struggles. The other storytellers who are the subject of this paper – Malian writers – however, still have not been legitimized in this way. They are not popularized through international exposure like Malian music or widely read in academia, possibly because they do not represent an indigenous tradition like musicians or griots. Does that omission mean that there are no writers in Mali? Or that they are not productive?

While I attempted to find information about the literary scene in Bamako before I arrived in the country, I found a limited amount of information online and through academic searches. Many of the websites of publishing houses and publishing initiatives were not been updated with the same regularity as websites in the U.S. Academic searches revealed that many studies about literature were conducted either under the auspices of African Literature as an entire field or were limited to a single author. Upon arrival in Bamako, however, I quickly learned that the literary scene is active and rich.

At the helm of this scene is Ismaïla Samba Traoré, introduced earlier in this paper, who is a writer, publisher and educator. Born in the 1950s, Samba Traoré was the son of a donut maker. His father died when he was young, and he relied on his mother, as most children do, for support and love. In recounting his childhood to a class at *École la Renaissance* in February 2012, he said he was lucky. "Even though we were poor, I never had to worry about being hungry." In the mornings, his mother would shuffle out to the street to make a fire, heat oil and sink balls of dough until they were hot and crisp. She would sell them to school children and market workers as they day started and everyone made their way during the warm mornings. Samba Traoré's last stop before heading to school was right outside his front door, where his mother would fill his belly with gooey dough.

Through interviews with him, I learned that Samba Traoré was educated in Mali and France, and frequently travels between the two, while making his home in Bamako's Baco-Djicoroni ACI neighborhood, near the Niger River. His home is also the office of *La Sahélienne*, the publishing house he founded and continues to run. While not every writer in Bamako is connected to Samba Traoré, *La Sahélienne* is a good place to start learning about writers in the city because of the sheer volume of events and outreach. Some works published by *La Sahélienne* make their way to the house on the initiative of the author – he or she will write or call, send pages or a writing sample, and Samba Traoré will determine if the work is a match for the business.

Many writers come to be published in a different way, however. During my time in Bamako, I observed Samba Traoré going out into the community, actively searching for writers or potential writers, training them, both formally and informally, mentoring

them and helping them write. Hanane Keïta, Zeni Traoré and Aicha Diarra, the writers introduced earlier all brought different levels of skill and imagination to their work, but they all successfully entered the writing world through the investment of Samba Traoré.

The writers in my sample varied in many ways: age; gender; socioeconomic status. But, they all grew up speaking Bamanankan as their maternal tongue. None of them were writers as their main occupation, and even the most successful – Samba Traoré – could not fully support himself and his family on his income as a writer. He has diversified his work to include running the publishing and working in the non-profit sphere to supplement his income.

Zeni Traoré and Aicha Diarra are two young women whom I interviewed for this project. They are similar in that they are both teenagers – Traoré at 19, Diarra at 17 – and have both been mentored by Samba Traoré but the similarities end there. Diarra, raised in Bamako, described to me that she comes from an upper-middle class family, and began speaking French at an early age. She has attended high-quality private schools since she was young and will likely go to France for university. Traoré, on the other hand, comes from a village in the Kolokani region of Mali, about 2 hours from the city. She was sent to the capital at 16 by her father, who lives and works in France and supports two wives and thirteen children. Zeni, already 2 years older than Aicha, is only in grade 9, whereas Aicha has graduated high school and is studying independently in preparation for university.

Like Diarra, Cheick Sak Diakité, 30, graduated from a private school in Bamako. He, too, was raised by wealthy parents and went to Paris for higher education. He has lived between Paris and Bamako since graduating from college, but has come back to

Bamako to settle down, having been recently married to a fellow Malian. Bobo Keita and Issiaka Sidibe both work in professional fields, Keita as a government worker and Sidibe as a teacher. While both write profusely in French, neither of them publishes his work. Hanane Keïta, in her mid-40s, is a mother and housewife, but began writing as an adult, which led her to publish her first novel shortly before my arrival in Mali.

Moussa Doumbia, father of 8 children with whom he speaks Bamanankan at home, writes mostly in that language, whereas Abdoul Coulibaly, 34 and single, recognizes the value of mixing his maternal language, also Bamanankan, with French when he writes. All of these writers have different motivations for writing and have entered into the world of writing in different ways. They receive various levels of support from friends and family, and perceive success differently. But they all write, despite the almost nonexistent possibility of financial success, even for those who have been published.

These 8 interviewees comprise the core of my sample for this project. I gathered information from other writers, including Samba Traoré and the Senegalese writer Aminata Sow Fall, and this information assists in contextualizing writing culture in West Africa and Bamako in particular. Through the exploration of this literary scene, I learned that despite the fact that writing is not a traditional line of work in Malian culture, many Malians are interested in literature, its production and its consumption. Rather than spreading information about this interest through digital or electronic media such as the internet and television, in-person social networks seem to be the primary method by which people learn about these happenings, and partake in them.

CHAPTER III

READING AND WRITING CULTURE IN BAMAKO

Walking down any street in Bamako, one will see a number of things: women washing clothes; children playing football, covered in dust; goats and chickens running around or lazing about in the shade; groups of men, young and old, sitting in chairs drinking tea and chatting. One thing I never saw during the three months I spent in Bamako: someone sitting down, alone, reading a book. Periodically, I would see men stopped at the newspaper stand, reading the daily headlines, but I never did see people reading for pleasure. While this observation in no way means that no one reads for pleasure in Mali, my informants painted a picture of a non-traditional reading culture in the country. Where some cultures may read for informative or entertainment purposes, However, education activists and interested parties, such as Ismaïla Samba Traoré reach out to communities to increase readership among Malians and to integrate reading and writing culture into the ethos of these citizens.

Outreach to Students and the Development of a Readership

Samba Traoré and *La Sahélienne* have both formal and informal mechanisms to reach out to the public. As described in Chapter 2, formal versions of this outreach include events like *Rentrée Littéraire* and *Les Nuits de la Francophonie*. Generally free and open to the public, the purpose of events like these is to publicize the work of *La Sahélienne* while also creating a time and space for people interested in writing and reading to connect and share work.

Informal outreach occurs more sporadically and with less planning, generally when opportunities arise. One such event brought Zeni Traoré and Samba Traoré

together. Samba Traoré invited me to accompany him on a classroom visit at *École la Renaissance.* He was going to give a talk to the literature class about writing. The opportunity for the visit was born of a simple misunderstanding between two students. Reading an excerpt of *Les Ruchers de la Capitale*, the first novel written by Samba Traoré, students began to argue about the author. One student asserted that he was dead. When pressed by the teacher as to why he thought that, he said, "look at who we read. Hugo is dead. Voltaire is dead. Writers are all dead[6]."

Zeni, outspoken and unafraid as always, insisted that Samba Traoré was not in fact dead. She was challenged by the other student to prove it. Despite the fact that she did not know how to use the internet, she was determined to prove this student wrong. She went home and begged her older brother to take her to a *cyber*, one of the many internet cafés in which Bamakois seek refuge, Skyping with relatives in other countries, sending emails and doing research. She invested her own money in the minutes and pushed her brother to conduct an intense on-line search. Finally, they came up with an address and a phone number for Samba Traoré.

At first, Zeni pestered Samba Traoré. She recounts asking him, "Can I come see you? Can I prove that you're real by visiting you?" When he resisted or claimed that he was busy one too many times, she and three girlfriends borrowed 3000 CFA (approximately 6 USD) to take a taxi to his neighborhood in Baco-Djicoroni ACI. Unwilling to turn the girls away, he and his wife entertained them, and Samba Traoré found himself impressed with Zeni. They shared the same family name and, soon, she

[6] Not verbatim, as told to me by IST

began calling him *ton-ton*, or uncle. In turn, he called her *la présidente*, because of her assertiveness and leadership skills.

Samba Traoré eventually found a time to visit Zeni's class, to prove that he was in fact still alive. The visit was a major event: the girls who wooed him to *École La Renaissance* were dressed in their finest *completes*, or traditional Malian dresses, and had prepared a presentation to introduce *ton-ton* to the class. Additionally, they had a table set up for Samba Traoré, complete with Fanta and Coca-cola, glasses and fans. Clearly, they viewed him as a superstar.

I was eager to accompany Samba Traoré for a few reasons. I wanted to hear what he had to say about his career, and figured his talk would be rich with insights about his life and goals. Also, having heard from a number of my interviewees that one obstacle they face in the way of becoming successful writers is a lack of readership in Mali, I was interested to see what exactly took place in literature classrooms in the country. Were students really learning to read? Were they learning to like or even love reading? I knew that in most classrooms, students shared reading books – at *La Rénaissance*, each book was shared by an average of five students – and that even in grades 8 and 9, after having been learning in French for over 6 years, many still struggled with basic words and phrases when reading. Knowing about my interest, Samba Traoré invited me to attend his talk.

That morning, I met him at *La Sahélienne* and we drove over to the school. Typically, the school's street was unnamed and unknown, just a dusty clay alley in the *Kalaban Koura* neighborhood. Rather than try to give us directions all the way to the school, Zeni and her co-organizers waited for us by a well-known bridge on the main

road so they could direct us the rest of the way. We knew we had found them by their colorful outfits, high heels, new hairstyles and bright, purposeful smiles.

The girls, giggling yet serious, piled into the car – 8 of us total in a Corolla-type car – and navigated the bumpy clay streets until we got to the school. Pouring out of the car and into the courtyard was absolute pandemonium. Everyone was thrilled to see Samba Traoré. For the students, it seemed to be a spectacle, like they knew something really important was happening but were not exactly sure what it was. The teachers, though, recognized the importance of Samba Traoré's visit, his stature in the literary community, and the quality of his production. They seemed thrilled and humbled.

While the teachers were in awe of Samba Traoré, the students were purely excited. When we all finally made it into the classroom, Zeni and her co-presenters shared information about Samba Traoré to the class. The quiet classroom became even more hushed as Samba Traoré stood and began to speak. Students were riveted during his talk. For two hours, they used their phones to take photos and record his speech rather than send texts, they pored over their shared textbooks, reading the words they had already read, and responded in awe when they learned that the text in the book was only a slim extract of Samba Traoré's novel. He held up the full book, over 200 pages, and students were shocked. Zeni quietly, almost shamefully, recounted, "*Nous ne savons pas qu'il a existé comme ça…*" "We didn't know [the book] existed like that…"

This shock seems consonant with the misconceptions students have about writers in general. From the student who thought that all writers are dead, to the whole class, amazed that *Les Ruchers de la Capitale* was more than a 500-word document, these students embody the results of incomplete education. As Samba Traoré said to the

students during his talk, “The Malian school system is a deeply unjust system. They put things in the program, but they don’t buy the books to give to schools or make a library. See, these extracts in the text? If you read the entire novel, then yes, you would know what a novel is.”

That incomplete education does and will continue to contribute to the lack of readership within the country, and a perpetuation of this particular obstacle for writers. Students need to be able to do more than read. They must learn to love to read, to understand why they read, to understand the shape and look of books, along with the corporal reality of those who write them. Samba Traoré’s visit helped to demonstrate that those writers can look just like the students.

They can also sound like the students. Much like the plurilingual nature of Malian children’s lives and the lives of the writers I interviewed for this paper, Samba Traoré used more than one language during his visit to the school. Just as I had with the taxi-man, he switched between French and Bamanankan fluidly, particularly when recounting tales from his childhood or using proverbs to demonstrate a point. Whereas French is the language of expression in the classroom, the official language of administration in Mali and education within *écoles classiques*, Samba Traoré used Bamanankan unabashedly to connect with the students and to relate to them.

La Sahélienne, led by Samba Traoré, is deeply invested in exposing young people to literature, and the possibilities of literary culture, in forming writers among the youth, as well as critical thinkers, and creating an audience of readers. In addition to the fact that Samba Traoré is a writer himself, while also being the director of Mali’s largest publishing house, he is also an educational activist and cultural preservationist. Unlike

traditional publishing houses, Samba Traoré moves out into the community to seek potential writers, to recruit them and encourage them to put words on the page, as much for his benefit as theirs.

His outreach is not only limited to poor schools or classrooms of five students per textbook. As part of the *Rentrée* event, *La Sahélienne* invited groups to participate in workshops. During one such visit, a class sat underneath a cluster of trees in the Parc National, while two authors held court, asking students' questions. After observing this workshop, I was able to later compare it to the experience of visiting Zeni's school with Samba Traoré.

