



Colonial Legacies in Francophone African Literature: The School and the Invention of the Bourgeoisie, by Mohamed Kamara (2023)

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Mohamed Kamara contributes to literary and sociohistorical scholarship on the role of colonial education in France's *mission civilisatrice* by offering incisive analysis of the relationship between the colonial school system and the indigenous elite in sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, he examines how the colonial school furthered the macrocosmic French colonial project by disseminating violence through the calculated invention of an African bourgeoisie from 1817–1958/1960. Alienated from their indigenous cultures and communities and granted only limited access to colonial administration and privilege, this class of educated natives was supposed to collaborate with the colonizer while remaining subaltern to him. Kamara breaks down the ramifications of this simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from French colonialism through a comprehensive literary analysis of works by Black Francophone African writers.

Kamara's meticulously researched study, spanning eighteen texts that were published from 1920–1997, examines the cascading individual, social, cultural, political, and economic changes precipitated by the colonial school and its contrived middle class. Primarily about Western Africa and largely produced by writers who themselves were products of the colonial education system, these texts range from Amadou Mapaté Diagné's *Les trois volontés de Malic* (1920) to Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1971) to Amadou Koné's *Les coupeurs de têtes* (1997). Within these discourses of domination and resistance, Kamara explores the reverberating effects of the colonial school on the indigenous bourgeoisie, their families, and the communities from which they were exiled.

In Chapter 1, Kamara presents an intersectional overview of the theories, ideologies, and policies that undergirded the French colonial school in sub-Saharan Africa. He puts into dialogue the philosophers Léopold Sédar Senghor, Hannah Arendt, and Paulo Freire to discuss how colonial education was used as an oppressive pedagogy that repressed individuality. While Kamara acknowledges

that well-intentioned French educators did exist, there were not enough of them to transform, much less redeem, colonial educational practices and policies.

Chapter 2 introduces Kamara's talent for engaging and insightful close reading as he interweaves analyses of individual Francophone African texts into a cohesive discussion of conflicting attitudes and reactions to colonial education. Essentially, these fictional and nonfictional works collectively reveal how the colonial institution, viewed as oppressive by some but liberating by others, nonetheless forced Africans to confront its irreversible impacts on their social fabric.

Continuing to blend the historical, the ideological, and the literary, Kamara turns to the question of gender politics and women's education in Chapter 3. Delving into autobiographical elements of three female-authored works, he addresses how France's mission to shape bourgeois women into suitable wives for their male counterparts backfired. Instead of becoming intermediaries that transmitted French language, culture, and civilization from the colonizer to the indigenous masses, women such as Aoua Kéita became activists who partnered with nonliterate women in the war against patriarchy and colonialism.

In Chapter 4, Kamara elaborates on colonial education's role in social transformation by discussing how its invention of a new middle class upset the previously rigid boundaries of a caste-based society. He utilizes the notions of *blakoroya* and *batârdise*, or bastardy, to shape his argument that the colonial school was responsible for social transgression because it enabled slaves, bastards, and uncircumcised men to gain power by being socialized into the bourgeois class. However, when Kamara applies *blakoroya* and *bastardy* to women's education, his argument begins to feel disjointed, especially after the eloquence of his preceding sections and chapters. Since he had previously

utilized the two notions to shape a discourse of circumcision, illegitimacy, and manhood, a one-sentence explanation is insufficient in explaining how *blakoroya* and *bastardy* can also be used as theoretical frameworks for evaluating women's social transgressions. While Kamara does show how women violated patriarchal expectations, his discussions of feminocentric texts are rather brief compared to his explorations of *blakoroya* and *bastardy* in androcentric texts, and this brevity seems to reflect the difficulty of applying the notions to women's education. Outside of the need to reconcile *blakoroya* and *bastardy* with women's education, the chapter successfully presents a portrait of the bourgeois transgression caused by colonial education.

Kamara segues from social to individual change in Chapter 5, positing that the colonial school was complicit in the emergence of six human types found both in real life and in African literature: the mimic man, the misfit and the half-breed, the marionette, the *arriviste*, the rebel, and the two-faced god. Despite their distinguishing traits, Kamara argues that these individuals are all left to stagnate in the liminal space created by colonial education, belonging to neither the uneducated African masses nor the fully educated French masters.

In Chapter 6, Kamara establishes that, following the colonial school's invention of the indigenous elite, Francophone sub-Saharan literature also invented a bourgeoisie vis-à-vis a mostly homogenized and negative portrayal of the class. Solidifying this second invention of the bourgeoisie are literary devices such as hyperbole and metaphor as well as authorial intent, all of which in turn create tension between literature and reality. However, Kamara makes the case that representation, like reality, remains subjective, and thus the former does not negate the latter.

Kamara concludes that these literary representations of the indigenous elite, in fact, constitute a literature of failure because

they saw the colonial middle class for exactly what it was. France's desire to create a bourgeois class that would advance the colonial agenda ultimately became its undoing. Instead of cementing their own colonization and that of their peoples, the African bourgeoisie eventually became harbingers of political emancipation. And yet, because this colonized middle class had not been trained to positively impact their native environments, colonial education also promoted Africa's underdevelopment.

As Kamara states, his intended audience comprises scholars of Francophone sub-Saharan Africa as well as those who work on colonial education. His research successfully engages such scholars by tackling questions of colonialism, race, class, and gender and by analyzing literary representations of France's colonial education institution and the resultant African bourgeoisie. Given the clarity with which Kamara conveys his arguments, his book could also prove useful to a wider audience. Detailed and informative without crossing the line into tedium or pedantry, Kamara's book is an excellent resource for anyone who is interested in developing a sustainable education plan that safeguards Africa's future.