



University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons


Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations

2017

Clear Language: Script, Register And The N'ko Movement Of Manding-Speaking West Africa

Coleman Dupont Donaldson
University of Pennsylvania, coleman.donaldson@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations>

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [African Studies Commons](#), and the [Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donaldson, Coleman Dupont, "Clear Language: Script, Register And The N'ko Movement Of Manding-Speaking West Africa" (2017). *Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations*. 2751.
<https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2751>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2751>
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Clear Language: Script, Register And The N'ko Movement Of Manding-Speaking West Africa

Abstract

What role should indigenous languages and literacy play in education and society in West Africa in the 21st century? My dissertation investigates this question in the context of the N'ko (ߥ߬ߣߩߌ) movement, which labors to promote an eponymous script invented for writing Manding in 1949 by the intellectual and author Sulemaana Kantè. Based primarily on three summers (2012, 2013, 2016) of fieldwork carried out between Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, this ethnographic study sheds light on why N'ko-based literacy and education continue to spread across Manding-speaking West Africa by focusing on how the metalinguistic practices—that is, “talk about talk”—of N'ko's students, intellectuals and interlocutors are connected to larger sociopolitical projects. Specifically, I analyze fieldnotes, artifacts (such as pictures, N'ko texts, online postings etc.), and audio recordings of both public interactions and semi-formal interviews that I collected between 2011 and 2016. In part to establish the relevant context, the dissertation begins with an investigation of Sulemaana Kantè and, drawing on his own words, analyzes him as a particular iteration of the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition that gave rise to local language literacy in Arabic script or what is often called Ajami (Arabic 'ajamī) today. Subsequently, I demonstrate how alternative glosses of the word N'ko as either 'Kantè's script' or 'the Manding language' are indexical of the heterogenous voices and ideas within and about the N'ko movement. Specifically, in Chapter Five, I explore how acts where N'ko references a script point to both a politically palatable and authentically embraced notion of pan-Africanism that is particularly salient for a younger generation of Western-educated N'ko activists. Alternatively, in Chapter Six, I investigate how the emergence and use of N'ko today as a label equivalent to Manding is rooted in not just ethno-nationalism, but also a desire to discursively cultivate savvy, hard-working and logical citizens as a basis to remake post-colonial West African society. This dissertation thereby shows the importance of metalinguistic discourse in accomplishing social action and sheds light on why state-directed efforts at promoting mother-tongue education in the region have failed.

Degree Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group

Education

First Advisor

Nancy H. Hornberger

Keywords

Mali, Manding, N'ko, Register, Script, Sulemaana Kantè

Subject Categories

African Languages and Societies | African Studies | Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics | Linguistics

This dissertation is available at ScholarlyCommons: <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2751>

CLEAR LANGUAGE: SCRIPT, REGISTER AND THE N'KO MOVEMENT OF
MANDING-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

Coleman Donaldson

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2017

Supervisor of Dissertation

Nancy H. Hornberger, Professor of Education

Graduate Group Chairperson

J. Matthew Hartley, Professor of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Nancy H. Hornberger, Professor of Education

Asif Agha, Professor of Anthropology

Cheikh Babou, Associate Professor of History

Valentin Vydrin, Professor of Linguistics, *l'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations
Orientales*, Paris, France

ProQuest Number:10681364

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10681364

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

CLEAR LANGUAGE: SCRIPT, REGISTER AND THE N'KO MOVEMENT OF
MANDING-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

COPYRIGHT

2017

Coleman Dupont Donaldson

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ፀፅ ዓክፊት ፀፅ ለገላጠላ ለፍ ለጅሃጠ ኃይ
ዓቶጋ ለፀፀ ፀፅ ስፒ ለፈ ስፍ ስፍ ፀፅ
ፀፀ ፀፀ ለፍ ፀፅ ስፍ

‘It’s said that life is madness.
Certainly, but those with the same madness,
they seek one another out’
(Audio Recording 72, Bamako - July 13, 2016)

This dissertation would not have been seen the light of day without the assistance and companionship of an inconceivably large number of people, all of whom I will not be able to lay out here. That said, I’d be remiss if I didn’t express a few specific thanks.

First, my committee members. Nancy, thank you for providing me with guidance and support throughout the intellectual, personal and literal wanderings that gave rise to this dissertation. I’m grateful to have had an advisor and chair that both critically weighed in on my ideas and writings and provided me with the space that I needed to make my way to the end of my doctoral studies. Dr. Agha—seminars, meetings and conversations with you since 2013 have been instrumental to my thinking about not just N’ko, but also the things called language, culture and society; thank you. Cheikh, thank you for providing me with both level-headed advice and key historical insights to guide me in my thinking about West Africa and N’ko. Finally, I’d like to thank Dr. Valentin Vydrin who was, in fact, my first N’ko teacher. For that, and for introducing me to the formal linguistic tradition surrounding Manding and West African languages in general, I say thank you. I could have never completed (let alone conceptualized) this project without your training following my service in the Peace Corps. While our interpretations and interests occasionally diverge, your scholarship and feedback are central to the pages that follow.

Additionally, I’d like to thank Dr. Stanton Wortham who supervised my Master’s thesis at Penn. Your effortless lectures on ethnography and discourse analysis eased much of the difficult work that went into this document. Finally, I must express my deep gratitude to Dr. Robert Moore, a shadow committee member. Through lectures, office hours and shared meals, Rob, you’ve provided me with intellectual tools, career advice, and friendship—thank you.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the assistance of the Franco-American Fulbright Commission, which afforded me a stepping stone from Peace Corps into the world of research and, ultimately, N’ko. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of two academic-year and one summer Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships from the United States Department of Education. In the case of the latter, I must also thank the personnel of l’Université Julius Nyéréré de Kankan.

I’d also like to thank a number of academic colleagues who provided forms of guidance and support that led to this dissertation: George Alao et Brigitte Rasoloniaina de

ABSTRACT

CLEAR LANGUAGE: SCRIPT, REGISTER AND THE N’KO MOVEMENT OF MANDING-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

Coleman Donaldson

Nancy Hornberger

What role should indigenous languages and literacy play in education and society in West Africa in the 21st century? My dissertation investigates this question in the context of the N’ko (ߥ߬ߣߏ߫) movement, which labors to promote an eponymous script invented for writing Manding in 1949 by the intellectual and author Sulemaana Kantè. Based primarily on three summers (2012, 2013, 2016) of fieldwork carried out between Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, this ethnographic study sheds light on why N’ko-based literacy and education continue to spread across Manding-speaking West Africa by focusing on how the metalinguistic practices—that is, “talk about talk”—of N’ko’s students, intellectuals and interlocutors are connected to larger sociopolitical projects. Specifically, I analyze fieldnotes, artifacts (such as pictures, N’ko texts, online postings etc.), and audio recordings of both public interactions and semi-formal interviews that I collected between 2011 and 2016. In part to establish the relevant context, the dissertation begins with an investigation of Sulemaana Kantè and, drawing on his own words, analyzes him as a particular iteration of the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition that gave rise to local language literacy in Arabic script or what is often called *Ajami* (Arabic ‘*ajamī*) today. Subsequently, I demonstrate how alternative glosses of the word *N’ko* as either ‘Kantè’s

script' or 'the Manding language' are indexical of the heterogenous voices and ideas within and about the N'ko movement. Specifically, in Chapter Five, I explore how acts where *N'ko* references a script point to both a politically palatable and authentically embraced notion of pan-Africanism that is particularly salient for a younger generation of Western-educated N'ko activists. Alternatively, in Chapter Six, I investigate how the emergence and use of N'ko today as a label equivalent to Manding is rooted in not just ethno-nationalism, but also a desire to discursively cultivate savvy, hard-working and logical citizens as a basis to remake post-colonial West African society. This dissertation thereby shows the importance of metalinguistic discourse in accomplishing social action and sheds light on why state-directed efforts at promoting mother-tongue education in the region have failed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	x
TYPOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS	xii
MANDING ORTHOGRAPHY	xiii
TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS	xviii
ABBREVIATIONS	xix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	7
<u>Manding Sociolinguistics.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>The Metadiscursive Past of the Present.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Post-Colonial Local Language Policy and Planning.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Manding LPP Alternatives: Ajami and N’ko.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Theoretical Framework.....</u>	<u>20</u>
Chapter 3: Methodology	35
<u>Access and Contexts.....</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>Data Collection.....</u>	<u>46</u>
<u>Data Analysis.....</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>Historical Investigation.....</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>Validity.....</u>	<u>58</u>
Chapter 4: <i>Kàramóò Sùlemáana</i> (‘Teacher Sulemaana’)	60
<u>Kantè, the Afro-Muslim Vernacular Intellectual.....</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>Kantè as anti-colonial pan-Africanist.....</u>	<u>90</u>
<u>Kantè as a Manding Muslim.....</u>	<u>103</u>
<u>Conclusion.....</u>	<u>116</u>
Ethnographic Interlude	119
<u>“<i>Án yé sòsólí’ kéla kúma’ dó kàn</i>” (‘We don’t agree about a word’).....</u>	<u>119</u>
Chapter 5: <i>N’kó yé sébenni’ yé</i> (‘N’ko is a writing system’)	126