The *Rentrée* workshop visit took place on a dry season day in February that was unusually chilly for Bamako at that time. Earlier in the morning, I had met with some of the people running the event and joked, "*Nɛnɛ bɛ.*" Bamanankan for "It's cold," I always uttered the phrase ironically, as I never considered the weather to be cold. That morning, a number of the people I greeted were in fact cold, and responded harshly, with, "yes, it is," or with simple shrugs, as they kept their hands buried into their pockets. To drive the point home, my research assistant Moussa came to our meeting wearing a corduroy jacket. By the early afternoon, though, the chill had waned, but the weather was still calm enough for a group of private school students to gather, sitting in plastic chairs underneath a group of trees, while two writers assembled at a table in front of them to give a talk.

From Moussa, I learned that the *Rentrée* staff had asked schools if they would like to attend this talk, and the administrators of this school had agreed. The students were all *lycée,* or high school aged, and lolled about on the plastic chairs in all manners, legs

hanging over armrests or shoulders hunched over cell phones. While I did not interview the students, I assumed they attended a high quality school based on their dress – they all wore uniform tops with very nice pants, skirts, shoes, etc. and no one wore typical Malian-style clothing – and their French skills, skills that generally indicate a high-quality, consistent education. This assumption was confirmed by Moussa – the students attended a school that was much more expensive than *École la Renaissance.* Most students, when they spoke, spoke clear and fluent French. The interchange between the writers and the students took place in French. Also unlike Samba Traoré's visit to Zeni's school, the writers in this talk never switched to Bamanankan in order to relate to the audience.

The design of these two events was similar: an accomplished author appears in front of a group of students to talk about the same thing: writing, how to become a writer, the importance of literature. These two events could have taken place in the United States or France just as easily as they took place in Bamako. As a matter of fact, I was surprised that something that seemed so similar to me (these events) took place not once but twice that I knew about. But, the events differed in a few important ways.

The outreach during *Rentrée Littéraire* was designed for students from an elite class, students whose parents were likely educated and employed, students who could afford textbooks, any books, in addition to nice clothes and private school tuition. They were contacted by *La Sahélienne* staff and asked to attend. The school provided a ride to the park and all students had to do was show up. The students, much as would be expected of students in any western city, lounged casually on chairs, those in the back chatted, and most of them had their cell phones in their hands, texting away. The speakers

had to work to get the attention of the students, and used the excitement of the one or two interested students to engage the audience. The entire event was conducted in French.

As I described above, the scene at *École La Renaissance* was wildly different. Despite the differences between the audience at the *Rentrée* event and at Zeni's school, the content of the talk was not too different than the talk at *la Renaissance*. The two authors took turns speaking. The first simply walked students through the technical aspects of books coming into being. He began by describing the writing process, highlighting who can write – anyone – and what people can write – anything. He then delved into the steps of finding an agent or a publisher, physically having the book printed and distributed to be sold, and marketing the book.

The second author reached out to the students in the audience in order to begin talking about African authors. He discussed finding inspiration in quotidian life, the life that the students may find around them, and like Samba Traoré, wanted to drive home the fact that writers can look just like those students, can be the students. Ultimately, both outreach sessions aimed to accomplish the same things: to expose students to the fact that Malian authors have gained recognition and success, and have been able to publish work; and to educate students on the steps towards becoming a writer. Finally, both sessions attempted to encourage students to become readers.

This goal seems to be particularly important given that the number one obstacle identified by the interviewees in this study was the lack of readership in the Mali. Given that *La Sahélienne* conducts outreach among all populations of students, the lack of readership in the country does not seem to be directly related to the socioeconomic status

of the students. Rather, students across the board do not read, and activists and educators are working to create a culture of reading among them.

Samba Traoré illuminated some of the distractions that students have to turn them away from reading. During the question and answer section of Samba Traoré's talk at *La Renaissance*, one student asked him how to become a great writer. The question was so vague and general, but for Samba Traoré, it indicated a great interest and an opportunity. He touched on a number of the topics he had pointed to throughout the talk. Thinking back to his childhood, he said, "We didn't have a television. You, you have a television. With a simple button, you travel the entire world. But, us, we traveled through books." While the students do not have access to libraries stocked with books, and writers themselves struggle to find reading material, Samba Traoré demonstrated to this class that reading is possible if the volition exists.

He recounts how he learned to read. As he explained to the students, his mother made beignets outside of their house every morning, and, "*c'était sur ces petits bouts de papier ou j'ai commencé à lire d'abord*." Describing the newspaper that his mother used to wrap the beignets, he said, "It was on those little scraps of paper that I first started to read." So, to become a writer, he continued, "you must sacrifice things. I was great at football, and many of my friends ran to play football while I stayed at home. You have to sacrifice some things. And I did. I learned how to write, and I can tell you…*Il faut lire. Il faut lire. Il faut lire. Il faut lire. Il faut lire. Il faut lire.*" Quietly, like a drumbeat: "You must read. You must read. You must read. You must read. You must read. You must read. "

Writing as a Profession in Mali

Many of the interviewees in this study identified as unemployed, despite the fact that they were actively writing and, in one case, had even published a book. Cheick Sak Diakité and I met at the African Grill in Bamako and discussed his path towards writing. Over two espressos, he mentioned that he was unemployed, looking for a job. His love of international business has led him to want to be a banker. I laughed at the thought, and commented that it seemed ironic, given his love of reading and writing. I asked, "Have you thought of being a writer as your profession, to earn a living?"

He paused. We had been speaking for over 45 minutes on tape, and he seemed to be more comfortable with me and our conversation than at any point beforehand. Finally, he said, *"Oui, il y avait un moment au Paris, oui…pour un moment, juste une petite moment, quand j'étais au Paris, franchement, je me suis dit, je peux faire des livres, j'ai le courage à faire un ou deux livres."* "Yes, there was a moment in Paris, yes…for a moment, just a brief moment, when I was in Paris, frankly, I told myself, I can do books I have the courage to do one or two books." He paused, sipping his espresso, and looked at me quietly. I did not prompt him further, and he leaned in, towards me and the recorder. His voice was louder, due to his proximity to me, crouching over the table heavily.

He said, *"Mais, quand je viens ici [au Mali], franchement, non, franchement, je pense meme pas. [Au Mali] non."* "But, when I come here [to Mali], frankly, no, frankly, I don't think so. [In Mali], no."

"Pourquoi?" "Why?" I prompt.

“Pourquoi, je sais qu’ici, on ne lit absolutement pas. On ne lit pas de tout, de tout de tout. Au Mali, meme si tu vends un livre à milles franc, tu ne trouves personne de l’acheter.” “Because, I know that here [in Mali], Malians absolutely do not read. We don’t read at all, at all, at all. In Mali, even if you sell a book at 1000 CFA [equivalent to 2 USD], you will find no one to buy it.”

Diakité’s hesitation is echoed by others in this sample. Issiaka Sidibe, a teacher, echoes Diakité almost completely. He also says that, even if books were 1000 CFA, they still would not be purchased or read. He argued that, “reading, it’s not here in Mali…there isn’t a taste for that.” While he is making a gross generalization about the entire population of the country, his perception is important. If writers do not see their compatriots as a potential market, and the educational sector is not interested in their works either, they will likely look elsewhere for publishing opportunities.

Coulibaly offers a similar argument as to why he does not pursue writing as a career. He said, “the profession of writing is not very well appreciated here in Mali.” He goes on to explain that this lack of appreciation and recognition is the reason that almost all of the writers that he knows prefer to write as a hobby, and select another field for work. While culturally, Coulibaly feels that Malians do not value writers, Doumbia sees institutional failures as the cause of so many difficulties for writers. According to him, “the support of writers needs to be more moral. Currently there is not enough support in education, in jobs, in events, for writers in Mali.” He lists the reasons that writers should be valued. “Writers pass messages through their writing. They write to value their ancestors and promote reading [among youth]” but they do not receive support at a governmental level that would allow them to flourish. He goes on to say that “[I] don’t

often receive a lot of support from people around me. People [here] are less attracted by writing, which is why my writing work often goes by unnoticed."

Zeni's family wants her to be a doctor. Aicha wants to go into sales. Cheick is looking for a job as a banker. Sidibe is a teacher. Coulibaly and Doumbia are unemployed, but neither considers themselves to be writers. They all write for different reasons. Aicha writes because, as she said, she has "*tous ces idées dans [m]a tête, et je veux les exprimer*." She has, "all these ideas in [her] head, and she wants to express them." Doumbia writes in order to preserve history and traditional values. Sidibe remarked that he writes for the "hunger and thirst of humanity."

All of these authors write for the same reasons that people all over write: self-expression; education; connections between generations; preservation of traditions and heritage. Yet, none of them felt like writing could be a profession; they all identified as something else: a banker, a teacher, a saleswoman. When asked about why they did not perceive writing to be a possible profession, few of them were able to answer the question directly. Doumbia, the only interviewee who chose to write solely in a national language, said, "*Je ne pense pas pouvoir devenir un écrivain professionnel avec le Bambara qui est moins considéré, mais, je n'aime écrire qu'en bambara."* "I don't think I can become a professional writer with Bambara which is less respected, but I only like to write in Bambara."

Aicha's family expects her to do something to earn a living. When I asked if her family supported her interest in writing, she said, "Oui." "Yes!" But when asked if they would support her if she wanted to be a writer professionally, she said, "*Mais, ils veulent*

que je peux gagner ma vie, et moi aussi." "They want me to be able to earn a living, and me too." Writing for a living is not perceived as a possibility.

When I discussed employment with Aicha, she, ever smiling, said, "I love sales." At seventeen, she wanted to go to school to learn about marketing, a practical skill for which she could actually earn a living. Zeni expressed her desire to be a doctor, if she could continue with school. When pressed for a reason as to why these two writers did not see writing as a viable career option, they both were ambivalent about the possibility. Aicha was silent for a moment, then offered, "I think I like to talk to people too much. Me writing prevents that."

Upon an initial listen, Zeni's answer does not seem related. She said, "*d'être médecine, je peux aider, je peux aller au village*." The simplicity of her French does not immediately reveal the larger connotations about life in Mali. She said, "as a doctor, I could help, I could go to the village." Listening to Zeni's entire interview, the connection between her response and Aicha's becomes clearer. Their need for community trumps their interest in writing. From the moment I met Aicha, she wanted to talk, to share, as Malians say, *causer*.

Walking down any street in Bamako, one can see groups and groups of people doing the same – having tea, cooking, cleaning, sitting and simply catching up, talking about their days, never alone. One of the main characteristics of life in Mali that is different from life in the United States is the importance of community. Is it possible that Aicha's identity as a Malian, having grown up among an extended family, never spending time alone, contributes to her distaste for writing as her profession? Does writing as an occupation appear to lead to a life of solitude?

And does obligation prevent Zeni from writing as well? When listening to our whole interview, I connected her desire to become a doctor with the way she described education in the village. She is grateful for the opportunity to have come to Bamako, and comments often on how lucky she is to have the chance to continue going to school. Does her obligation to her community of origin preclude her from being a writer? If the opportunities for economic success were apparent for her, would writing then be legitimized for Zeni?

When Cheick published his book in France, he thought that he could possibly publish more books and become a writer. But, after his experience with *Publibook*, a French publisher that recruits novice writers, the lack of marketing and advertisement they have done for his work and the complete lack of recognition he has received for being a published author, he has realized he would prefer to work in an established profession.

He still wants to keep writing, however. When I asked if he would write a second book, he said, "*J'ai déjà écrit un deuxième livre. Mais, c'était un de mes parents qui a fait disparaître le document*." "I already wrote a second book. But, one of my parents 'lost' it." In addition to the myriad roadblocks he has faced, such as lack of mentorship, struggling with language choice, writing and finding a publisher, he went on to say that his parents decided that he was too invested in writing, and they wanted him to find a profession. Neither of them admitted to erasing his work, yet the fact remains that it was erased. When he does finish rewriting his next book, however, he is firm in wanting the book to be published in Mali. He said, *"Je [ne] veux pas qu'il soit publié à l'étranger, àParis. Je veux qu'il soit publié ici, au Mali."* "I don't want that it is published abroad, in

Paris. I want it to be published here, in Mali." That desire may mean that he has to alter how he writes, but his experience with his publisher in Paris was so negative that he does not mind.

