

## BOOK REVIEW

Mohamed Kamara. *Colonial Legacies in Francophone African Literature: The School and the Invention of the Bourgeoisie*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023. x + 247 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$105. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-7936-4444-2.

In *Colonial Legacies in Francophone African Literature: The School and the Invention of the Bourgeoisie*, Mohamed Kamara presents a fresh approach to understanding the stakes of colonial schooling in both its implementation and its representation. First, via historical contextualization, Kamara demonstrates how colonial educational policy in French West Africa enacted a deliberate effort to generate new social categories and stratification in colonized regions. Then, through astute analysis of the many literary representations of the scholastic institution and its graduates, Kamara explores how authors and their characters navigate, critique, or exploit the social, political, and economic shifts coinciding with the emergence of the African bourgeoisie. While the “education question” in these literatures of French expression has been long debated, Kamara resituates it in terms of social transformation and in an impressive breadth of over eighteen literary works published between 1920 and 1997. The author rejuvenates discussion around certain widely read and cited texts (e.g., Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Aventure ambiguë* and Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*) and brings to the fore others deserving of more attention (e.g., Aoua Kéita’s *Femme d’Afrique: la vie d’Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même* and Bernard Dadié’s *Monsieur Thôgô-Gnini*). Kamara deftly justifies how each text studied contributes to the discourse and understanding of this persisting social class.

As Kamara evinces, the lasting repercussions of the colonial school cannot be understood outside of the educational policy developed and implemented by the French colonial administration. Therefore, his thoroughly researched Chapter One focuses on how colonial praxis distributed an intentionally substandard schooling to Africans in order to generate collusive indigenous intermediaries. The author exposes the ironies of French colonial ideology in developing this new social group and even—to the amusement of the reader—tactfully sprinkles humor throughout the discussion. This conceptual framework established, subsequent chapters delve into the literary representation of the school and the new class and person-types created by the colonial machine. In fact, a central strength of this project lies in its hyperfocus on the texts. In other words, Kamara’s monograph is firmly anchored in the literature, which not only conforms with his assertion that these texts offer more “honest versions” of colonial education (21) but also reinforces the importance of literary study into this sociocultural phenomenon.

Chapter Two treats representations of the school most directly, attuning to pedagogies, scholastic relationships, and students' affective experiences in Amadou Mapaté Diagne's *Les trois volontés de Malic* (1920), Bernard Dadié's *Climbié* (1956), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Aventure ambiguë* (1962), Pierre Sammy's *L'Odyssée de Mongou* (1983), and Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *Amkoullel, l'enfant peul* (1991). Chapter Three serves to situate women's education in both historical and literary terms, closely examining Aoua Kéïta's *Femme d'Afrique: la vie d'Aoua Kéïta racontée par elle-même* (1975), Frida Lawson's "Je suis une Africaine ... j'ai vingt ans" (1942), and Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1971). Although schooling remains a consistent background condition, Chapters Four, Five, and Six focus more on the graduates of the colonial school and shift away from direct representation of and discourse on education. Chapter Four delineates frameworks literary authors use to grapple with shifting social hierarchies created by open access to French education. Chapter Five presents several character types "forged in the crucible of the colonial school" (185) that reappear in this literature. Of central focus is the arriviste, which Kamara illustrates largely through Bernard Dadié's play *Monsieur Thôgô-Gnini* (1970). The sixth and final chapter transitions from fiction and trope to biography and more nuanced forms of the bourgeois experience. Indeed, Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *L'Étrange destin de Wangrin* (1973) brings the bourgeois stock character into question as Kamara explores if fictional representations of this new type of African correspond with reality.

Chapter Three stands out as a particularly important contribution to discourse on colonial education as it pertains to women students. Kamara illuminates how the three women authors (and women characters in the case of Bâ's text) often defy the suppressive efforts of a curriculum aiming to produce docile homemakers and mothers. Paradoxically, the women eventually resist colonial and patriarchal forces *thanks* to their schooling. Granted, the chapter shows that educating women was no less disruptive in terms of social transformation, and these women received plenty of negative attention from surrounding forces preferring more submissive figures. However, the bourgeois woman is not the butt of a joke or a subject of critique as many of Kamara's other readings demonstrate. Their experiences are arguably more liberatory. Therefore, this chapter on women authors and their characters somewhat contradicts the monograph's assertions about the consistency of the representation of school and the African bourgeois as being "mostly negative" (52). This leaves us with the question: where precisely do women fit in the critique of the bourgeoisie? The reader would benefit from a stronger exploration of where the woman bourgeois coincides with or—it would seem—diverges from that of the man, both characters and authors.

In a convincing pan out to the bigger picture, both the introduction and conclusion link the African bourgeoisie generated by colonial schooling to "generalized corruption and inefficiency ... in states run by elements trained in West African education" (3). Kamara concludes with this insight: in education resides both the origin of and the solution to the problem. As representations of schooling continue to proliferate in sub-Saharan African literature of French expression, Kamara's monograph lays essential foundations and offers

innovative approaches for broaching the larger education question in both literature and contemporary practices.

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