Script, Not Language.....	128
Pan-African Tones.....	142
“The Path to Motherland Liberation”.....	173
Conclusion.....	185
Chapter 6: <i>Kángbɛ</i> : Clear Language, Clear Citizenship.....	190
Who speaks Manding?.....	192
“ <i>N’ko fɔ̃baa’ bée lè tɔɔ dɔ</i> ” ‘In the name of those who say N’kó’.....	196
“ <i>An bé kán’ dè nɔ̃fě, à píyɔpiyɔ</i> ”: ‘We are going for the language, in its pure form’.....	215
Conclusion.....	253
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	255
A Linguistic Anthropological Investigation of N’ko.....	256
African Language and Education Policy.....	261
Final Thoughts.....	272
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	273

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Manding language and dialect continuum (map of Vydrin, Bergman, & Benjamin, 2001).....	7
Figure 2: Major Manding varieties by local name, etymology and foreign-language designations.....	8
Figure 3: The N’ko script.....	17
Figure 4: April 2016 Facebook post promoting N’ko as a single association [tón] (279).33	
Figure 5: Facebook post about N’ko as an association.....	34
Figure 6: Fieldwork timeline in days since 2016/06/12.....	37
Figure 7: Online N’ko class via video teleconference.....	38
Figure 8: Dissertation fieldwork conducted between 2012-2016.....	43
Figure 9: Count of non-audio recorded "documents" in ethnographic dataset (sorted by document subtype).....	47
Figure 10: Frequency distribution of codes.....	51
Figure 11: Portrait of Sulemaana Kantè (821).....	56
Figure 12: Tweet from a visit to Sulemaana Kantè’s grave which reads “The inventor’s tomb in Kolonin, may he rest in peace”.....	61
Figure 13: Map of select traditions of Manding, Wolof, Fulani and Hausa Ajami literacy.....	70
Figure 14: Map of <i>Màndén</i> , the Ghana and Mali empires, and <i>Jùlá</i> trade network (Sources: Dalby, 1971; Launay, 1983; Simonis, 2010).....	74
Figure 15: Approximate map of Kantè’s post-1941 travels and history of residence in West Africa (as per Amselle, 2003; Kántè, 2013, p. 200; Oyler, 2005; Sangaré, 2011)....	86
Figure 16: Author and his teacher Màmadí Sùwaré in 2016.....	110
Figure 17: Portrait of Kantè with N’ko script calligraphy of a bird, formed by the words “Inventor of the N’ko alphabet”, which carries a branch reading “Sòlomaná’ Kántè”...121	
Figure 18: Writing system terms derived from <i>sébe</i>	123
Figure 19: <i>sébeli</i> as ‘writing’ and ‘writing system’.....	125
Figure 20: Facebook post on N’ko as a human writing system.....	133
Figure 21: Sékù’s student’s atelier.....	145
Figure 22: Tonal realization of <i>mòkò má nà</i>	154
Figure 23: Tonal realization of “ <i>mòkó’ má nà</i> ” in terms of registers.....	154
Figure 24a: N’ko <i>kánmasere</i> system for marking tone and length using <a>	
Figure 24b: N’ko <i>kánmasere</i> system for marking tone, length and the floating L tone using <a>.....	156
Figure 25: Sékù’s lesson on tones.....	158
Figure 26: Facebook post on N’ko as the African continent’s alphabet.....	164
Figure 27: ‘Africa had fallen, N’ko picked it back up’ Facebook post.....	165
Figure 28: ‘Our dear writing system’ Facebook post.....	167
Figure 29: Pan-Africanist flyer of an N’ko association at the University de Julius Nyérére in 2013.....	170
Figure 30: #blacklivesmatter Facebook post.....	170
Figure 31: The Ganlodo Kingdom’s embrace of N’ko.....	172

Figure 32: Ísa Sàmaké's Motorcycle Mudflap.....	175
Figure 33: The N'ko-as-Manding Speech Chain Network.....	191
Figure 34: Common Arabic loanwords in Manding and proposed N'ko alternatives (Kántè, 2007).....	192
Figure 35: Manding dialectology according to Kantè's "The common language of Manden" (Kántè, 2007, pp. 5-7).....	194
Figure 36: Intervocalic velar representation in N'ko orthography.....	206
Figure 37: Phenomena represented by <n> in Latin-based Manding orthography versus N'ko.....	207
Figure 38: Aminata's first comment on Speech Events.....	209
Figure 39: Aminata's second comment on Speech Events.....	210
Figure 40: N.Fa.Ya's courtyard with view from left to right of radio station, sewing training center and <i>Wànkáran' Kàrantá</i> (882).....	212
Figure 41: Màhamúud Sánkare leads a lesson in N.Fa.Ya's <i>Wànkáran' Kàrantá</i> (964).....	214
Figure 42: Màhamúud Sánkare's analysis of Bamanan pronouns.....	217
Figure 43: Manding pronouns according to Kantè (2008b, p. 9).....	219
Figure 45: N'ko Bookshop in Bamako adorned with the slogan <i>kólɔn, báara, télen</i>	224
Figure 46: Truck emblazoned with <i>kà kólɔn, kà báara, kà télen</i> in Banamba (930).....	224
Figure 47: Shopkeeper's drawing of the Manding language tree in my notebook (1286)	234

TYPOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS

I use a range of typographical conventions that vary depending on context. In general, in accordance with common linguistic practice, the following applies when used outside of discourse transcripts (see the following section for those conventions):

‘Single quotes’ signal linguistic glosses.

[Square brackets] mark phonetic transcription, or serve to provide clarifications or the original of translations.

/Forward slashes/ mark phonemic transcription.

<Words enclosed within angle brackets> signal a discussion of orthographic form.

{Curly brackets} mark strict transliteration of graphic forms.

((Double parentheses)) mark uncertain translation of N’ko texts.

*star preceding a word signals a protoform.

Underlining is used to emphasize a point (in particular when italics are already abundant) or highlight a key feature.

Italics serve to note either a) expository emphasis or b) foreign language words. In the latter case, please note the following:

- For non-technical words derived from Arabic, but found in scholarly work related to Islam, I have used commonly established latinizations (e.g., “Quran,” “Ajami,” etc.) and do not use italics. Otherwise, Arabic words are identifiable by either my use of the Arabic script or the abbreviation “Ar.” When transliterating Arabic, I have followed the standards of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). In some cases, for convenience’s sake, I ignore Arabic plural forms and simply apply the English <s> to the singular form (e.g., *madrasa* → *madrasas* and not *madāris*).
- French words, when necessary, are signaled by the use of the abbreviation “Fr.”
- Without any of these indications, one may assume that a given word is Manding. (See the following section for details about the Manding orthography)

Alpha-numeric sequences between parentheses, such as (5) or (1142; A30), are references to either linguistic examples given in the text or the digital identifier assigned to various ethnographic “documents” such as fieldnotes, pictures, artifacts or audio recordings. The context should suffice to differentiate linguistic examples from ethnographic data references.

MANDING ORTHOGRAPHY

I use Manding as a blanket term and do not seek to differentiate Maninka, Bamanan, Jula or even Mandinka forms unless relevant to my analysis. Such instances are signaled in the text.

Latin-based Manding text results from when I opt to either a) transliterate Manding texts written in N’ko or b) cite Manding words that do not stem from a written text. In both cases, I use a Latin-based phonemic orthography that attempts to synthesize the various national standards that linguists use while also marking tone.

In general, in Latin-script orthographies, Manding words are written and read as one typically hears them pronounced. With a few major exceptions (<c>, <j> and <y>), the orthography follows the conventions of the IPA.

Below I sketch out my conventions for using Latin-based orthography with additional information to describe my transliteration scheme for N’ko as necessary.

Consonants

Latin	N’ko	English approximation	Example	Gloss
b	Ɔ	<u>b</u> ad	<i>bón</i>	‘house’
c	ɬ	<u>Ch</u> ad	<i>cé</i>	‘man’
d	ɓ	<u>d</u> og	<i>dóló</i>	‘alcohol’
f	ɸ	<u>f</u> ilm	<i>fóló</i>	‘first’
g	- ¹	good	<i>gàribú</i>	‘Quranic student seeking alms’
gb	ɓ	*A labio-velar double occlusive—in essence, an English /g/ and /b/ at the same time	<i>gbò</i>	‘bad’
h	ɣ	<u>h</u> ello	<i>hákili</i>	‘idea’
j	ɥ	<u>j</u> ump	<i>jàn</i>	‘long’
k	ɣ	<u>c</u> all	<i>kélen</i>	‘one’
l	ɣ	<u>l</u> amp	<i>lòkó</i>	‘plantain’
m	Δ	<u>m</u> ight	<i>mògó</i>	‘person’
n ²	ɣ	<u>n</u> ever	<i>náani</i>	‘four’

¹ A dash indicates that the grapheme in question is not held to be one of the base letters or sounds of Manding in N’ko education circles.

² <n> is also used for marking the syllabic nasal /n/, which appears in the 1SG pronoun *ń* ‘I’ as well as vowel nasalization. See the sections that follow.