When I asked him about this book that he was rewriting, the book that his parents "made disappear," I was direct. *"Alors, le deuxième livre que tu as écris, c'est perdu?"* "So the second book your wrote, it's lost?"

His response is at once a testament to the universality of writing, the sentiment of writers and also a reference – whether conscious or not – to the oral culture so present in Mali. Orality and the transmission of stories through orality require the transmitter to develop mechanisms for remembering, retelling and reproducing the same stories. Diakité will have to use those same tools if he rewrites his work. He said, *"Non, en fait, c'était perdu à Paris, mais quand on écrit, on a toujours ce qu'on a écrit ici, dans la tête."* "No, in fact, it was lost in Paris, but when you write, you always have what you wrote here, in your head."

Availability of Reading Material

To determine if the writers themselves worked against the stereotypes they identified I discussed reading habits with Diakité during our talk. When I asked how often he reads, he laughed and said simply, "*pas assez*." "Not enough." I pressed him further to get an answer in numbers, and again, he painted a picture of Mali. "Here in Mali, I can't find the books I want to read. In Paris, I read a lot more."

"Why," I asked.

“In Paris, there are books everywhere. Libraries, schools, everywhere. If I feel like reading, I just pop into a store. There’s a FNAC[7] on every corner.”

I then asked him, “Where do you get books in Mali?” I almost expected him to say, “I call Ismaïla,” but he did not reference the publisher a single time as an option for finding books to read.

Instead, he told me about the difficulty he had in finding books. Most recently, he lamented that he could not find the latest winner of the *Prix Goncourt* anywhere in Bamako. “But,” he said quietly, “there is a little market where they sell books. I never know *sur quoi je vais tomber* (what I will find).” Dibidani, the market for books, is in Bamako, not far from the African Grill where he and I had met the day of the interview. He says it is quite possibly a black market – “I’m not sure if it’s legal…” – but that it is his go-to place for book shopping in Mali.

I ask him about searching for books. Like every other market in Bamako, I assume that Djibijani is a series of stalls with piles and piles of priceless products, the opposite of the neatly lined shelves Diakité finds at FNAC in Paris. *“La-bas, on doit chercher, chercher, chercher?”* “At Djibijani, you have to dig, dig, dig [to find a book],” I ask.

“No,” he says. “You can ask. Over there, they are very well-informed.” Despite the fact that Dibidani is similar to markets elsewhere, with stacks of books lining tables in no discernible order, the market does actually have an order to it. But unlike at FNAC, in order to find a particular book, a customer must interact with market staff that will then

[7] FNAC is a French chain store that sells books, CDs, DVDs and electronics.

search for it. Luckily, as Diakité says, the staff know what they have, and if they do not have it, how long it may take to get it.

I compared Diakité's experience searching for books in Bamako with my own. In order to attend the book club at the home of the USAID director in Mali, I needed to purchase and read Hanane Keïta's work *Femmes Sans Avenir*. Back home in the United States, I would have had a few options for procuring the book: Barnes and Nobles was five miles away from my home; the library around the corner; or, more easily, Amazon.com. Based on Diakité's description of Djibijani, I would not have found the book at the market because of how new it was, but at that time, I still had not learned of the market's existence. So, to my mind, my single option in Bamako was the bookstore in the Grand Hotel.

I managed to navigate to the bookstore by using a poorly detailed map of Bamako. I crossed the Niger River on the *Pont des Martyrs*, and walked straight into *centre-ville*, where the streets were paved with asphalt rather than clay. I wove in and out of market stalls, the vendors selling all sorts of good, pots, pans, mosquito nets, dead Toubab[8] clothes. I followed the trajectory I had marked out before my departure from home and made it to the Grand Hotel, one of the nicest hotels in Bamako.

By Western standards, this nice hotel is simply a nice hotel. But, emerging from the sweaty, raucous streets of Mali's capital city, the hotel is out of place, a mirage, an indulgence. Off the lobby is the bookstore, staffed by an older man that a regular patron familiarly called, "*grand-père*." The fact that the bookstore sits in the lobby of a hotel

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[8] *Toubab* is the Bamanan word for white person. Because so many Western clothes have been shipped to African markets from Goodwill and other, similar donation centers, they are called Toubab clothes. In Mali, they take it a step further, assuming that anyone who has given clothes away has done so because they are dead. Thus, the term *dead Toubab clothes*, is used to refer to clothes at the market, whether or not they came from dead white people.

that caters to mainly Western visitors indicates the market for those books; they will be bought by visitors or by Malians with two things: education and dispensable income.

Whereas Larson, describing bookstores in most African cities as barely containing many works by African authors, the bookstore in the Grand Hotel offered full shelves of books by francophone authors from the region. The rest of the offerings in the one-room store, which was the size of a small office with a table in the middle and shelves on every wall, were quite mixed: some novels in English, more novels in French, crossword puzzles, instructional manuals "for Dummies," college level textbooks and historical works about Mali and West Africa. The prices were on par with the cost of books in most bookstores in the United States, irregardless of the place of publication, out of reach for the majority of the population in the country.

As Bgoya says,

> Languages grow and flourish with art through the development of literary culture; and literary culture cannot develop without books…if language as a cultural and development imperative is not integrated in national policy, it is improbable that publishing will develop in the national language/s or in any language for that matter (289).

Overall, it seems that literary culture in Bamako is developing very slowly, due largely to the efforts of a small population of writers and interested parties who conduct outreach and encourage others to write and read. The outreach to students described in this chapter is a testament to these efforts. But writers still face many challenges because of a lack of literary culture in Mali; chief among them is the lack of readership in the country, whether in French or a national language.

While the lack of readership is a large obstacle that is faced by the writers I interviewed, it is not the only obstacle. As Diakité said, people do not read in Mali.

According to Samba Traoré and Doumbia, the lack of readership is due in part to the oral and communal nature of Malian culture. They both described how people would prefer to sit outside and chat, tell stories and listen to the radio, than sit alone, writing. Writers do not occupy a large place in popular cultural in Mali; that space is filled by radio telecasters, signers and *griots*, oral storytellers. The final circumstance that contributes to the lack of readership is simply the lack of books. As Diakité's anecdote illustrates, books can be found, but they will not necessarily be the books a reader wants to read, and they also may not have been procured legally.

CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN MALI AND ITS EFFECT ON WRITING

Mali is a francophone country, having been exposed to French in the mid-18th century as a former French colony. French is identified by Malians in a lot of ways. For some, it is the language of administration and government, and therefore, power. For others, it is the imposed, neo-colonial language and represents elitism and exclusion. Others see it as a global language, and disconnect its contemporary power from its historical violence. In the Malian language, Bamanankan, French is called "Toubabukan," literally translated as "language of the white or French man." French, translated in such a way, is foreign at the core. Each of the writers in this sample has had to grapple with their view of this language.

This study shows that, although everyone in Mali has a maternal language, and that language is most often one of the thirteen Malian languages rather than French, this language may not be their chosen language for every interaction. As I have demonstrated and will continue to show through my research, while French has been imposed on the country and its infrastructure, some have chosen to embrace the language. Their reasons for doing so are diverse, but they are conscious. The respondents in this study are active agents in the decision to use a certain language in a certain situation. That agency does not disappear in the case of language use in writing. In this chapter, I explore the language choices that these writers make in the context of the linguistic reality of Mali.

The Linguistic Reality of Contemporary Mali

The linguistic reality of Mali is dynamic and still evolving. With increasing urbanization and migration, language use among groups has shifted in favor of

Bamanankan and French. Because of these shifts, Bamanankan has taken precedence as the Malian *lingua franca*, while other languages slip out of use among families of other ethnicities. These shifting language dynamics create an environment where French is not the only invading language. Because a stigma has developed among some groups about the invasive nature of Bamanankan, they may use French rather than Bamanankan because they view the Malian language as a true threat to their own (Dumestre).

Because Bamanankan was the maternal language of most of my sample, the shifting dynamics of language use in the country did not affect my respondents noticeably. But, they recognized the hierarchy described by Dumestre, and the reach of French compared to Bamanankan, and Bamanankan compared to other national languages. The following vignette demonstrates that language shifting within families has naturally occurred among members of this sample, illuminated the domination of Bamanankan in Malian life.

"Me, I'm Peul," Cheick Sak Diakité explains when I first ask him about the languages he speaks at home with his family. "*Les Diakités* – in principle – are Peul. But we're all mixed and me, I don't speak Peul."

"You don't speak Peul?" I ask to clarify.

"*Pas de tout*. Not at all," he responds. "I think that I speak even less Peul than English!"

"Is that something that you feel like you're missing out on?"

"No, not really because my father doesn't speak Peul either, nor do my uncles…and, my mom, well, she's *Malinké*, so that's Bamanankan, so, me…I speak Bamanankan, and *voila*."

Issiaka Sidibe, president of the High School French club in Kati, mentions the same thing. Ethnically, he is Peul. Hey says, "My parents are from Wassoulou and normally, us…because we're Peuls, [we'd speak Peul], but unfortunately in Wassoulou, they don't speak Peul." Growing up, he spoke Bamanankan with his family and friends, and continued to speak it in most situations outside of his work life as a teacher until he became the *de facto* representative of standard French to students in Kati. At that point, he transitioned from speaking Bamanankan regularly to speaking French in all spheres but his home life with his wife.

Both Diakité and Sidibe do not speak Peul because of the mixing of ethnic groups or because of the migration of their families. Somewhere in the history of their ancestors, one language – in their case – Bamanankan – won out over another language, and now their maternal tongue is not the same as that of their predecessors. Many factors are at play in this language shifting including the movement of large portions of the population from rural areas to capital cities, such as Bamako, where Bamanankan is a *lingua franca*. Another factor is globalization, and the need for languages that can be used to communicate outside of a country's borders. Bgoya recognizes the danger this trend plays for national languages. He says, "to systematically relegate indigenous languages to performing simple social functions is a step towards killing those languages" (288). Later, he identifies literature as a way to stem this language loss.

This plurilingual nature of Mali means that everyone must decide which language to use based on the situation in which one finds oneself. Just as I had to navigate between French and Bamanankan when talking to my taxi driver, as I described in the opening vignette, Samba Traoré utilized both languages when talking to the literature class –

French because he was in an *école classique* where French is the language of instruction, Bamananankan to make a point or recount an anecdote that could be best understood in that language rather than French.

The Malian constitution awards national language status to fourteen languages, according them all equal status, including French. According to Skattum's interpretation, "this status implies their codification (officially recognized alphabet and orthography)" (99). Given that the languages are codified, they can be used by writers to generate text, an important point when comparing the language choices of writers when they write, with the language choices they make in other situations in their lives. Mali has no one official language, although the official language of the government and administration is French.

The importance of French cannot be solely contributed to the ferocity with which the French colonized Mali. Because of Mali's land-locked location and harsh desert climate in the north, French intrusion into Mali was not as complete as it was in neighboring countries such as Senegal. As Skattum describes,

> The French colonization, which in Mali officially lasted from 1892 till 1960, imposed French law, administration, and not least, schools and language on the region. The impact of these sixty to seventy years of French colonization is of course very important, but not as strong as in many other former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. The rich historical and cultural heritages as well as the long habit of ethnic co-existence and missing are major factors in Mali's resistance to French influence and Malians' attachment to their own traditions and languages (103).

Because of the incomplete nature of the cultural colonization of the country, French is a less prevalent vestige of the colonial era than in other countries of former French West Africa. But, it remains an important language, a chosen language as well as an imposed one, for many members of Malian society.

The reasons for this continuing dominance are complex. Because of the role of French education in preparing the next post-colonial generation of leaders in the country (Brenner 88), French still plays a significant role in the administration of the country and the legitimization of education and knowledge. According to Brenner, the language was used historically to create a new elite class that would continue to govern the country. The remnants of this strategy are still in play, as Malian institutions – government, education, etc. – still resemble French models, both linguistically and structurally.

That most of the writers in this sample elected to write in French is a testament to the significance of the language in the country. Despite the lesser intrusion of French culture in Mali as compared to its neighbors, French is still privileged among the sample, for various reasons. Some of the respondents simply do not recognize Bamanankan or other Malian languages as writing languages, while others use French to write to a particular audience. Those respondents also recognize that while Bamanankan might carry the clear meaning of their expression, French is an international language, and can carry those expressions out of Mali, to other francophone African countries and to the rest of the world.

Skattum goes on to explain that, "Mali is one of the few francophone countries to have an endogenous majority language, Bambara [Bamanankan], which is spoken by around 40 percent [of Malians] as mother tongue and another 40 percent [of Malians] as *lingua franca*" (99). This domination of Bamanankan gives many Malians a common language, which could contribute to the development of Bamanankan literature. On the other hand, some see this language colonizing other languages that are spoken by fewer and fewer people. This colonization, or *Bambarization* (Dumestre 122), of the country

can be used to explain why neither Diakité nor Sidibe speak Peul. Abdoulaye Barry identifies this *Bambarization* as problematic. He says, "There can be no question of imposing one of these languages on other people because that would simply mean moving the problem. The French language represents a disadvantage to the Bamanan child, *but the Bamanan language would be just as much of a disadvantage to a Fulani child*" (Barry). This tension between Bamanankan and other, marginalized national languages could be an obstacle to the development of a Bamanankan language literature in the country.

The tension exists because of the defined role in the linguistic hierarchy for the languages. Bamanankan will generally be the language in common between two members of different ethnic groups who meet in Bamako, rather than French. Calvet found that "only 4% of the interactions in the marketplaces in Bamako…take place in French." In comparison to other national languages, then, Bamanankan can be considered high in Dumestre's linguistic hierarchy. Bamanankan has also taken hold in the countryside as more and more of the rural population moves to Bamako. While many populations either choose or must use Bamanankan as their *lingua franca*, French plays a role among Malians in different regions as well.

French has become the *lingua franca* for some, not because of the supremacy of the language or its superior utility in expressing thought. Rather, it is used as a method of resistance against Bambarization and preservation of those groups' own languages. Skattum identifies this trend among ethnic and linguistic groups from north and east Mali. "For the Songhay and Tamachek, who use it to avoid Bambara domination, French has an instrumental role as well" (Skattum 116). Language choice is not simply a matter

of location or ethnicity for Malians. Instead, these selections are made based on a complex set of criteria which are connected to power, preservation and access.

For most Malians, French formally enters the child's life when they exit the private sphere and enter the public one, usually by going to school. Elements of the language have made their way into the everyday parlance of national languages, particularly in urban areas like Bamako, but official exposure begins in the classroom. While most of my respondents reported using French in formal situations only, such as work or administration, the 1992 Constitution of Mali still privileges French while also defending its indigenous plurilingualism:

> The Sovereign People of Mali proclaim their determination to defend the rights of Women and Children as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the national community (Preamble).
> French is the language of official expression. The modes of promotion and officialization of the national languages are determined by law (Title II, article 25).

Mali is an interesting case to study language use because in the same breath, the rights of its citizens to their national languages are affirmed and French is given official status, despite the fact that so few Malians actually speak French in their private lives. Because of the administrative use of French in national courts of law and government, many Malians are closed out of those processes for lack of comprehension. Research demonstrates that Malian citizens are negotiating language use and language hierarchies within their own communities, by selecting one language over another. This negotiation could be due to the ambiguous governmental guidance on language preservation and use among the country's disparate language users.

Because of the myriad choices Malians must make on a daily basis pertaining to language choice, and the competition between these languages, specifically French and

Bamanankan, I hypothesized that most writers would want to write in Bamanankan, rather than in French. Bamanankan was scripted in the 1960s (Skattum pg) and since that time, written work in Bamanankan has emerged. I postured that Malians would make choices in their writing that were consonant with the choices they make when speaking in the various spheres. Given that these respondents spoke Bamanankan with more regularity and in more areas of their lives, I assumed that its dominance would carry over into their writing.

Language Choice among Writers

Across the board, every single interviewee responded that they spoke in a national language with their families, whether they were in the home or on the street. My sample included writers from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Class can play a part in how much exposure a person may have to French, but, according to Dumestre, may not impact the amount of French that is spoken in the home and family life. He says:

> In Mali, French is spoken mainly among the upper class, and mainly at work – outside work, people with an ability in French most often speak one of the Malian languages. Parents' social position and mastery of French make a great difference for the children and tend to result in the reproduction of social differences. The francophone elite regularly try to expose their children to French through private lessons, private schools, schools abroad, and so on. (Dumestre 127).

My findings aligned with Dumestre's observation that in the private sphere, most Malians will speak a national language. Even though they write primarily in French, all of my interviewees, despite their socio-economic status or upbringing still spoke national languages at home. Three writers in particular, Cheick Sak Diakité, Bobo Keita and Aicha Diarra, hailed from upper-class families that Dumestre describes, ones that had the financial and social position to ensure high-quality education for their children. Yet they all indicated that they spoke Bamanankan with their families. This language use even

extends to formal situations such as work and school. Diakité graduated from high school and went on to study business and law in Paris, to follow in the footsteps of his father. He was ridiculed by his teacher in high school for speaking French in the classroom. Diakité said, “I liked to speak and practice French, but I remember during my senior year in high school, in the classroom, the teacher said, ‘You only like to speak French to show off.’ Her comment really stayed with me.”

Even in classrooms, the tension between French and national languages creates a conflict within students. Diakité spoke French because, as he said, “I liked to speak French. I liked being good at it.” But at school, he was admonished because of his delight in speaking and excelling in French. Within his home life, French was further marginalized. His parents privileged French for his education, but among family and friends, even when he and his father were in France, they spoke Bamanankan together. This marginalization of French at home was reinforced and further complicated by his experiences at school, the place where French was not only accepted but required. In spite of these experiences, Diakité still elects to write in French. Other respondents identify similar conflicts with language choice. The recognition of these conflicts and tensions help us to move the binary debate about language choice into a more nuanced space. It also confirms the agency of the writers; they are not simply blinded by the colonial encounter, or hoping to gain esteem or status by using the colonial language. Rather, they are navigated a difficult set of choices because of the introduction of new technologies and tools into their culture, just as they would and do in different spheres like health or government.

Aicha Diarra, describing her home life, indicated that her parents are both employed; her father is a civil servant and her mother is a customs officer. Like Diakité, she comes from Dumestre's "upper-class." At 17, she has no need to work and is able to continue her education, while writing on the side. She likes French, and likes learning other new languages, but speaks a national language in most aspects of her life. Both Diakité and Diarra said that despite the positions held by their parents for which they only spoke French, their education in French in Mali, and for Diakité , his continued education in French abroad, when among friends and family, in the private sphere, they always spoke Bamanankan. Skattum comments on this phenomenon, saying that even among elite, professionally francophone families, "very few [parents]…choose to speak French at home to help their children. French is not used for identity purposes, but as an instrument of social promotion" (Skattum 115).This important, powerful characteristic of French cannot be forgotten or undermined in the conversation about language choice in Malian writing, and it will be discussed in further detail later on in this chapter.

When asked about the occasions during which they do speak French with other Malians, they all noted that those occasions are rare. Even Sidibe, the French teacher from Kati and the president of the *Club de la Langue Française*, whose mission is to train students in the proper use of French as outlined by the *Academie Française*, spoke French to his students and in administrative situations in Kati, but when he returned home he spoke Bamanankan. With his family in Kati, in Sikasso, in Côte d'Ivoire, he never spoke French. In our interview, he said, "in this professional capacity, I speak only French with my students and my colleagues. No national languages. I set the example." But, when asked his language of choice at home, he said quickly, "*le Bambara* .

Toujours, presque toujours, le Bambara ." "Bambara . Always, almost always, Bambara ." Despite the fact that he speaks the national language in his private sphere, he recognizes the importance and value of French for his students, and seeks to be a role model in their apprehension of the language, unlike Diakité's teacher who ridiculed him for speaking French.

All of the interviewees who were also students noted that they spoke in French in educational situations, particularly during *lycée* and university, but even in these arenas, Bamanankan was used and sometimes even privileged. As the default, these interviewees also used French to communicate with non-Malians. Despite the fact that all of the interviewees speak in national languages at home and among friends, they still all wrote in French primarily, with only one of them, Abdoul Karim Coulibaly, writing in French and Bamanankan.

Among this group of self-identified national language users, why would any of them put pen to paper in French rather than Bamanankan or another national language? In the privacy of home, at heightened levels of comfort, all interviewees eschewed their maternal tongue in favor of the colonial one, to write. Ngũgĩ would argue that they are accepting the signs and meanings of French, rather than their own language and the culture that accompanies it. But to some of the writers, Bamanankan is a language reserved for oral communication. Does this status motivate writers to write in French rather than the national languages? For those who select French, the answers to these questions are somewhat unclear. For example, when asked if she would ever consider writing in Bamanankan , Aicha Diarra acted confused. Then she claimed she was unable to read or write in Bamanankan. *"J'ai essayé un peu, mais c'est trop difficile à*

apprendre." "I've tried a little, but it's too hard to learn." Here, she says little about a larger debate; rather, she offers commentary on the nature of her education, through which writing in French became natural, normal, and writing in Bamanankan became foreign and contrived.

She is also pointing to the fact that in Mali, Bamanankan is the primary method of communication *orally*. As a writer, she is already utilizing a new technology, a new form of expression. She, like the other writers in this sample, is not a storyteller in the traditional West African sense, who would express herself orally. Rather, they all are electing to write, and are navigating the tensions and obstacles at that accompany that choice in a cultural context that truly privileges oral storytelling.

The debate about language choice in writing is large and is taking place all over the African continent. Writers have grappled with it since independence. For some, writing in a colonial language is tantamount to acquiescing to the ways of thought of former colonial powers, and is almost an assertion that their ways of doing things are superior to indigenous, African ways. As described in Chapter 1, two of the loudest voices in this debate are Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer who is often referred to as the father of African literature, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and political activist whose 1986 work *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, and his subsequent dedication to writing in his maternal language of Gĩkũyũ, greatly inspired this inquiry.

As outlined in the introduction, the basic argument between the two focuses on the role of colonial languages in the expression of African writing. Achebe, in his lyrical book of essays, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, advocates owning the colonial language,

Africanizing it, using it as a tool. In the essay, "The African Writer and the English Language," he says,

> Those of us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance. Or we may go on resenting it because it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire. But let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it (96).

Ngũgĩ, alternatively, views the colonial language, no matter which it is, as a perpetual colonizer. Language is not simply a tool for Ngũgĩ. Even in the post-colonial era, acquiescence to the colonial language means submission. He writes, in *Decolonising the Mind*, "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation…English became more than a language; it was the language" (9).

While Ngũgĩ published *Decolonising the Mind* in 1986, his argument still carries weight three decades later. During the conference held in Asmara, Eritrea in January 2000, *Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century*, writers and scholars gathered to, "examine the state of African languages in literature, scholarship, publishing, education, and administration in Africa and throughout the world." The participants of this meeting produced a declaration that closely mirrors the beliefs of Ngũgĩ, pushing all Africans to intentionally work to preserve and use African languages in all sectors. The declaration states, "At the start of a new century and millennium, Africa must firmly reject this incongruity and affirm a new beginning by returning to its languages and heritage."

While the larger debate about language choice in African writing is binary, the debate among this group of writers in Mali is much more nuanced than the larger conversation would suggest. This nuance may be due to the oral culture of the country,

the utility of French, the predominance of French language skill among the elite class, or a combination of these and other issues. Among the sample, no one ever argued that French was a better tool for writing then Bamanankan despite the fact that the majority did in fact write in French. Some of the respondents preferred writing in French but their arguments as to why had little to do with which language was for writing and which language was for speaking. Rather, the two main supporters of writing solely in French, Aicha Diarra and Issiaka Sidibe, had different reasons for their selection.

Sidibe elected to write in French to set the standard for students in his classes. He explained to me that his students must take the exams in French, study in French, read in French, and as the president of the French club, he felt obliged to set an example for them. Furthermore, writing in French allowed him to connect with other writers in francophone West Africa. He told me about a network of writers in Senegal that met regularly to talk about publishing issues and writing. Whereas Bamanankan is the *lingua franca* within Mali, and has even started to overtake or marginalize other Malian languages, it is a different Bamanankan than the one spoken outside of Mali. According to Sidibe, he cannot use it as easily when he travels to other countries in which Bamanankan is spoken. He says, "The thing that surprises me with Bambara…when I go to the Ivory Coast, the type of Bambara I speak there, it's influenced by *Dyula*[9], but here in Mali, the Bambara…it seems to me there are some words that you don't find at all! When I speak with my family, there are kids that laugh and call me the "*Ivoirien*" because [in Bamanankan] with a lot of words that are found [in the Bamanankan spoken] in Ivory Coast.