ɲ	ɸ	*Palatal nasal—like <i>enseñar</i> in Spanish	<i>ɲì</i>	‘good’
ŋ	-	king	<i>ŋòmí</i>	‘fritter’
p	ɸ	power	<i>pán</i>	‘jump’
r	ʈ / ʈ³	*a tapped /r/ like <i>pero</i> in Spanish	<i>báara</i>	‘work’
s	ɔ	soup	<i>sàyá</i>	‘death’
t	b	tomato	<i>tilé</i>	‘sun’
w ⁴	ɗ	west	<i>wári</i>	‘money’
y	ɸ	yogurt	<i>yéle</i>	‘laugh’
z	-	zebra	<i>zùwén</i>	‘June’

Vowels

Letter	N’ko	English approximation	Example	Gloss
a	ɪ	wasp	<i>bàbá</i>	‘dad’
e	o	*like <i>manger</i> in French	<i>bèsé</i>	‘machette’
ɛ	ʌ	met	<i>sèné</i>	‘farming’
i	ɣ	happy	<i>fili</i>	‘throw’
u	ɯ	goose	<i>dugu</i>	‘earth’
o	ɔ	*like <i>beau</i> in French	<i>bǒ</i>	‘excrement’
ɔ	ɤ	bought	<i>bògó</i>	‘mud, clay’

Syllabic Nasal

Letter	N’ko	English approximation	Example	Gloss
n	ɳ	*Syllabic nasal	<i>ń</i>	‘I’

When the syllabic nasal appears in compound or “conglomerate” words, I mark its presence by use of dashes: *bìn-ń-kànni* ‘aggression, attack’ (lit. “fall-me-on”). The only exception is my use of the convention of the apostrophe in the case of the word ɳkɔ {ń-ko’} which I write out as <ń’ko>.

³ In N’ko ʈ is used in cases where multiple /r/’s are separated by a identical vowels. This is common in expressive adverbs and often manifests itself as an extended r-trill (e.g., *fúruru* ‘completely’, which would be written in N’ko as úrúrúr {frrú}).

⁴ Also used for marking plurals. See the following section on “Pluralization”.

Tone

Grave diacritics mark low tones and acute diacritics mark high tones. An unmarked vowel carries the same tone as the last marked vowel before it.

The tonal article on nouns is noted by an apostrophe <'> (e.g., *Lú' ká bòn* 'The courtyard is big'). When writing nouns in citation form, I follow the N'ko convention of giving them with the tonal article, but for convenience's sake, I omit it from the Latin-based form (e.g., *lú* 'courtyard'):

𞤲𞤳 {lú'} → <lú> 'courtyard'

Similarly, by convention I ignore the tonal article when transliterating the personal pronouns *Y* and *!*:

Y {í'} → <í> 2SG
! {án'} → <án> 3PL

If a Manding word or name appears in Latin-script without any diacritics that means that either a) the lexeme does not carry an underlying tone (e.g., *lu/nu* PL) or b) its tone is unclear or unknown to me. See Chapter 5 for an exploration of the N'ko orthography's system of marking tone.

I write tonally compact compounds words as single words, occasionally using a hyphen for clarity's sake between the different constituent elements (e.g., *fàrafìn-sébèli* 'African writing system').

Length

In many Manding varieties, vowel lengthening can be contrastive—this is marked by simply doubling the vowel in question. In the case of long low convex tones, I write them with one tone on each vowel as opposed to a single haček or caron (viz. <ˇ>). For example, 𞤲𞤳 {mǒó'} → <mòó> 'person'.

In N'ko script, length is marked purely by use of the *kánmasere* diacritic system that also marks tone (see Chapter 5).

Nasalization

In Manding, nasalization is also contrastive and can be applied to any of the seven vowels of the Eastern varieties. It is marked by a word final <n>. For example, /bõ/ → <bón> 'house'.

In N’ko this is marked by a subposed dot diacritic known as *kánnadiyalan*: ɓɓ {bón’} → <bón>

Prenasalization

In certain Manding varieties, some words or syllables are prenasalized. This is marked by an <n> preceding the affected consonant. For example: *nsíirin* ‘tale’.

Pluralization

I mark Manding pluralization in one of two ways.

When transcribing oral discourse of the Jula/Bamanan form /u/ (as in *boo* in English), I follow common Latin-based orthographic practice of representing it as word-final suffix⁵ using the letter <w>:

/mùsò/ → <mùsò> ‘woman’
/mùsò ù/ → <mùsów> ‘women’

When transcribing the more Maninka form /lu/ or /nu/, I follow the common Latin-based Maninka orthographic practice of representing it as a free-standing word:

/mùsò lù/ → <mùsò lù> ‘women’

When transliterating N’ko texts, I vary between these two conventions depending on whether the author writes a Bamanan/Jula form (e.g., ɓɓ {sò’ u} → <sów>) or the more common *Kángbɛ*⁶/Maninka form (e.g., ɓɓ {sò’ lù} → <sò’ lù>), which is identical by both strict transliteration and my convention.

Assimilation

Following common Latin-based orthographic practice, I mark common cases of vowel assimilation (viz. when one word’s final vowel takes on the quality of the following word’s initial vowel) by use of an apostrophe:

À yé à fɓ → À y'à fɓ.
‘S/he said it’

When transliterating the N’ko orthography, I ignore the distinction between the two distinct apostrophes (<'> ,<'>) that, respectively are used to mark whether the “elided” (

⁵ In truth, it is likely a clitic as echoed by the N’ko practice of writing pluralization as a stand-alone word.

⁶ See Chapter 6 for an investigation of *kángbɛ* and its relationship to this issue.

ᱠᱚᱛᱚᱸᱰ ᱠᱚᱛᱚᱸᱰ) vowel carried a high or a low tone:

ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {í' bᱚ à fᱚ} → ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {í' bà fᱚ} <i b' à fᱚ> 'You say it'

ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {í' kà à fᱚ} → ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {í' kà fᱚ} <i k' à fᱚ> 'You said it'

N'ko Gbàralí Rule

In N'ko, there exists a purely orthographic convention known as ᱚᱛᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚᱛᱚ *gbàralí* that is applied when two identical vowels carrying the same tone (viz. V¹) are preceded and separated by two distinct consonants ⁷(viz. C¹ and C²). Such instances (viz. C¹V¹C²V¹) become <C¹C²V¹> orthographically. When transliterating N'ko script, I expand orthographic instances of *gbàralí* into their full form to facilitate harmony with typical Latin-based Manding orthography. An example is illustrated below:

ᱚᱛᱚᱛᱚ {flé} → <f^lé> 'look, watch'

N'ko affirmative intransitive perfective and imperfective verbal suffix markers

In the N'ko tradition, the affirmative intransitive perfective marker (ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ) and the imperfective verbal suffix marker (ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ) are typically written as their own free-standing words. When transliterating N'ko texts I preserve this practice:

ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {à wá da} → <à wá da> 'S/he went'
 ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ ᱚᱛᱚ {à yé kúma lá} → <à yé kúma lá> 'S/he is speaking'

In all other Latin-based orthographic contexts, I write both the affirmative intransitive perfective marker (regardless of dialectical or allophonic variation; viz. *-ra/-la/-na/-da*) and the imperfective verbal suffix marker as suffixes following typical practice:

À wáda 'S/he went'
 À táara 'S/he went'
 À nàna 'S/he came'
 À yé kúmala 'S/he is speaking'

N'ko Wóloso Letters

In N'ko orthography, two letters ᱚᱛᱚ <l> and ᱚᱛᱚ <y> have contextual variants, ᱚᱛᱚ and ᱚᱛᱚ, known as *ná-woloso* and *ná-woloso*, that are used to mark allophonic variation that

⁷ *Gbàralí* does not apply if the the first and second consonant are identical (e.g., ᱚᱛᱚᱛᱚ {sᱚsᱚ} <sᱚsᱚ>)



occurs when the the sounds /l/ and /y/ are preceded by a nasalized vowel and take the forms [ɲ] and [j̃]. In an effort to harmonize my transliterations with typical Latin-based orthography, I transliterate them as follows:

ɲ <n>
j̃ <y>

TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

<i>Italics</i>	Spoken Manding
-	Clipped speech
[implicit word]	Implied word or information ⁸
(best guess)	Transcriber's best guess
(???)	Unintelligible
(word???)	Transcriber's unsure guess
“reported”	Reported speech or metalinguistic discussion
↵	A new line signals a pause or new utterance
<description>	Transcriber's description of action
comment	Transcriber's comment

In the case of transparent French loanwords or nonce borrowings that are not significantly phonologically assimilated into Manding such as *mais*, *direction* etc., I have opted to preserve their French orthography. Note that this diverges from the common transcription practices of many linguists and folklorists who typically opt to simply transcribe loanwords using Manding orthography (e.g., *mε*, *dirɛkisiyɔn* etc., see Derive, 1978; Giray, 1996). I have adapted it because it increases readability and mirrors the orthographic practices used for loanwords in languages such as English, French, etc.

For the purposes of this dissertation, my typeset transcripts of spoken Manding lean towards broad discourse analytic transcription. That is, for readability's sake I have deleted extraneous repetitions or stutterings and do not signal length of pauses. Similarly, I have not used any special convention to mark latching, overlap, stylistic elongation or intonation.

⁸ As noted on p. x, [square brackets] are also used to provide the original of translated words.