[9] Mande language spoken in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast

Because of the inadequacy of Bamanankan for communicating deeply across borders, and the fact that French is still the language in common among the former colonies of French West Africa, French becomes much more useful in terms of making connections and showing work outside of Mali. Writing in French assisted him in gaining recognition among that group of writers that would not have been so easily gained if he had been writing in Bamanankan. This recognition has proved to be essential for the development of Sidibe's writing, as it has allowed him to travel to St. Louis, Senegal to participate in many writing workshops, among members of a writing community that is much more active that the community in Mali. Writing in Bamanankan could have prevented him from having this experience.

Diarra had simpler reasons for electing to write in French. When I asked why she chose to write in French, she smiled, furrowed her brow momentarily. After telling me that Bamanankan was "hard" to learn, she qualified her statement by saying that reading and writing in Bamanankan was "too difficult and…anyway…I never learned how. I will just keep writing in French." Her education played an important role in her current language choice for writing. It is possible that, had she been introduced to writing in Bamanankan rather than in French, she would have written in that language as naturally as in French. But, because French is seen as the language of social mobility for so many, her position as someone from an educated family of high socioeconomic status made it likely that she would become literate in French rather than a national language.

Other writers prefer to write in Bamanankan even though they primarily write in French. Moussa Doumbia, who works with students and youth activists in Kati, has been writing since 1997. He started writing poems in French, but he began writing in

Bamananankan after he competed in a poetry contest put on by the national radio company, ORTM. For a prize, he won a literacy tutorial in Bamananankan, and since then has been using that language in addition to French when he writes. Like Diarra, his reasons for selecting Bamananankan are not political; rather, they are personal. He feels that Bamananankan is "the language that gives [him] the power to reflect well [on his word choices] and give a profound and meaningful sense to [his] poetry." Like theorists who argue that the mother tongue is the way through which people make sense of the world, (Akinnaso 1993; Prah, 2002; Alidou-Ngame, 2002; Traoré, 2009; Benson, 2004), Doumbia's experience is that his poetry can be clearer, and more accurately express his sentiments, when in his maternal tongue. He goes on to say, "I have more ideas when I write in Bambara than when I write in French. I have more vocabulary when writing in Bambara than when I write in French."

The most common opinion among these interviewees, though, was even less extreme than Doumbia's. Whereas all of the respondents felt comfortable writing in French, Diakité, Zeni Traoré, Bobo Keïta and Coulibaly all indicated that their thoughts and ideas would be better understood and more accessible if they were written in Bamananankan rather than in French. They also associated a strong sense of pride with speaking and using Bamananankan regularly. But they still chose to write in French because of the opportunities that expression could provide.

Coulibaly explains that he was inspired to write in 1992 when he heard an old adage: "*la parole s'envole mais l'écrit reste*." "Speech flies away, but writing stays." He participated in a number of workshops that were organized by different educational and publishing groups over the years, and was greatly inspired by Négritude writers, as much

for their activism as for the beauty of their writing. He identifies the importance of writing, claiming that it is a way to communicate, or, "a *relais* between generations, a true vector of the transmission of knowledge…a writer is someone who knows how to offer his opinions, his thoughts and his discoveries so that others can use them."

His main goal is to communicate to others. Given that the literacy rate in Mali is in the 26%, and the majority of that population is literate in French, rather than a national language, it would only make sense that Coulibaly writes in French, in order to communicate with that population and the population outside of Mali. But he indicates additional reasons as well. He goes on to say that "[I] can express myself better in French than in Bambara because [I] have studied French for such a long time, and it's also the language of work…whereas Bambara…[I] only use Bambara in an informal capacity. [I] am more convinced that it is more useful to use a mixture of the languages for writing, because it enriches [my] vocabulary and makes [my] work come alive."

Without expressly stating it, Coulibaly's logic aligns with Achebe's. Achebe never accepts English as is, or strives to write in the King's English rather than Nigerian English. Similarly, Coulibaly does not view French as a static tool; rather, he sees a way to inject Bamanankan into French, to mix the two in an effort to create something new, something powerful. Achebe asserted, "…I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (103). Coulibaly is doing the same thing with French, altering it, adapting it to suit his Malian life and help him create something greater than Bamanankan alone would allow, something rich, something that would "come alive" on the page.

Diakité also references the inability of French alone to carry the full meaning of his words to his audience. We began discussing language choice as I ask him whether or not he writes in Bamanankan. "*En Bambara*," he exclaims and questions simultaneously. "*Mais, oui! Bien sur!*" "Yes, of course!" When he tells me this, I am shocked. Initially, he told me he only writes in French. When I express my confusion, he continues, "I write in Bamanankan when I text, definitely, and when I write raps." "Raps?" I am still confused. "Yes, I write raps. I am a *slammeur* (slam poet) and I don't do it anymore, but the kids know that I write lyrics. So they come to me and I write the lyrics but they have to come up with the melody."

"And you write this in Bambara," I ask.

"Yes, in Bambara…" He laughs as he explains how, often, the kids who have him write their lyrics complain that he is misspelling certain words. "I tell them, no, that's a *ɛ*, and they argue back, no, it's an *ɛ*. But then I have to explain that there is no *é* in Bambara. That is must be a ɛ. People argue about it in [cell phone] texts, too!"

We laugh at the argument, but I also acknowledge that it could represent a larger issue about the role of education of national languages in literacy, that this example could confirm that national language education is actually diluting the quality of schools in Mali, rather than increasing it. As I explain in Chapter 5, some parents even feel that the introduction of national language education into the school system is lowering the overall quality of the schools, creating less educates students. As I acknowledge that issue, I re-ask my original question. "So, do you read or write in Bamanankan?"

He recounts the one time he ever read a book in that language. It was in Paris, and a man approached him in a train station, "a white man, like how you're white, a French

man," Diakité describes. He tells me that the man approached him and asked if he was African. "I went along, and said yes." From where, the man asked. "Mali," Diakité replied. Oh, so you speak Bambara, the man said, pulling a book from his bag. The book turned out to be the Bible, translated into a number of West African languages. The man was trying to spread the good word in the train station. Almost three hundred years after missionaries unknowingly began preserving African languages by using them to translate the Bible, Diakité found himself having a similar encounter on the white man's home turf. "I read that Bible a bit, not too much," he explained, "but in general, no, I don't read in Bambara…"

When we move back to talking about writing, he confirms again that he only writes in Bamanankan when he is communicating with friends via text or brief email, or while composing raps for *slammeurs* like himself. He says, "I would have to say that I don't write in Bambara. When I do write in Bambara [for writing raps or texts] I can say it's more logical."

I ask him, "Would you prefer to write in French or in Bambara?"

He sighed, and said, "Frankly, if I knew there would be people to read it…frankly…I would write in Bambara. All the people that live in Bamako…Peul, Malinké, Bamakois…they understand Bambara better than they understand French. If we write a book in French, they may understand, but really…if it's in Bambara, they'll definitely understand." He goes on to make the issue larger, though. For Diakité, French is the best option if he wants people to read his work. Surely, according to him, writing in Bamanankan makes texts more understandable for the consumer, but it does not

guarantee that they will read it. He says, “But the taste for reading, to take a book, to buy it, it’s not Malian. The problem isn’t language. It’s elsewhere.”

Therefore, Diakité chooses to write in French so he can reach an audience, and that audience may not be in Mali. It is the language that can most readily help him reach success, whether success is merely publishing a book, or having his work read by as many people as possible. As Bgoya writes, “the choice of a publishing language defines who is the object of publishing” (289). Diakité would rather have a choice and choose French than have to write in Bamanankan merely because it is the language he grew up speaking. To follow Ngũgĩ’s directive would mean that he would have to relinquish hope of having his work accessed by all but a small group of people – those who are literate in Bamanankan.

Diakité is not alone in allowing his audience to dictate the language in which he chooses to write. Bobo Keita follows the same guidelines. When I ask him, “In which language do you write,” he first answers, firmly, “French.” But then, he adds, “Well, sometimes I write in Bambara. It depends.”

“What does it depend on,” I ask.

“If I am writing for people in the village, I write in Bambara. But if I am writing for intellectuals, in Mali, in France, around the world, I’ll write in French, because it’s an international language.” Diakité and Keita both embrace the role of French as a tool to communicate with a larger world.

Ndholovu identifies the language issue as a human rights issue. He says,

> …If, for political, economic or other reasons, a person is denied access to a language that is crucial to ensuring his/her upward social mobility, then that person’s individual *right to language* will have been violated and this constitutes a form of marginalization (Ndhlovu 138-9).

While Diakité, Coulibaly and Doumbia all express pride in Bamanankan and the ability of the language to carry their experiences, to deny them access to French would be akin to denying them one of their human rights. Because French is the language of access, of administration, education and, as Skattum and Ndhlovu both point out, social mobility, ensuring their right to use that language is essential to their development in the literary field. The complexity of this issue plays out in Zeni Traoré's experience, as well. When she describes language use among her family, and how she feels about French and Bamanankan, it is clear that she feels entitled to both languages.

Zeni discussed literacy dynamics and language use among her family. With her brothers and sisters who had been to school and lived with Zeni in Bamako, they sometimes spoke French at home when they were studying together, although they spoke mostly Bamanankan. But with her mother, who was still in the village outside of Kolokani, Bamanankan was the only language they spoke. She is currently enrolled in functional literacy courses in Bamanankan in the village. Zeni, when speaking about those courses, expressed her desire (and excitement) to enroll in the courses during *vacances* so that she could also learn to read and write in her maternal tongue. Sitting at a table on the patio of *La Sahélienne*, I tried to get a full picture of her language use in daily life. I asked, "*Bon, au village, avec ta famille, qu'est-ce que tu parles*?" "In the village, with your family, what do you speak?"

Proudly, she answered, "*Je parle en Bambara , c'est ma langue, ma langue maternelle. Nous sommes Traorés, nous sommes tous les Bamanas*." "I speak in Bambara, that's *my language*, my maternal language. We are Traorés, we are all Bamana." I went on to ask her where she spoke French, and she said, *"le seul endroit,*

c'est l'école." "The only place is [at] school." We continued talking and I asked her if she had ever written or read books in Bamanankan . Unlike Aicha Diarra, she did not find the question to be strange, but they did have a similar response. Zeni said, "No, I have never written in Bambara, or read in Bambara . There are books in Bambara but, me, I find it a bit difficult." But she still wants to go to the village and learn along with her mother. When I pushed her to tell me why, she said, "*Je vais commencer à assister…pour connaître ma langue…Pour comprendre des autres et pour connaître des langues des autres, il faut connaître écrire et lire pour toi-même.*" "I am going to start to attend [the Bambara literacy classes in the village]…to know my language…To understand others and to know the languages of others. One must know how to read and write [in them] for oneself."

The question that Ndholovu's position raises is the *right to language* that "is crucial to ensuring his/her upward social mobility" (138). Which language is that? Based on the use of French by these writers, and the rationale for using French, that language seems to be French. But, the writers also recognize a legitimate reason for using Bamanankan. Based on the interviewees' responses, French's status as the language of administration, the language of writing, the language that can be the conduit to exposure elsewhere, pushes the writers to write in French. But, they do not all want to. French is the language of social mobility, but is not necessarily the best language for communicating ideas to fellow Malians.

The extreme theories espoused by Achebe and Ngũgĩ as solutions to the problem of language choice for African literature are refuted by this sample. Rather than polarizing the debate about language choice, the answers of these respondents should

push critics and commentators to consider that the choice is much more complex than the debate indicates. Ndhlovu points out that language choice is a fundamental human right, and that a person should be able to elect their language based on their own desired goals. If French is the tool that will allow a Malian writer to accomplish their goal, then they should have access to that language.