ABBREVIATIONS

<	‘comes from’
→	‘becomes’
↓	Tonal downstep marker
1SG	First person singular pronoun
3SG	Third person singular pronoun
AOF	<i>Afrique Occidentale Française</i> (French West Africa)
Ar.	Arabic
ART	Tonal article
Fr.	French
FLAS	Foreign Language Area Studies
H	High tone
IIALC	International Institute of African Languages and Cultures
INA	<i>Institut National des Arts</i>
INF	Infinitive
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
IPVF.AFF	Affirmative imperfective marker
IPVF.NEG	Negative imperfective marker
L	Low tone
Lit.	Literally
LPP	Language Policy and Planning
NOM	Nominaliation marker
NP	Noun phrase
O	Object
PFV.INTR	Intransitive perfective marker
PFV.NEG	Negative perfective marker
PL	Plural
PTCP.RES	Resultative participle
QUO	Quotative
RDA	<i>Rassemblement Démocratique Africain</i>
S	Subject
V	Verb

Chapter 1: Introduction

What role should indigenous languages and literacy play in education and society in West Africa? My dissertation investigates a set of historical and modern actors' responses to this question through their efforts at promoting mother-tongue literacy and education through a unique orthography designed for a language popularly known as Bambara⁹, termed Manding by linguists (Vydrine, 1995–1996), and baptized as N'ko (𞤅𞤆𞤇) by some students and scholars today (Kántè, 2008b).

West African society today is characterized by multilingual social stratification. More than fifty years following the independence of much of West Africa from France, French clearly remains the dominant language of the State and its official education systems. In the Quranic schooling tradition, West African teachers pen and teach students to read texts written in Arabic, although it is not a language spoken by the majority of the world's Muslims. All the while, the near entirety of West Africans speak an indigenous sub-Saharan African language as their primary language of daily life.

This seeming incongruence has not escaped the attention of local actors, especially in Manding-speaking West Africa where a formidable social movement based around vernacular literacy promotion in the N'ko script has flourished (Amselle, 2001, 2003; Hellweg, 2013; Oyler, 1995; Vydrin, 2011; Vydrine, 2001b; Wyrod, 2008, 2008).

Invented in 1949 by the Guinean “peasant intellectual” (Feierman, 1990), Sùlemáana

Kántè,¹⁰ N'ko is a non-Latin, non-Arabic based writing system for Manding. Despite his

⁹ See, for instance Bird, Hutchison & Kanté (1977).

¹⁰ Henceforth <Sulemaana Kantè>, ignoring tonal diacritics and using <è> in place of <ε>, except in citations (e.g., “Kántè, 2008b”) where I note his name using Latin-based Manding transliteration system. I have opted to write Kantè's first name as *Sulemaana* given that it is written as such by Kantè himself in the majority of his works that I have in my personal archive (see Vydrin 2012, p. 63 for a discussion)

lack of formal training, Kantè's alphabet is a perfect phonological analysis of his native Manding variety and remarkably includes a set of diacritics for marking tone (Vydrine, 2001b, pp. 128–129). Critically, Kantè also used his unique script to write over 100 books, on a vast range of topics spanning across linguistics, history, traditional medicine and Islam (including a translation of the Quran [Kántè, n.d.]), which continue to be typeset and published by N'ko activists¹¹ today.

Manding-language texts, however, are produced in at least two other writing systems. Many Manding-speakers spontaneously use adapted forms of the Arabic script for short jottings in a practice known as *Ajami* (Ar. عجمي *'ajamī*), stemming from the centuries old Quranic schooling tradition (Donaldson, 2013; Vydrin, 1998, 2014). The Latin-script, originally applied to Manding by colonial agents and missionaries (Van den Avenne, 2015a), has informed a range of disparate orthographies in post-colonial efforts to promote adult literacy and bilingual/mother-tongue education for over fifty years (Calvet, 1987; Skattum, 2000; Trefault, 1999; Yerende, 2005).

N'ko stands in opposition to these orthographies in a number of ways (e.g., its script; marking of tone). However, perhaps most importantly for N'ko activists, their script is not for writing named national varieties such as Bamanan (Fr. *bambara*) or Jula

¹¹ In this dissertation, I refer to people involved in N'ko circles in a range of ways that are not mutually exclusive or necessarily distinct (e.g., *students*, *teachers* or *activists*). Within N'ko circles one need not be an actual teacher or student to be labeled or refer to oneself as an N'ko 'teacher' (*kàramóó* ᠎ᠠᠷᠠᠮᠣᠣ) (327:14) or 'student' (*kàrandén* ᠎ᠠᠷᠠᠨᠳᠡᠨ). Generally speaking, both can be used as a label for anyone who both a) is studying or can read N'ko and b) supports the script's promotion. One common hypernym in N'ko circles is that of *N'ko-móó* (᠎ᠠᠷᠠᠮᠣᠣ *'N'ko person'*) (Fofana, 2008, pp. 2-5). In its place, I will use the French term *N'koisant*. Given this, for stylistic purposes though throughout the dissertation I vary my own English-language usage in ways that are often interchangeable unless I signal otherwise.

but rather for writing what they hold to be one single language: Manding, or as they often prefer to call it, *N'ko*. Central to the N'ko movement, therefore, is language standardization (Cooper, 1989; Haugen, 1959) disseminated through prescriptive spelling and grammar rules to form a standard language register known as *kángbe* or 'clear language' (Kántɛ, 2008a).

Despite this call for a unified Manding orthography and language, the movement itself is characterized by a range of different voices. For pan-Africanist university students, N'ko is an authentically African writing system that, if adopted, will iconically unite Africans across the continent. For reformist Muslims, N'ko offers the masses direct access to Islam, unfettered by the traditional Quranic schooling hierarchy and the need to learn Arabic. For others though, N'ko is critical in forging a united Afro-Muslim Manding identity that will liberate West Africans from both neocolonial French- and Arabic-speaking elites. Through ethnographic investigation, this dissertation aims to probe these intertwined perspectives and thereby potentially shed light on the N'ko movement's enduring growth as an educational and literary movement in West Africa in the early 21st century.

This project emerges from my Peace Corps work in adult literacy in Burkina Faso (2009-2011) and formal research carried out in West Africa and on the East Coast of the United States between 2011 and 2016. Through participant observation, I collected fieldnotes as well as a range of artifacts such as pictures, texts and online postings etc. Additionally, it draws on audio recordings of both public interactions and semi-formal interviews that I conducted, transcribed and translated myself. To make sense of this range of data, it draws on the concept of metalinguistic practices (Agha, 2007a; Lucy,

1993; Rymes, 2014)—that is, “talk about talk”—to investigate the pursuits behind the actions of N’ko’s students, intellectuals and interlocutors today in West Africa.

Specifically I ask: How do N’ko activists—in their educational and promotional activities—metalinguistically engage with the proper name *N’ko* as a label for both the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949 and the Manding language itself. And how is their engagement, use and promotion of N’ko—be it a language or a script—for mother-tongue education connected to larger socio-political projects and changes in West Africa?

I begin things in Chapter 2 by laying out the conceptual framework that has guided the data collection, analysis and writing of this dissertation. Next, I move on to Chapter 3, which is an explanation of the methods that I employed to collect, analyze and write this dissertation.

Subsequently, there are three analytic chapters. The first one, Chapter 4, is primarily a historical chapter which serves two functions. First, in light of the enduring relevance of Sulemaana Kantè as the guiding intellectual (if not spiritual) figure of the N’ko movement, it establishes the relevant context for an ethnographic investigation of N’ko students and teachers today. Second, I use the chapter to refine prior analysis of Kantè (e.g., Amselle, 2001; Oyler, 1995; Wyrod, 2003). Put briefly, my major contribution is to draw on his own words to connect Kantè to a series of historical West African individuals that similarly sought to read and write in their own languages as early as the 18th century, as part of a nebulous but enduring pattern that I call the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition. This in turn improves the solidified understanding of Kantè as an anti-colonial pan-Africanist and ethno-nationalist figure, by putting the emphasis on his role as an Islamic reformist galvanized by the debates and ideas of his times.

Next, I use a brief ethnographic interlude as a means of introducing Chapters 5 and 6, which, respectively focus on the divergent usage of the referential pairings of “N’ko as script” and “N’ko as language” within the movement today. Chapter 5 looks at instances in which N’koisans uphold the notion that the phonemic string /n̄ko/ is first and foremost the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. How did this understanding first emerge and how is it mobilized today? As we shall see, this line of reasoning is deeply connected to facts of linguistic tone in Manding as well as many other African languages. This in turn points to activists’ sincere belief in and politically palatable use of Pan-Africanism in certain kinds of situations.

In Chapter 6 I explore the alternative: how did the name *N’ko* get paired with the Manding language and how is this understanding upheld and circulated today? Critical for this understanding are facts of Manding dialectology and etymology. Just as in the previous chapter, however, discussion of these matters stretches outside of the realm of pure structural linguistics. As we shall see, the embrace of N’ko as the Manding language is also connected to a desire to critique and reform models of postcolonial citizenship.

I use the final chapter to both summarize the overall argument of the preceding chapters and elaborate on some of the wider disciplinary implications of this study. Additionally, I discuss what the dissertation suggests for the future of both the N’ko movement as well as local language literacy and education initiatives in West Africa.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

In the following sections, I outline the prior research, experiential knowledge and relevant theoretical tools that constitute the *conceptual framework* (Maxwell, 2012; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012) that has guided my study. In terms of literature, I investigate three domains: Manding sociolinguistics; the history of the language in terms of colonial linguistic and later post-colonial language planning work; and finally, the grassroots traditions of N'ko and Ajami. Situated within these bodies of work and my own personal experience, I subsequently lay out my theoretical framework for approaching my questions.

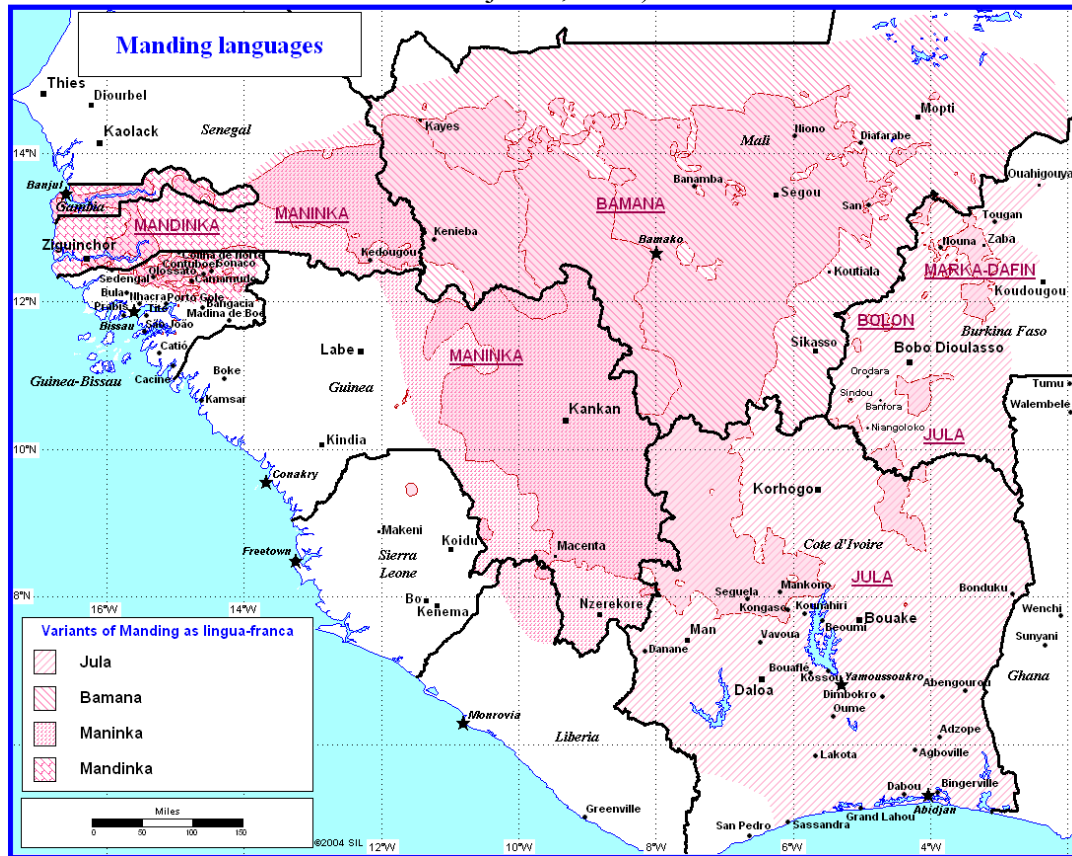
Manding Sociolinguistics

From a linguistic perspective, Manding¹² is a language-dialect continuum stretching across West Africa from Senegal to Burkina Faso (see Figure 1) (Vydrine, 1995). The word 'Manding' is a Western adaptation of the word *Màndén*, the name of both a place and former West African polity, commonly referred to as the Mali¹³ Empire, that at its apogee encompassed much of modern-day Guinea and Mali, primarily between the 13th and 15th centuries (Kánté, 2008a; Levtzion, 1973; Simonis, 2010, pp. 41–54).

¹² This usage, however, is not uniform across different fields of research. In American anthropological and historical circles, for instance, one often encounters the term *mande* or *mandekan* in place of Manding (e.g., Bird, 1981; see Galtier, 1980, pp. 16–26; Vydrine, 1995 for a discussion). The major issue with this usage is that it coincides with the European and disciplinary linguistics convention of using Mande to refer to a broader language family that is more than 5,000 years old (Vydrin, 2009, 2016b). I will use the term Mande in the sense of a linguistic family which encompasses non-mutually intelligible languages that are only distantly related and that have little to do with the *Màndén* empire (e.g. Soninke, Susu, Bisa, Looma, etc., in addition to Manding).

¹³ Depending on a scholar's language and or discipline, they might use one of a range of toponyms such as Mande, Manden, Manding or Mali in place of *Màndén* (Creissels, In Press, p. 2).

Figure 1: Manding language and dialect continuum (map of Vydrin, Bergman, & Benjamin, 2001)



Manding varieties that are locally known by a range of names (i.e., Maninka¹⁴ in Guinea, Mandinka in the Gambia, Bamanan in Mali, and Jula in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso), are widely used in their respective zones as trade languages between different peoples and language groups (Dalby, 1971; Mansour, 1993). Nonetheless, mutual intelligibility is widely noted, in particular, between Maninka, Bamanan and Jula (Dumestre & Retord, 1981, p. 3)¹⁵. Despite both this and linguists’ clear acknowledgement of their connectedness and overlap (e.g., Creissels, 2009; Dumestre, 2003), national language

¹⁴ As is customary, I will refer to these different varieties by removing their shared second element *-kán*, which means ‘language’ (see Chapter 6 for a discussion).

¹⁵ This stems in part from their common classification as Eastern Manding varieties (traditionally distinguished from Western Manding by their seven instead of five vowel system).

policies and linguistic work typically treat Manding varieties largely as distinct, albeit related, varieties or even languages (Calvet, 1987). The traditionally distinguished major Manding varieties are laid out along with their alternative foreign-language designations in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Major Manding varieties by local name, etymology and foreign-language designations

Local Name	Etymology	French Name	English Name	Alternative Spellings
<i>màndinkakán</i>	< ‘Language of the people of Manden’	mandingue, malinké	Mandinka, Mandingo	
<i>màninkakán</i>	< ‘Language of the people of Manden’	malinké	Maninka	
<i>bámanankan</i>	< ‘Language of those that refuse (Islam)’	bambara	Bamanan	Bamana
<i>jùlakán</i>	‘Trader’s language’	dioula	Jula	Dyula, Diula, Dyoula

Since the Independence era there have been major advances in terms of Manding lexicography (Bailleul, 2007; Dumestre, 2011; Vydrine, 2010), grammar (Creissels, 2009; Dumestre, 2003; Vydrin, 2016a; Vydrine, 1999a) and situating the language in a larger typological sense (Vydrin, 2009). Sociolinguistic advances on the other hand have been more limited. With a couple of notable exceptions (Canut, 1996; Canut, 2011; Derive, 1987; Dombrowsky, 1994; Sanogo, 2013; Showalter, 2000), most work that could be considered sociolinguistic has been directly connected to applied linguistics research that supports and evaluates development industry and government programs (Skattum, 2000;

Trefault, 1999; Turriffin, 1989) or missionary linguistic work in service of proselytization (Boone, Boling, Silué, & Augustin, 2007; Harrison & Harrison, 2002). Others such as Slezak (2007) are sociolinguistic but operate in the variationist tradition via surveys and questionnaires on reported behavior. Thus despite being the most widespread trade language of one half of West Africa, Manding speech practices have not often been subject to qualitative study—whether under the banner of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology or the ethnography of speaking—like other African languages such as Wolof (Irvine, 1974; McLaughlin, 2001; Perrino, 2002), Bemba (Spitulnik, 1996, 1998) or other so-called urban youth languages (Kiessling & Mous, 2004) such as Ivoirian Nouchi (Newell, 2009).

My own sense of Manding variation and speech practices are informed by my two years working and traveling in West Africa as a Peace Corps Volunteer based in Jula-speaking Burkina Faso between 2009 and 2011. Every day in my rural village without water, paved roads or electricity, I was exposed to a multilingualism at least as, if not more, cosmopolitan than that of any world-class city. While I worked with civil servants in French, I dedicated my free time to learning the local Manding variety, Jula, which functioned as a lingua franca between the many ethnic groups that lived in the area. Thus a typical day was punctuated by “translanguaging” (García, 2009; Williams, 1994) between and across upwards of five languages a day: Cerma¹⁶, Jula, Mòoré¹⁷, French and Fulani¹⁸ amongst others. Upon arriving in Burkina Faso, I knew from some pre-departure

¹⁶ Gouin; iso:cme

¹⁷ Mossi; iso:mos

¹⁸ Here and throughout this dissertation I use ‘Fulani’ as a linguistic hypernym that denotes the range of related varieties spoken by Fula/Fulbe/Fulani (Fr. *peul*) people (e.g., Pular, Pulaar, Fulfulde; iso:ful)

internet research that Jula was a trade language of sorts, but I couldn't quite figure out what that meant. Was Jula the first language of people in my village? Was it no one's? Why did some people pepper it with French? And how was it related to Malian *bambara* (Fr.)?