But as Zeni's pride in developing reading and writing skills in Bamanankan demonstrates, the inclusion of one language for a set of reasons does not automatically mean the exclusion of another. In the plurilingual environment of Mali, these writers can certainly continue to use more than one language, just as they choose to write rather than to transmit their stories orally. Selection of the colonial language does not automatically mean acquiescence, as Ngũgĩ would suggest. Rather, that selection can be a calculated choice designed to achieve a goal. Arguing that these writers are blinded by the former colonizer gives them no more credit than the colonizers did in the first place.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATION, PUBLISHING AND MENTORSHIP

> If there is no market for books in a country or sub-region of *Francophonie*, what matters is to find out for whom the writers write. In this sense, the question of education becomes crucial if the authors are to be aware of their peoples as potential readers. It is common knowledge that Francophone African literature is somewhat behind in this area in comparison to music, which is immediately directed toward the African public. But over and above any polemics, the essential point to remember is that *Francophonie* should make it a priority to invest in education, even before investing in books, because education is the future of the book (Diawara 2001).

Education, Development and Possible Funding for Indigenous Publishers

Maria Diarra and Rebecca Rhodes both work in educational support in Bamako. Rhodes is the director of PHARE, the *Programme Harmonisé d'Appui au Renforcement de l'Education*, a USAID program that collaborates with the Malian Ministry of Education to "improve the quality of elementary education, with an emphasis on literacy[10]." Diarra is the founder and director of IEP, the *Institut pour L'éducation Populaire.* Based in Kati, 16 kilometers from Bamako, IEP was founded in 1996 to provide alternative educational materials for schools to privilege indigenous teaching methods, rather than imported ones. Since 2008, Diarra has led IEP in developing teacher training programs for new teachers using convergent curriculum in Mali, teaching in national languages and French. While both women are at the helm of diverse organizations, one facet of each of their jobs is the same: the development of French and national language text for use in education.

The development of these educational texts, whether they are in French or national languages, is relevant to the study at hand for three reasons. First, as both the quote that introduced this chapter and the concerns of the authors in this sample suggest,

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[10] http://idd.edc.org/projects/mali-usaidphare-program-programme-harmonis%C3%A9-dappui-au-renforcement-de-leducation

without an internal readership, who is reading the production of these authors and how can they determine for whom they are writing? Many of the interviewees indicated that they are writing to reach Malians, to tell Malian stories or to preserve Malian history, but who will read it if not Malians? Diawara describes a problem facing writers from the francophone world that is not so dire for writers from Anglophone Africa

> Looking at the power relations that organize the field of French-language literature, it could be said that Francophone literature from sub-Saharan Africa is an invisible sub-field. It interests neither the Parisian critical establishment nor other agents of literary legitimation and canonization such as universities, salons, and the general public (145).

He claims that writers from Anglophone Africa do enjoy such legitimation and recognition. If the Parisian literary establishment will not recognize these Malian writers, they must seek recognition locally, either within francophone West Africa or simply Mali itself.

The second point about the development of educational texts concerns funding models for publishing purposes. Bgoya describes textbook publishing in Africa as the most lucrative field of publishing. Textbook production in Mali is funded by the Malian Ministry of Education and by aid organizations, large and small; this funding is the most reliable type of funding source available. With guaranteed profits made from textbook publishing, publishers become financially able to produce other types of works. But in many cases, textbook publishing is dominated by transnational publishers, with little or no profit going to local organizations.

Finally, Mali is an interesting case to study because of the creation of *écoles éxperimentales*, which are schools where students develop literacy in a national language before moving on to develop literacy in French. The advent of these schools is important

because of their need for national language texts and because of the readership they could create in national languages. As many of the writers in this sample have stated, they would prefer to write in Bamanankan, but do not for lack of a readership, the advent of these schools could solve that issue for them.

When I ask Samba Traoré about Maria Diarra, he is hesitant to engage me on her work or IEP. I bring her up after asking him about the trends he sees for *La Sahélienne*, and what types of books he anticipates publishing in the future. He divulges that his publishing house produces more and more technical and non-fiction books. While *La Sahélienne* publishes a good deal of fiction, technical works and texts that could be used in university courses are more expensive and can be more lucrative for the company. I inquired about the possibility of publishing texts that could be used in elementary classrooms. He conceded that collaborating with the government and development organizations can provide a built-in market. Schools need texts, and the money is there to purchase them; Mali dedicates money to education, and a lot of development money flows into the country to help raise Mali's literacy rate.

Samba Traoré takes a while to boot up his Dell desktop. The computer is years old, the rounded monitor screen encased in a tan plastic box. I think back to meeting with Maria Diarra in Kati. When I could not find the IEP office after dismounting the *sotrama*, I called her and she sent a driver in a Land Rover to pick me up. Before our meeting, she was tapping away inside an air-conditioned room, working on her new Mac laptop. Back in the offices of *La Sahélienne*, I sweat through my shirt and bring her up one more time. "*L'Insitut pour L'éducation populaire*? What do you think of their work? Maria Diarra?"

Samba Traoré breathes deeply. “Maria Diarra is well-connected,” he says and then lets silence take over the room.

I ask, “Do you think *La Sahélienne* could produce educational materials?”

“That would be great,” he responds, unemotionally. We change the subject.

Weeks later, he invites me to his house. Upon receiving the invitation, I did not know the purpose of the visit, nor did I ask. When I arrived, I learned that the meeting was in honor of International Women’s Day, March 8, 2012. He was hosting the winner of the “Best New Writer” from the 2012 *Rentrée Littéraire* that had taken place the month before, and whose book was the focus of the book club meeting in January. He also invited the director of USAID Mali, who had also been the host of the book club meeting. We were hosted by Samba Traoré’s wife on the roof, hoping to encounter some breezes that would cool off the hot days that were punctuating the dry season in Bamako. After tea and plantains and an hour of superficial conversation about International Women’s Day, Samba Traoré began to ask the Director about the many projects that USAID and other organizations have, how they develop texts for schools and how they are funded.

Samba Traoré said, *“Tu sais, nous allons aux écoles.”* “You know, we go to schools.” He recounted the outreach that his publishing house does and advocates, the texts that they have in national languages and the infrastructure and network *La Sahélienne* has built over the last decade. *“Tu ne peux pas nous inclure?”* “You can’t include us,” he asked. The conversation ended with the equivalent of a shrug: the Director commented on the difficulties of proposing programs, the red tape, the bureaucracy. We all moved back to the plantains and talk of the celebrations in Bamako

and all over the world for International Women's Day. Keïta, the author and prize-winner, was exhausted after speaking at the day's festivities, and she offered to give me a ride back to my neighborhood. In true local fashion, we "asked for the road" and parted ways. No progress seemed to be made.

Based on an interview with Rebecca Rhodes, the director of PHARE in Bamako, schools and educators can come to her organization and request national language materials for use in the school system. If PHARE does not have level-appropriate materials, they will produce them internally. According to Rhodes, the national language texts are produced primarily by educators and PHARE staff. Samba Traoré is aware of the work of PHARE, and has seen how IEP has benefitted from collaborations with non-governmental organizations. He is seeking the same type of relationship for *La Sahélienne* because he recognizes the possibilities of the educational marketplace.

The exchange described above, between Samba Traoré and Black exposes the disconnect between different players in the field of publishing and text production in Mali. While the work of PHARE may have a positive effect in the country, assisting in the development of national language texts to support *écoles éxperimentales*, and contribute to the increase of literacy rates in the country, the effect on *La Sahélienne* is negative.

The use of national languages in school systems could provide a marketplace for the work of these authors. All over Africa, educational publishing is the most lucrative marketplace (Bgoya 156), and in Mali and many other countries, colonial language texts are purchased from European or American producers. With Mali spending 4.4% of its national budget on education and materials, this money could go directly to Malian

writers to produce material, rather than outside of the country or to educators who currently produce the materials for PHARE. While a small percentage of existing textbook titles are being published by local publishers, Brickhill, et. al. explains that publishers of

> any new manuscripts from the Ministry of Education must be selected through international competitive bidding, according to the policy of the financing agency, the World Bank. It will be difficult for the poor and inexperienced local publishers to compete with French or Canadian companies for contracts if the books are in French. But the titles for *classe à pédagogie convergente* use both French and a local language, and for such publishing, the publishers feel that they will have an advantage over the multinational publishers (192).

The role for local publishers is defined, but they are not successful in securing large, lucrative contracts. In the case of national language texts for use in *écoles éxpérimentales*, Malian publishers no longer face competition from French and Canadian publishers, but do have to deal with internal competition from non-profits and development and aid organizations such as USAID and IEP. The existence of non-profits who develop national language materials make it impossible for publishing houses like *La Sahélienne* to compete for contracts to produce educational materials in the same way they would in a true free market. This competition is not only detrimental because of its stifling effect on the economic success of houses like *La Sahélienne*, but because it also sends a message to local organizations that this worthwhile work can only be accomplished by outsiders. Thus, the local publishing industry is suffering from both a financial and moral blow.

Publishing: Experiences of the Writers

"Édition, impression, diffusion, vente" "Publishing, Printing, Distribution, Sale" (Le Potvin)

"The malaise expressed by African writers about current publishing opportunities both at home and abroad permeates every aspect of publishing. The economies of many African countries have

been so broken that, with a few notable exceptions, the publishing of imaginative works by their writers has ceased" (Larson 62).

According to Le Potvin, the essential act of writing lends itself to the production of a commodity, the book, which can or should be: edited/published, printed, distributed and sold. For this sample of writers in Mali, the act of writing did not seem to be consciously connected to publishing and the commoditization that follows. Yet, writing and publishing are intertwined and all of the interviewees encountered the process. For some, the difficulties with publishing within Mali are simply technical. As Larson points out, "the state of some books published in Africa" are poorly produced. He quotes Zell as saying,

> Too often, the local books are poorly edited, badly designed, sloppily proofread, coupled with careless or slipshod printing and finishing, with the net result that the finished product, sadly, looks decidedly amateurish…there seems to be a lack of quality control throughout (Zell qtd. in Larson, 98).

With very little money, and limited staff and resources, Malian publishers have a hard time producing books, and those publishing houses that do must be overly selective when deciding who to publish.

For others, the problems associated with Malian publishing are more due to political pressure and possible censorship. Finally, publishers in Mali may actively seek writers in an effort to produce marketable materials while also achieving second-tier goals such as education and training of young people.

To further the stress felt by writers, 5 of the 8 interviewees indicated that, if all else were equal (readership, marketplace, etc.), they would prefer to write in Bamanankan. Some members of the sample recognized the work being done by aid organizations and NGOs to develop national language texts. Instead of using currently

working authors and already existing texts while also developing those skills among writers that are already working, there is a gap between people working in those development offices and publishing offices.

Through these interviews, I identified three major obstacles to publishing as perceived by the sample. First, censorship is an issue that can either prevent the production or publication of creative work. Second, the lack of information about publishing makes it difficult for writers to bring work to be edited and published or distributed. And finally, a reluctance to publish and establish a career as a writer because of the lack of credibility of writing as a profession in Mali, the lack of a network to support writers and the lack of a market for work in national languages because of competition from aid and development organizations coupled with the lack of readership in the country.

As the members of this sample navigated these obstacles, they also had to contend with the stigma attached to writing as a career, and the lack of recognition of that field as a profession. This skepticism of the field of writing and publishing led Diakité's parents to delete his second attempt at writing a book. Under these stressful conditions, these writers must negotiate their options. For Diakité, those options were seeking a publisher within Mali or looking outside of Mali. For his first novel, he ultimately solicited a publisher in France.

His first book, *Les Derniers Jours des Animaux Malades*, is easy to find on the world wide web, and is available for purchase. Diakité initially sought a publisher after completing the work in Bamako. He asked around, to friends and teachers, at the old used book market in Djibidjani, Bamako, but owing to his youth and naiveté – he says – he

failed to follow up on any of the leads he found. Instead, he took to the internet, and found Publibook, a French publishing company. They offered to publish the book, and still sell it for 20 euro on their website.

Diakité brought the book to the African Grill and allowed me to look through it. All throughout, I caught glimpses of certain names: ATT, short for Amadou Toumani Touré, the freshly overthrown former president of Mali; Alpha, short for Alpha Oumar Konaré, the president who preceded ATT; and Moussa Traoré, the former general and dictator of Mali, whose unpopularity led to his removal from office in 1991. I asked Diakité about why he included political figures in the book, and he said, "*j'étais jeune, j'avais des idées, j'ai pensé que c'était toute la verité.*" "I was young, I had ideas, and I thought they were all the truth," he said, alluding to the fact that, in his book, he made a lot of comments about political figures that were a bit assertive, and that he would not likely make today.