Years later, I have developed a metalanguage and historical sense of the languages, registers and varieties that I was engaging with and deploying day in and day out. Starting out however, I simply wondered why some people said *gbé*, *gwé* or even *jé* ('white'), as I scrambled to learn and practice as much as I could. From some choice books ordered from Indiana and France, it seemed to me that Jula was a derivative of *bambara*. Indeed, prior to my readings, Burkinabè friends had declared that if I truly wanted to learn Jula, I would somehow mysteriously have to learn *bambara*. And yet a few acquaintances in my village insisted that what I was learning was not in fact "true Jula" (*jùlakán yèréyèré*) but street Jula; I would need to remain close to them if I wanted to learn it. Strangely though, I found that if I attempted to play off of these distinctions, my jokes would frequently fall flat. For instance, while traveling in Mali when I was asked incredulously, "*é bé bamanankan' mén?*" ('You speak Bamanan?') and responded "*ón-hòn, í bé jùlakan' lè fɔ*" ('No, I speak Jula'), I normally faced nothing but incomprehension or a quick lesson: "*ù bée kélen!*" ('They're all the same!').

The Metadiscursive Past of the Present

Guided perhaps by similar encounters, historians and linguists interested in Manding have not shied away from analyzing its historical trajectory and constitution (Bird, 1970; Calvet, 1982; Jacobson, 2001; Mansour, 1993; Sanogo, 2007). Van den Avenne (2012, 2014, 2015b, 2017) has provided the most cogent analyses to date on the

engagement of European explorers, linguists and colonial agents with the language starting in the late 18th century. Explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators and linguists began to produce both anglophone and francophone scholarship on Manding starting in the early 19th century. Focusing on the ways that grammars, pedagogical works and dictionaries embodied a range of “tendencies” and “temptations”, Van den Avenne (2015b) deftly lays out the variable approaches that authors took to putting Manding speech into writing, depending in part on their social location and goals. These works on the genealogy of Manding through foreign scholarship, however, have not engaged with how these metadiscursive works may be connected to the categories circulating in West Africa today. Canut (1996, 2002) investigates the emic understanding of the linguistic border between Bamanan and Maninka through transcribed conversations and fieldnotes from the 1990s, but she does not connect the interpretations of her research participants to any of these older historical discourses stemming from linguistic work. Anthropologists for their part have questioned the legacy of linguistics in defining ethnic categories such as Bamanan (Bazin, 1985), but have not attempted an explicit investigation of how this linguistic legacy plays out in terms of the speech practices and language ideologies of Manding-speakers today.

This absence of the colonial from understandings of Manding language practices today could perhaps be interpreted as justified; it would be overstating the case to say that Manding as we know it today was simply “invented” by the colonial encounter (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). An analysis of post-colonial literacy and education initiatives such as N’ko however begs this connection. During the colonial era, applied linguistic interest in Manding may have seemed distant as French

was the only official language in education (Calvet, 2010). Following independence though, linguists figured prominently in the conferences and meetings that would give birth to the orthographies and codifications utilized in adult literacy and formal education programs of Guinea and Mali in the 1960s and 1970s (Sow, 1977). Just as the presidents of the newly independent countries were not political new-comers, neither were the linguists who had a history of connections with institutions such as *l'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* in Paris and the International African Institute in London. Despite this, most reviews of educational language policy in the region, while gesturing towards the historical conditions that have given rise to today's state of postcoloniality (e.g., Lazdowski, 2015), simply start with the independent states of the region, instead of exploring the more explicit and direct connections between independence and the colonial era. And yet, as Cooper (2002) argues, approaching post-colonial Africa requires a view that bridges across the colonial and the independence era. This must also be extended to explorations of the local language education initiatives such as N'ko.

Post-Colonial Local Language Policy and Planning

Following World War II, despite the centuries-old, if sometimes marginal, practice of West African vernacular literacy stemming from the Islamic tradition (Donaldson, 2013; Ngom, 2009; Salvaing, 2004; Vydrin, 2014), Francophone African elites largely viewed African languages as not being ready for the “challenge” of development (Sakiliba, 1957). African languages were not considered properly *corpus* planned (Kloss, 1969); they lacked a standard orthography and technical terms for modern and scientific concepts. The elite francophones of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA),

saw African languages as not only insufficiently *developed* (Ferguson, 1968), but also their supporters as ethno-nationalist rivals that could fragment a pan-African drive for independence based around the French language (N’Guessan, 2007; Schmidt, 2005, p. 33). This position, however, did not preclude certain champions of African languages operating directly within the colonial apparatus, such as author Amadou Hampâté Bâ or linguist Maurice Houis (respectively, see Austen, 2010a; and Houis, 1957), from dedicating themselves to orthography development and the promotion of local language education.

Ultimately following independence, the major Manding-speaking countries pursued a number of distinct paths regarding local language education policy. While Burkina Faso’s first president continued the language policy approach stemming from the colonial order (André, 2007) and Ivoirian local languages remained absent from education policy and practice through the 1970s (Boutin & N’Guessan, 2013; Djité, 1989; Turcotte, 1980), Guinea and Mali made gestures towards local languages in education as early as 1962. An official decree in Mali that year framed the languages “of the country” as a bridge between home and school (Mbodj-Pouye, 2007; Ouane, 1991), and a “Bambara” reader was apparently released sometime prior to 1966 (UNESCO, 1966, p. 36). Utilizing the work of colonial administrator-cum-linguist Maurice Delafosse, Guinea likewise developed a Latin-based transcription system for its local languages as early as 1962 (Sow, 1977). This was in turn utilized to create a “Malinké” syllabary. Under Sékou Touré, Guinea eventually embraced so-called national languages in both adult literacy and formal education through a National Languages Program (Calvet, 1987; Doualamou, 1981; Oyler, 2001; Sylla, 1997; Yerende, 2005) as part of his

larger Socialist Revolution from 1968 until 1984 (Touré, 1967). Mali wholeheartedly took to what was known as “functional literacy” (Dumont, 1973; Audrey Mbodj-Pouye, 2007; *The Experimental World Literacy Programme*, 1976; Turriffin, 1989) before attempting to integrate national languages into the formal education sector starting primarily in the 1980s (Diarra, 1997; Doumbia, 2000; Skattum, 2000; M. L. Traoré, 2009; Trefault, 1999). While Côte d’Ivoire would never embrace bilingual or mother-tongue education, despite some funding for research on local languages (Djite, 2000), Burkina Faso would ultimately make moves in that direction starting primarily in the 1980s (Lavoie, 2008; Nikiéma, 2011) with the emphasis on functional adult literacy over bilingual education during the revolutionary years of Thomas Sankara (André, 2007). Across the region through the 1990s and up until today there has been a steady stream of development agency and international donor-backed initiatives promoting bilingual and adult literacy initiatives around local African languages (Benson & Lynd, 2011; Nikiéma, 2011; Trudell, 2012).

Behind these diverse programs is the idea, held by many scholars, that African languages are central to post-colonial education reform (Bamgboṣe, 1991; Djité, 2008; Thiong’o, 1986). Nonetheless, despite fifty years of state and international donor efforts in Manding-medium literacy centers (Mbodj-Pouye, 2013), Islamic schools (Brenner, 2001) and public schools (Calvet, 1987; Skattum, 2000; Trefault, 1999), observers continually point to major implementational issues (Calvet, 1987; Dumestre, 1997, 2000) that have accompanied a general rejection of the Malian and Guinean state programs (Vydrin, 2011, pp. 196–197). Why are these efforts at promoting bilingual or mother-tongue education so passively dismissed by local populations despite millions of dollars

of funding? One way of answering such a question is to look at alternative forms of literacy that have not received attention from the development industry-orientation of education and language policy and planning scholars.

Manding LPP Alternatives: Ajami and N’ko

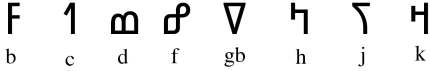
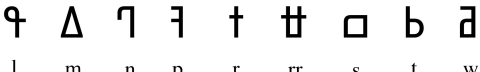

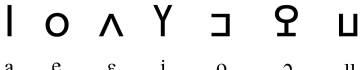
Absent from the investigations of local language education policy in Francophone Africa has been a focus on alternative literacy practices promoted and existing outside of formal government-run programs, such as Ajami and N’ko, in the case of Manding. I, myself, worked in adult literacy promotion during the Peace Corps between 2009 and 2011, but it was not until later that I turned my gaze towards these other forms of literacy. Officially partnered with the equivalent of a local school district, I worked closely with the person in charge of non-formal education and eventually found a role as a post-literacy trainer that primarily ran sessions around savings and credit clubs and the production of liquid soap for women’s groups that were newly “literated” (Fr. *alphabétisé*) in Jula. Throughout this time working, speaking and studying the language (albeit through Latin-based orthography), I never once considered that my similarly-aged male friends and soccer teammates might be penning not Arabic but rather Jula Ajami as I later discovered and analyzed in another publication (Donaldson, 2013).

So-called Ajami literacy has been practiced in West Africa since at least the 17th century according to oldest collected texts (see Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion). A blanket term used to refer to the use of the Arabic script to write African languages, the practice emerged from within the Quranic schooling tradition that accompanied Islam’s arrival in the region (Hunwick, 2004). In many instances Ajami literacy was and is a “grassroots literacy” (Blommaert, 2008) existing marginally alongside the Quranic

system. This in particular seems to be the case for Manding, for which there do not appear to be robust literary collections of texts (Donaldson, 2013; Vydrin, 1998, 2014) except in the Western Mandinka-speaking areas of the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau (Giesing & Vydrin, 2007). This fact has not precluded in-depth analyses of the Manding Ajami texts that have been identified (Dumestre & Vydrin, 2014; Tamari, 1994). Even so, Manding Ajami, like that of Wolof (Camara, 1997; Ngom, 2009, 2010, 2016), Hausa (Mack & Boyd, 2000; Philips, 2000) and Fulani (Diallo, 2012), can fruitfully be explored ethnographically as both a literacy practice (Street, 1984, 1993) and potentially a type of language planning and policy (Hornberger, 1994, 2006). Such a focus would demonstrate how its use, meaning and valorization is distinct from state-backed local language literacy promotion and indeed, may help us understand why the practice of Ajami has endured for centuries despite the State's efforts to promote Manding literacy in Latin-based orthographies.

The paucity of Manding Ajami texts, at least in some parts of the Manding-speaking world, can potentially be attributed to the related phenomenon of N'ko (𞤅𞤆𞤇). Referring in the strictest sense to a non-Latin-, non-Arabic-based script invented in 1949 by the Guinean Sulemana Kantè (see Figure 3 below), N'ko more broadly denotes a transnational social movement based around Manding-medium literacy and education. The historian Diane Oyler (1995, 2001, 2005) provided the first Western study of the movement and did not fail to contrast N'ko's grassroots spread through historical Jula traders (Wilks, 2000) and the Quranic schooling network (Ware, 2014; Wilks, 1968) with the failure of Guinea's ambitious National Language Program (1968-1984) that I alluded to above.

Figure 3: The N'ko script

c o n s o n a n t s																	
																	
syllabic nasal																	
vowels																	
d i a v o w e l i c s	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">!</td> <td>: Nasalized</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> </td> <td>: High full / High abrupt (word-finally) (word-internally)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">~</td> <td>: Low abrupt</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> </td> <td>: High abrupt</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">~</td> <td>: Low abrupt lengthened</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> </td> <td>: High abrupt lengthened</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">↑</td> <td>: Low full lengthened</td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> </td> <td>: High full lengthened</td> </tr> </table>	!	: Nasalized		: High full / High abrupt (word-finally) (word-internally)	~	: Low abrupt		: High abrupt	~	: Low abrupt lengthened		: High abrupt lengthened	↑	: Low full lengthened		: High full lengthened
!	: Nasalized		: High full / High abrupt (word-finally) (word-internally)														
~	: Low abrupt		: High abrupt														
~	: Low abrupt lengthened		: High abrupt lengthened														
↑	: Low full lengthened		: High full lengthened														

Wyrod (2003, 2008), comparing and contrasting the ideas of Kantè and Sékou Touré about mother tongue education through the writings of the latter, also gave evidence of the movement's partial spread into formal schools. Western scholars have additionally observed the movement's ethno-nationalist tendency to invoke the historical grandeur of the *Mandén* empire to promote Manding literacy in N'ko as part of a larger struggle to decolonize the francophone State and Arab-dominated Islam (e.g., Amselle, 2003; Conrad, 2001). More recently, Hellweg (2013) and d'Avignon (2012) have drawn our attention to the role of traditional medicine standardization and commerce within N'ko circles. None of these accounts however focus on what specifically happens in the classroom or how N'ko proceeds as an educational movement that engages in its own forms of language planning.

Kantè, for instance, did not use the term *N'ko* to refer only to his orthography. As we shall see in Chapter 6, he upheld the term as the proper name of the Manding language itself. Thus, while the scholarship laid out above offer insights about the N'ko movement's continued growth and ability to successfully promote Manding-language literacy, they all curiously do not investigate what strikes me as one of its core features: the creation and dissemination of a standard language register that transcends dialectal variation. Echoing other classic cases of nationalism (Anderson, 2006/1983), one of Kantè's central concerns was standardizing Manding through an impressive range of historical and linguistic writings on language (Kántè, 1992, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Indeed, a large proportion of interactions with and amongst N'ko's social actors, whether in the streets, on the radio or in print are mediated by the use, learning or discussion of this standard language register. Linguists have long noted this normative character (e.g., Davydov, 2008; Vydrin, 2011; Vydrine, 1996, 2010) but these accounts have not yet been informed by systematic ethnographic study to track how students are introduced to N'ko as not just a script or Manding orthography but also a linguistic hypernym and standard language register.

Theoretical Framework

In approaching these issues surrounding the N'ko movement, I draw inspiration from a critical realist's approach to language (Cameron, Frazer, Rampton, & Richardson, 1992; Corson, 1997), ethnographic approaches to language policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, 2011a) as something that individuals do (McCarty, 2011a) and linguistic anthropological understandings of reflexivity (Lucy, 1993), register (Agha, 2007a) and metapragmatics (Silverstein, 1976).

Linguistics vs. Critical Realism.

“Departmentalized Linguistics” (Agha, 2007b) as founded by Saussure (1972/1916) distinguishes the study of language as a science focused on the signifier over the signified. While acknowledging that language, as we know it, is in fact a social phenomenon, Linguistics approaches the study of language as a study of an abstract system (Fr. *langue*) detached from its use in the real world (Fr. *parole*). Linguistics then necessarily delineates and studies idealized, pure forms of language that do not in fact conform to the “ways of speaking” of actual people (Hymes, 1974). While this is arguably a valid approach for scientists interested in the cognitive side of language structure or creating grammars, it is of little use to those seeking to study language as it is actually used (Cameron et al., 1992). For languages, such as Manding, without a history of top-down standardization or use in formal education systems, this is especially true. While there are clear differences in the Manding varieties spoken by individuals, the speech practices of individuals never correspond with the distinct varieties (e.g., Bamanan, Maninka, Jula etc.) as proposed by linguists (Canut, 1996, 2001). Vydrin’s (1999b) choice to publish a bi-dialectal Manding-English dictionary as opposed to a single Bamanan-English version demonstrates this tension between Manding and its varieties that linguists face in their work.

My point here is not to undermine the value of linguistic description or theorizing; both play an important role in our attempts to better understand language as part of cognition, education and society. I am motivated rather by the fact that:

[...] the study of language use, in whatever academic discipline, cannot ignore actors' own concepts, descriptions and understandings of reality. Nor can the

study of language use be detached from the social and political context in which language is used (Cameron et al., 1992, pp. 12–13).

My approach to language and this study thus stems from a philosophical paradigm of critical realism (Corson, 1997). As Maxwell (2012) discusses, critical realism combines ontological realism with epistemological constructivism. Thus while Manding and the divisions within it may be real and in theory correctly classified linguistically, speakers', individuals' and even linguists' understanding of Manding are inevitably their own construction. As a result this study will adopt a social constructivist (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Creswell, 2013) approach to explore the interface between the linguistic reality of forms and speakers' interpretation of them through models of usage.

The Total Linguistic Fact: reflexivity, metapragmatics and register.

Linguists have approached the issue of speakers' rationalizations of language form and use in different ways. For Saussure and other structural linguists following in his path (Bloomfield, 1933; Chomsky, 1965), the solution was rather simple: ignore them. Situated within an idealized monolingual and perfectly homogenous speech community and focused on accessing an innate capacity and competence in *langue*, any rationalizations about language from speakers beyond grammaticality judgements are simply distorting factors in the elicitation of forms. Chomsky's influence in the early 1960s and onwards would reshape American Linguistics departments by shifting their focus from fieldwork aimed at creating new grammars, lexicons and transcribed texts to theoretical models of a cognitive system of Universal Grammar underlying the use of all languages (Chomsky, 1975). This shift radically altered the trajectory of a generation of

classically-trained field linguists as Chomsky's idea spread across Linguistics departments as part of the so-called cognitive revolution.

It did not however preclude certain linguists from insisting that, on at least one level, Chomsky's (1965) model was not empirically valid if it did not attend to the "orderly heterogeneity" (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog, 1968, p. 188) that seemed to be, in fact, inherent to speech communities around the world. For Labov (1972, p. 200), this synchronic variation was the rationale for a linguistics—variationist sociolinguistics—that would study "parasitic" social meaning as a necessary part of accounting for language change. On his account, the lack of homogeneity did not signal the death of the speech community as a concept, but rather a need to re-tool it to incorporate variation alongside a notion of shared evaluations (Labov, 1972, p. 195). However, Labov's formulation, while seemingly social, did not deviate from a Chomskyan mentalist conception of *langue*; speakers could vary in their deployment of linguistic forms depending on varying contextual styles, but ultimately the analyst's interest was in eliciting "the vernacular", or "the style in which the minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech" (Labov, 1972, p. 181). In this sense, the approach was distinctly *asocial*. The deployment of linguistic forms was not accounted for by attending to speakers' rationalizations, the interaction, nor the ethnographic context—it was determined by an expert linguist's sense of when a speaker was no longer paying attention to their speech.