After publishing his book in Paris, and selling a few copies, he became aware of a small publishing house in Mali. He said, "*Après que je me suis renseigné mieux, j'ai trouvé que, oui, il y a des maisons d'éditions ici*." "After I really informed myself better, I realized that yes, there are publishing houses here!" So, he approached one. He recounts, "*Je suis allé voir la maison d'édition à Bamako pour faire un peu de promotion, la publicité [au Mali] s'il le pouvait, et il y avait un monsieur le directeur qui m'a demandé 'Pourquoi tu n'a pas me donner le manuscript' pour que eux, ils fassent le publication*?" "I went to see the publishing house in Bamako to see if they could do a bit of promotion and advertising [in Mali] if they could, and there was a man [who turned out to be] the

director who asked me, ‘Why didn’t you give me the manuscript’ so that they could do the publishing?”

Diakité gave him the book to look through, and they discussed the use of political figures in the work. The publisher said, “*je vois. Oui, franchement, je ne pouvais pas publier ca. Mais voila*.” “I see. Yeah, frankly, I couldn’t publish that. Oh well.” Diakité explained to me that he did not need further explanation from the director of the publishing house; he fully understood. He said that when he was even writing the book, he knew that the inclusion of certain information would lead to troubles later on. His experience is not unusual for writers all over Africa. Larson writes, “the censorship of literary works in Africa has never been total. Instead it has been randomly directed at individual writers who have offended figures in power…African leaders have typically been so thin-skinned as to tolerate little or no criticism…” (121). Despite the existence of publishing infrastructure within the country, writers like Diakité are limited in terms of subject matter, especially if they want to publish with a Malian house. They are likely to be more limited following the coup of March 2012. But, as the next section illustrates, the informal mentorship and writer support that takes place among members of this writing network could possibly help alleviate some of the stresses caused by these obstacles.

Inspiration, Mentorship and Writer Support

In a country with a very low literacy rate and no real infrastructure or market to support writing, my final question is why these writers even choose to write. Some of my respondents became writers to achieve social goals or preserve tradition or heritage. Others write because they feel like they can or should or simply want to. Finally, a few have been inspired by *conteurs,* or storytellers, who lived with them in their youth,

recounting stories that were passed down through generations orally. The role of mentorship is very important among these writers, and exists outside of formal structures like education. This mentorship contributes significantly to the motivation of some of this sample.

Zeni Traoré described the project nervously. Samba Traoré was standing near us, his back facing the picnic table on which we sat, but we both knew he was listening to our conversation. Zeni wanted to own the project, she believed in it, but it was still Samba Traoré's; she was still insecure about her role in the research, but she was excited. As I have described elsewhere, Zeni and Ismaïla's relationship grew out of a meeting at her school. She engineered his coming to give a talk about his book, and life as a writer, and in turn, he was impressed by her persistence and leadership skills.

Zeni came to Bamako from a village in the Kolikani region. Her father lives in France, and left behind two wives, Zeni's mother in the village and his second wife who lives in Bamako. Using earnings from his job in France, he supports a large, extended family including Zeni and his 13 other children. Through his support, Zeni was able to move from the village to Bamako to further her education. Zeni recounted what her life would have been like if she had stayed in the village. She knows that she would not have been able to continue with school. "If you don't have the means," she explained, "like me, my parents – they sent me here. But my friends, there…they have all left school."

"In the village?" I asked for clarification. "*Au village?*"

"*Oui*," she responded. One simple word: "Yes." She continued, "They are all mothers, there. If you're there, they don't have enough teachers for school. There are lots of students, but not enough money to pay the teachers! They are [supposed to be] paid by

the government so they come when they want, teach class when they want…Parents don't give enough importance to school, probably because they aren't studied enough…they didn't go to school." She had grown agitated while recounting her prospects in the village. She paused, before adding her final words on this subject: "Me, if I were still there, in this state…I couldn't do it. I couldn't be where I am today. I arrived from my village at a low level [reading and writing], I didn't have a good level. *Grâce à Dieu*, I am here now. *Inshallah.*"

This education that Zeni feels so lucky to have has led her to Samba Traoré. While she talks about the village, with sadness, as a place with no access to education, she seems conflicted. Later in our conversation, she expresses much pride in her home village, of the traditional life that people live, but she also feels frustration for the lack of opportunities. Through Samba Traoré's mentorship, she will be able to use her fluency in two important Malian languages – French and Bamanankan – to document and celebrate village life, legitimizing its role in the country's identity.

This vignette demonstrates the importance of interpersonal relationships and mentorship in developing writers in Bamako. Because of Zeni's insistence in getting to know Samba Traoré and having him speak in her classroom, she and the writer began to learn about each other. He learned that she was born in a Bamana village not too far from Bamako and was sent to the capital to attend school. At 19, she was in the equivalent of 9th grade, and was one of the oldest in the class. Over the course of the three years she spent in Bamako, her French had become very good, and she was able to read and converse with no problem. A few months after their initial contact, Samba Traoré encouraged Zeni to collaborate with him on his book.

His project involved going to different ethnic regions in Mali and recording stories and tales, as well as traditions. Essentially, his goal was to document – as well as possible – the traditions and lives of Malian farmers. A lofty feat for an anthropologist, much less a fiction writer, this project seemed surmountable to Samba Traoré. In order to complete it, he identified Zeni and her connection to a Bamana village as a great resource for his goal. He also recognized it as beneficial to him, as a historian of Mali, to *La Sahélienne*, as a publishing house in need of marketable products, and just as importantly, to Zeni, as a young student, close to becoming a young woman, without any particular skills or connections to get her to a university or a job. At the core of Samba Traoré's recruitment of Zeni was the desire to help train her as a researcher, a writer and a cultural preservationist.

At the picnic table, she still fidgeted when explaining her course of action. She seemed uncomfortable with the prospect of becoming a writer. But inspired and encouraged by Samba Traoré who himself had his own mentor. When speaking to the school at that day in February, he recounted the way his imagination was sparked as a writer. He says, "at the house, I had an aunt who knew many *contes*, stories or tales, and from the moral lessons in the tales, me, my imagination started to work through these tales, and it [my imagination] took up a big place in my life. Then, I had the chance to meet a great Bambara storyteller…" Storytelling is a major component of Malian culture, and storytellers command respect and deference. They carry in their stories the history of the country, families and people and sing songs of praise. Samba Traoré was inspired by these tales to begin writing.

On the other hand, Bobo Keita began writing in order to preserve the tales that he heard in his family life from his grandmother. “It is my grandmother who really influenced me,” he tells me. He goes on to recount how she would tell stories and proverbs every day, and that as a child, he was captivated by them. So, he began writing in order to preserve them. He has been writing now for forty years, and has moved on to writing poetry and fiction, but his initial inspiration came from Malian storytelling traditions and his own grandmothers’ penchant for storytelling.

Keita and Samba Traoré were heavily influenced by the tales they heard as they were growing up. Other writers, like Zeni and Aicha, stumble upon mentors. In their case, Samba Traoré is educating them on how to become writers, having become a mentor himself. Diakité talks about the influence of his uncle, a professor of literature, who would help him find books to read, teach him how to construct powerful sentences and help him with his French writing. While mentorship such as this is not unusual outside of Mali, it is notable in these cases because of the dearth of formal mentorship or training opportunities in the country for writers. Creative writing does not exist in Mali as a legitimate discipline to study. Therefore, the writers in this sample all found both inspiration and education outside of any formal system. They all found mentorship through the informal development of interpersonal relationships and networks.

Zeni Traoré, Aicha Diarra and Hanane Keïta all have one thing in common – they did not set out to become writers. They all demonstrated some skill with writing, produced work, but only through an encounter with Samba Traoré and a significant editorial investment on his part did any of their work find consideration to get published. Based on his intervention in the development of young writers in Mali, Samba Traoré has

worked diligently to encourage writing and reading among the population and to encourage Malians to write for publication.

He is fighting on many fronts. On the one hand, writing is seen as an unrealistic occupation in Mali. According to Larson, there is only one single African writer who has been able to make a living as a writer – Chinua Achebe. In addition to financial difficulties that Malian writers face, culturally, many Malians do not view writing as a legitimate occupation. Finally, the some in the Western academy actively exclude contemporary literature from the developing world from English departments because it is viewed as something apart from literary tradition. Samba Traoré, and mentors and role models like him, must combat these attitudes and realities in order to develop writers in the country.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Despite a lack of documented attention, the Malian literary scene is active, and the insights I gained through my work with writers and other members of the literary scene demonstrate that it is impacted by a number of factors. Among these factors are: the colonial history of the country and the lasting linguistic impact French; the debate about the use of national languages in creative writing; the question of reading audience; the role of national languages in education; and the dynamics between *conteurs*, or storytellers, educators and other types of mentors and young writers and students.

In this thesis, I have used my work with Malian writers to problematize the African Language debate which pitches the use of African languages against colonial languages for primacy in creative writing. In his work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon, who predates Ngũgĩ, argues that "to speak…means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (17-18). Azam interprets Fanon:

> Speaking French means that one accepts, or is coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the French, which identifies blackness with evil and sin…Cultural values are internalized…into consciousness creating a fundamental disjuncture between the black man's consciousness and his body. Under these conditions, the black man is necessarily alienated from himself.

Given that the majority of the writers in this sample write primarily in French, I sought to understand how they interpreted the role of French in their lives and in their work.

Rather than seeing French as an invader, something that they have been "coerced into accepting," most of my respondents recognized the value of French as an international language, a language that would assist them in moving beyond the borders of their own country to reach a wider audience. They viewed French in this light without

ever discounting the value of Bamanankan, the maternal language for the sample. Diakité openly admitted that Bamanankan is more widely understood, even for himself after having been educated in French in both Mali and France. He says, “the proof is that even me, often [in French], I don’t get a philosophical idea, and I have to open the dictionary to search for five or six words a day…but if it’s Bamanankan, I would understand.”

No member of the sample contested the utility of Bamanankan in expression. But using Bamanankan to write is problematic for many reasons. Historically, the language has been used for oral expression, storytelling and passing down history orally, and its role as an oral language is still ingrained in culture today. When speaking of using Bamanankan to write, they identified many obstacles: differences in the language among regions, the lack of literate readers of the language and the contested methods of writing the language. Despite the superiority of the language for expression, the writers indicate that the technical difficulties associated with the language render it problematic for use in writing. However, they do not accept French in its current state. Rather than adopting the French consciousness that accompanies the language, some of the writers opt to manipulate it, change it, and mold it to better fit their needs and worldview.

Ultimately, I argue that despite the legacy of French in the country, its role as the language of an elite class, used for education and governance, the use of French in contemporary Mali among this sample of writers is the result of an active and conscious choice. All of the writers navigate their lives and negotiate language choice in each aspect of their lives, based on the audience, the situation and the context. The same negotiation occurs in their writing lives. As Keita matter-of-factly recounts, “If I’m

writing for villagers, I'll write in Bamanankan." He, and others in the sample, will make the choice based on the situation.

That the language of choice is inherited from the former colonial authority could be problematic because it does imply an acceptance of French. But given that the impact of French colonization was limited compared to other French West African countries, the majority of this sample simply recognized French as the international language of access. Given the low literacy rates of the country, they must look elsewhere for a reading audience and seek that audience among other francophone West African countries and France itself. But, Looking to France for a reading audience could contribute to the lack of economic success or recognition experienced by these writers, and other writers from francophone countries. Scholars such as Bgoya recognize the institutional delegitimization of francophone work in the Parisian academy. He says that, unlike Anglophone universities in the West, who have promoted positions for scholars whose work covers "global literature," "post-colonial literature" or literature from the developing world, those same legitimizing positions do not exist in the French academy. He goes on the say that the Parisian system essentially ignores work from francophone Africa. So while the writers are seeking an audience by electing to write in French, they may need to reconsider the utility of that language in light of the exclusive forces at work in France.

This study has also revealed the connections between Malian education and writing. The use of national languages in the school system could provide a reading audience for works in Bamanankan and other national languages. Given the interest of this sample in writing in Bamanankan, it is possible that within a few decades, the

literacy rate in national languages could increase, thereby creating an audience for writers who value the possibilities of expression in their maternal tongue over French. The connection between writers and education in Mali is two-fold. In addition to the development of a reading audience for national language work, the shift of the school system to include national languages could provide an economic opportunity for writers and publishing houses.

As development agencies and non-profits develop national language texts for use in schools, they could recruit local publishing houses like *La Sahélienne* and others, and writers who recognize value in writing in those national languages in order to produce those works. Currently, the majority of the work is being done by educators rather than writers, and the funding model leaves little opportunity for Malian publishing houses to compete for contracts. Having development agencies and non-profits collaborate with Malian writers and publishers represents a way forward, a means to help establish a true economy for those writers and publishers. The current model precludes these publishers from competing and possibly benefiting as they would in a true free-market economy.

The overall purpose of this study is to shed light on a literary scene that is little known inside the country of Mali, much less outside of it. The voices heard in this thesis should serve as a touch point for the many scholars who struggle with various debates about African literature. Given the enormity of the current debate, as it struggles to cover linguistic issues in this incredibly diverse continent, this study should push scholars to consider these issues in light of individual communities of writers, and their own experiences with language. Those experiences include reality of language use in everyday life, and the impact of education, culture, and the possibilities of economic success.

Critics of African literature should consider the diverse voices and opinions coming from the whole continent and more important from the writers themselves about language choice before theorizing about a whole diverse place.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, ENGLISH

Background Information

1. Please tell me about your childhood – where you were born, where you grew up, number of siblings, did all of your siblings attend school, and anything else that you may find to be relevant.
2. Describe your home environment and language use in the home environment.
3. Describe your school environment and language use in the school environment.
4. Describe your social environments and language use in those environments.

Writing Processes

5. When did you start writing?
6. What sparked your interest in writing?
7. Describe your evolution as a writer.
8. Talk about authors and works that have inspired you and why. How did you discover these authors?
9. Can you describe your process as a writer? How do you decide what to write, and how do you go about writing? Do you write with pen and paper, or do you write on a computer? Do you write at home, at school, outside? Do you write alone or while surrounded by people?
10. (Do you read authors for inspiration while you write? Do you allow others to read your work? Do you workshop your writing?)
11. Currently, how often do you write?
12. In which language do you write?

13. How do you identify topics about which to write? (repetitive)
14. What is your career goal?
15. If your career goal is to become a writer, what type of writer? (journalist, fiction writer, poetry, etc.)
16. If your career goal is not to become a writer, why not?
17. If you do not become a writer for your career, what role do you see writing playing in your life?

Support systems while writing

18. Do you identify yourself as a writer to others?
19. Do your parents support your ambitions to write?
20. Do your teachers support your ambitions to write?
21. Do your friends/schoolmates support your ambitions to write?

Writing in the culture

22. What is a writer? When do you become a writer?
23. For whom are you writing? Who do you perceive your audience to be?
24. Why write? Write to be published? Why?
25. How did you learn/how much do you know about Malian authors? The history of Malian literature? The history of West African literature?
26. Who is your favorite Malian author and why?
27. What role do you see yourself or your work playing in Malian society?
28. What role do you see your work playing, if any, in terms of representing Malians to the outside world?

Publishing/Success/Career

29. Have you ever heard of self-publishing? Have you considered doing it?
30. How did you learn/how much do you know about the publishing process?

Multi-Lingualism and how it interacts with the writing process

31. For writers who are multi-lingual – speak, write or think in more than one language – what impact does that have on the work that they produce?
32. Picture your writing process. You think, imagine, perhaps brainstorm or outline, either written down or in your brain. Does it happen in the language in which you ultimately write? If you primarily write in French, are you also thinking in French? Has it always been this way?
33. If you write in French, do you use words from a national language intermittently, regularly, ever in your writing? If so, why…describe some of the instances.
34. If you write in a national language, do you use French words in your writing? If so, why…describe.
35. If you write in French, do you use any other aspects of national languages in your writing? Words, sounds, sentence construction, etc.? If so, describe.
36. Compare expressing yourself in French v. a national language. Advantages/disadvantages of each?

Questions for La Sahelienne

37. What kind of outreach in the community? Goals of outreach? Mission statement?
38. How is content devised/controlled, if at all, to contribute to literacy efforts, use in schools and education programs?

39. Are there ever purely didactic texts, texts whose goal it is simply to teach or further development goals or is it “pure imagination”?
40. In the west, publishing houses seem to recruit texts that will sell and authors that are reliable producers of that type of texts, those that will find an audience that can financially support them. How does Sahelienne balance the need to make a profit with the need to recruit and train/educate populations or accomplish NGO/development goals?
41. Financial Structure? How many full-time staff? How are writers paid? Private v. public v. NGO funding?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, FRENCH

Background Information

1. Dites-moi de votre enfance. Ou est-ce que vous étiez né, vous enlevé, combien de frères et soeurs dont vous avez?
2. Décrivez votre environment à la maison quand vous étiez jeune. Vous avez parlé quelle(s) langue(s) à la maison (avec la famille)?
3. Décrivez votre environment à l'école quand vous étiez jeune. Vous avez parlé quelle(s) langue(s) à l'école (avec la maitres, les amis de l'école, etc.)?
4. Décrivez votre environment social quand vous étiez jeune. Vous avez parlé quelle(s) langue(s) à avec les amis – en jouant, en faisant n'importe quoi avec eux?

Writing Processes

5. Quand est-ce que vous avez commencé à écrire?
6. Pourquoi? C'est quoi qui vous a intéressé?
7. Decrivez votre évolution comme écrivain.
8. Parlez des écrivains qui vous ont inspirés et pourquoi? Comment est-ce que vous avez décrivez ces écrivains? (A l'école? Avec amis? A cause d'un prof?)
9. Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire votre processus comme une écrivain? Comment est-ce que vous choississez ce que vous écrivez et comment est-ce que vous écrivez? C'est à dire, est-ce que vous écrivez avec une feuille et un stylo? Ou est-ce que vous écrivez à l'ordinateur? Est-ce vous écrivez à la maison, à l'école (si

vous êtes étudiant), au dehors? Est-ce que vous aimez écrire seul ou entouré par les gens?

10. (Est-ce que vous lisez des autres auteurs pour être inspirer quand vous écrivez? Est-ce que vous permettez des autres de lire votre oeuvre quand vous êtes en train d'écrire?)
11. Maintenant, combien de fois ne vous écrivez?
12. En quelle langue est-ce vous écrivez?
13. Qu'est que vous voulez faire comme boulot ou carrière ou, si vous avez une carrière, est-ce que vous pouvez la décrire?
14. Si vous voulez être écrivain pour gagner la vie, quelle type d'écrivain? (Journaliste, poète, écrivain des romans, etc.?)
15. Si vous ne voulez pas être écrivain pour gagner la vie, pourquoi pas?
16. Si vous ne voulez pas être écrivain pour gagner la vie, quelle rôle est-ce que vous voyez l'écriture jouant dans la vie?

Support systems while writing

17. Est-ce que vous vous identifiez comme un écrivain aux autres?
18. Est-ce que des autres (vos parents, vos enfants, vos amis, vos enseignants, vos collègues) vous soutenir avec vos ambitions d'écrire?

Writing in the culture

19. Pour vous, qu'est-ce que c'est au'un écrivain?
20. Vous écrivez pour qui? Qui est-ce que vous considez comme votre lectorat?
21. Quelles sont vos raisons d' écrire? D'être publier? D'être connu? D'aider des jeunes?

22. Comment est-ce que vous avez appris des auteurs maliens?
23. Quelle rôle est-ce que vous voyez votre oeuvre en jouant dans la societé Malienne?
24. Quelle rôle est-ce que vous voyez votre oeuvre en jouant pour réprésenter les maliens/le Mali au monde entier?

Publishing/Success/Career

25. Comment est-ce que vous avez appris de l'édition?
26. Pensez-vous que c'est facile d'être publier au Mali?

Multi-Lingualism and how it interacts with the writing process

27. Si vous parlez plusieurs langues – même si vous les parlez, comprenez, pensez – qu'est-ce que l'effet d'être multilingue sur l'oeuvre que vous produisez?
28. Quand vous écrivez, est-ce que vous pensez dans une langue, et écrire dans une autre? Ou si vous écrivez dans une langue, est-ce que vous pensez dans la même langue aussi?
29. Si vous écrivez en français, est-ce que vous utilisez les langues nationales, quelquefois, souvents, jamais, dans l'écriture? Pourquoi? Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire ces instances?
30. Même si vous écrivez dans une langue nationale, est-ce que vous utilisez les mots français dans l'écriture? Pourquoi? Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire ces instances?
31. Si vous écrivez en français, est-ce que vous utilisez les autres aspects des langues nationales – comme les sons, la méthode de construire des phrases, etc.? Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire ces instances?

32. Est-ce que vous pouvez faire une comparaison entre votre expression en français et votre expression en langues nationales? Quelles sont les avantages/désavantages de chaque méthode d'ecrit?

APPENDIX C

THE MARCH 2012 COUP AND ITS EFFECT ON THIS RESEARCH

While this research provides an important foundation in the area of emerging writers from Bamako, Mali, the study is already dated. During the period the research was conducted in Mali, many days were filled with moderate unrest and uncertainty, as Malian soldiers fought an increasingly difficult war in the North against Tuaregs seeking independence from the state created in collusion with France following independence in the 1960s. The tension created by this conflict and the disenfranchised and underequipped soldiers led to two outbursts of violence.

The first outburst was similar to the coup that led to the arrest of Moussa Traoré in 1991. That coup, led by Amadou Toumani Touré, was precipitated by angry military wives marching on Koulouba, the presidential palace, which is situated like a wedding topper on the Mandé Plateau, overlooking the capital city. In February, 2012, wives once again took to the streets, marching the 15 kilometers from the military town of Kati, west of the city, to Koulouba.

Infuriated by the unnecessary carnage in the north, they were seeking answers from a government that was reticent to supply the military with enough food, supplies and weaponry to fight the Libyan-trained northerners. The Tuaregs came to the fight with new arms that flooded into Mali after the death of Muammar Gaddafi, far superior than the arms of the Malian military.

The unrest was quelled by the ATT-led government, and calm reigned for the next month as the dry season kicked into full gear. As dust and heat infiltrated the daily lives of Malians, festivals went on and work – where it could be found – continued to be done.

However, the calm was short-lived. On the night of March 21, a group of soldiers, led by mid-level military Captain Amadou Haye Sanogo stormed Koulouba with guns, ousting President Touré and assumed leadership of the country.

From this point forward, research in Bamako was difficult, but not impossible. One of the informants for the project was hosting Aminata Sow Fall for a week, but she stayed for two because of the border closures. He continued to hold various events, and likewise, the research continued. Because so much news relies on word-of-mouth, the majority of the Malians that were a party to the research following the coup had very little to say about the events.

Unfortunately, the in-person research had to end as the security risk for foreigners increased with a threat from the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) to forbid the importation of goods, including food and gas, and the funding of banks. I was able to leave Mali two weeks after the coup, leaving behind a Malian research assistant who conducted a few interviews in my stead.

In the time following the final interview, many changes have occurred in Mali. These changes include: the taking of major cities in northern Mali by Tuareg rebels and Ansar Dine, among other groups; the declaration of the state of Azawad; the inauguration of a temporary president; the reported imposition of Shari'a law; rule of Azawad not by the Tuaregs but by competing Islamist groups; a counter-coup attempt which resulted in an assertion of power by the supposedly-uninvolved coup leader Sanogo and a refusal by his authority of troops from the West African community, resulting in no military action in Azawad since its creation in March.

While the US Embassy in Bamako recommended a “shelter-in-place” strategy for much of the rest of March, by April 3, it “authorized the departure of non-emergency personnel and all eligible family members of U.S. Embassy personnel” (Emergency Messages 4/3/12). By April 8, the Peace Corps had pulled volunteers from their sites in Mali (Crawley & Joyce) and one month later, the Fulbright program was suspended (Whitehouse 5/9/12).

This brief frame is not intended to explain the political and social circumstances that led to the coup d’état. Rather, its purpose it to demonstrate the enormity of change among the daily conditions of citizens of Mali since the completion of the study in April 2012. While this thesis can be used as a foundation for further study of the same topic, this recent history must be considered, and added to the already complex perspectives a researcher must have in order to understand this place and the people within it.

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