Labov's vision of sociolinguistics was not however the only one developed in the 1960s. Around the same time, the linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes worked to propose an alternative approach to the social side of language. Known as the ethnography

of speaking/communication (Hymes, 1962, 1964, 1972), this research program did not hold social meaning to be “parasitic” on language. Functionalist in nature, this approach saw reference as but one potential purpose of communication through speech acts (Hymes, 1962; Jakobson, 1960). Studying these diverse functions however required attention to *in situ* use. While Chomsky (1965) had deemed that linguists’ object of interest was solely a mentalistic *competence* of forms separated from actual use or *performance*, Hymes insisted that the two could not be separated and were in fact intertwined through a trajectory of socialization that gave a speaker “communicative competence” in a particular speech community (Hymes, 1972). On this view, speaker’s rationalizations about language were an important set of data and not something to be chopped off, à la Chomsky, or simply noted (primarily as footnotes), à la Labov.

Hymes’s insistence on the interconnectedness between form and function was in essence a gesture towards a need to investigate what later linguistic anthropologists have called “the total linguistic fact” (Silverstein, 1985; Wortham, 2008). This object of study however has a long lineage beginning with a Boasian conception of linguistics (Agha, 2007b; Boas, 1911), stretching through Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956), that while attentive to grammatical categories, never sought to restrict linguistics to the study of *langue* as extracted from *parole*.

Originally elaborated by Silverstein (1985), the total linguistic fact encompasses what Wortham (2008) refers to as form, use, ideology and domain.¹⁹ *Form* in this sense denotes the lexemes and grammar of language. While a necessary part of any linguistic

¹⁹ Note parallels between these four categories and Hymes’s (1972) notions of communicative competence being defined by what is *possible, feasible, appropriate* and *done*.

behavior, attending to forms through norms of denotation alone cannot tell us the meaning of an utterance. This is because speakers *use* language in creative and unexpected ways that create emergent meaning that befuddles any rule-based account of grammar or pragmatics (e.g., Searle, 1975). In addition however, no matter how well one dissects the interaction at hand, one cannot ascertain the meaning of an utterance without also appealing to larger circulating models that are known to certain *domains* or segments of people. These “models of linguistic signs and the people who characteristically use them” (Wortham, 2008, p. 40) are frequently referred to by linguistic anthropologists as *language ideologies* (Jaffe, 1999; Kroskrity, 2000; Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998).

While ideology conjures up the image of something existing in the head, semiotically-oriented linguistic anthropologists reject such a mentalist approach and instead focus on language’s fundamentally “reflexive” character (Agha, 2007a; Lucy, 1993). A simple way of putting this insight is that people are constantly engaged in talk about talk. More specifically:

speech is permeated by reflexive activity as speakers remark on language, report utterances, index and describe aspects of the speech event, invoke conventional names, and guide listeners in the proper interpretation of their utterances. This reflexivity is so pervasive and essential that we can say that language is, by nature, fundamentally reflexive (Lucy, 1993, p. 11)

Language use therefore always has an inherently *metalinguistic* character to it. In linguistic anthropological research this character has typically been understood as fundamentally being about *metapragmatics* (Silverstein, 1976); or the way in which this metalinguistics most frequently boils down to being about pragmatics or the “appropriate *use* of language (Lucy, 1993, p. 17, emphasis in the original). Silverstein (1993) teases this notion apart by distinguishing *metapragmatic discourse* from *metapragmatic*

function. Metapragmatic discourse refers to explicit instances of metapragmatic speech. A clear example would be an utterance such as “That’s slang.” But similar commentary on speech could and indeed does routinely occur much more implicitly through language’s continual *metapragmatic function*. A trajectory of socialization through friends, family and institutions over the course of one’s lifetime provides an individual with tacit commentary that determines the stereotypical social values of certain ways of speaking regardless of whether it is ever expressed as overtly as in the example above.

Thus while language ideologies may seem mentalistic, they are in fact reflexive models mediating between the use of language and the social world that are empirically traceable through “*habits of evaluation*” (Agha, 2007a, p. 17, my emphasis) in the form of explicit metapragmatic commentary and *patterns of use* which individuals read as implicit metapragmatic commentary. Yes, language is inherently reflexive, but it would be wrong to view speakers’ rationalizations about language as preexisting willy-nilly on the whims of individual biases and preferences; they emerge through events of linguistic, and more broadly, semiotic communication that are part and parcel of larger *speech chain networks* (Agha, 2007a, p. 67) that give both grammatical structures and language ideologies a *domain* of potential users and construers. From this view, the rationalizations of speakers about language practices are therefore neither useless, parasitic, nor naive; they are in fact central to our understandings of the total linguistic fact and must be engaged with continually in the course of linguistic research.

Agha’s (2007a) notion of *register* is critical in this regard by providing a conceptualization that inherently links grammar and ways of speaking with the reflexive models (that is, language ideologies) that give speech its social meaning and value. In

both folk terms and some traditional formulations, a dialect is seen to inherently point to the regional provenance of a person, while a register is understood as a situational deviance from a core of denotational forms (Biber & Finegan, 1993; Halliday, 1964, 1978). The two concepts are interrelated and stem from a view that there is a direct relationship between grammatical features and something else: for Labovian sociolinguists it is a speaker's pure vernacular, for dialectologists it is someone's geographical location, and in practice they often end up being the same. Register in Agha's sense subsumes the two concepts under a single sociologically relevant conceptualization of patterned "fashions of speaking" (Whorf, 1956; Hymes, 1974). Registers therefore are not simply different ways of saying the same thing. They are rather "cultural models of action" identifiable by a *repertoire* (viz. linguistic features), *range* (viz. enactable pragmatic values) and *domain* (viz. a set of users) (Agha, 2007a, p. 55). Note that while registers may seemingly belong within a language, this conceptualization is not in itself code-centric and does not take as its primary concern categorizing stretches of discourse as belonging to one language or another (cf. Myers-Scotton, 1993; Poplack, 1980). This is not to say that grammatical patterning—syncretic or otherwise—is not salient; on the contrary, it may be of the utmost importance, but its weight must be determined by attending to speakers' views. Registers may thus appear to be situational subcodes (Gumperz, 1962), regional dialects within a socially identifiable language, or hybrids that span multiple languages.

This is an important alternative to the traditional linguistics understanding of a so-called dialect. Typically understood as a natural category existing between speech communities separated by "lines of weakness" in the density of communication

(Bloomfield, 1926), this view shifts our understanding to see dialects, not as naturally-existing objects in the world, but rather as sociologically constituted norms of behavior that are *enregistered* to a place through socio-historical processes “whereby diverse behavioral signs [...] are functionally reanalyzed as cultural models of action” (Agha, 2007a, p. 55). While a traditional linguistic account does not attend to the processes which give rise to distinctly valorized ways of speaking known as dialects, registers, or even languages, this study views it as an essential and proposes to approach it through the lens of metalinguistic or reflexive discourse.

In doing so, my study seemingly stretches beyond matters deemed purely linguistic by some. As I have shown above, language as an object of study cannot be reduced to the study of synchronic snapshots of *langue*—that is, grammar—without fundamentally ignoring its essential role in social relations. The task for a social theory of language is to account for “how particular systems of speech valorization come into existence in the first place” (Agha, 2007a, pp. 15-16). As such, I focus on linguistic forms, but do so primarily in service of investigating the social processes in which N’ko are engaged through their use of language. In this sense, my study, in particular in Chapter 5 and 6, is *discourse analytic* because of how I provide “systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech, writing, and other signs” (Wortham & Reyes, 2015, p. 1).

Scholars of language have long investigated such speech as a form of social action. Researchers working under the banner of the Ethnography of Communication/Speaking (Hymes, 1962, 1964, 1972), for instance, attended to the relevant context of language use they observed by drawing on different frames (“speech

event” up to “speech community”) captured by the mnemonic of SPEAKING. Such work revealed major divergences between different cultural groups in terms of norms of language socialization and classroom participation (e.g., Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983). Later, work in Interactional Sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) focused less on pre-elaborated levels of context and more on the process on how speakers establish relevant context through the use of “contextualization cues”. Such research frequently analyzed instances of cross-cultural misunderstanding through the use of recordings that were played back for participants (e.g. Roberts, Davies, & Jupp, 1992). Finally, scholars working under the label of Microethnography (Erickson, 1992) drew heavily on video-recordings and the salience of non-linguistic signs in interaction (e.g., Erickson & Shultz, 1982).

All of these various traditions of discourse analysis have also been applied in educational research known as Classroom Discourse Analysis (Cazden, 1988; Rymes, 2009). In this vein, Wortham (2005) made the important contribution of seeking to use tools of discourse analysis to connect disparate classroom interactions and thereby demonstrate empirically how language serves to accomplish social action (“socialization” in the article’s case) across an academic year. This work and similar scholarship has important implications for discourse analytic research even outside of the classroom. In the chapters to come, I follow this tradition of linguistic anthropological discourse analysis that seeks to go “beyond the speech event” and apply the methods and tools developed by Wortham & Reyes (2015) in their recent book as part of my effort to analyze the total linguistic fact.

Doing Language Policy.

This understanding of language as fundamentally reflexive and mediated by metapragmatic discourse and function has unique implications for what we commonly refer to as language policy. In scholarly terms the field of language policy and planning (LPP) began to emerge alongside sociolinguistics, beginning the 1960s and following the publication of Haugen's (1959) piece on language planning in Norway. Ricento (2000) sees the field in terms of a number of historical stages. Initially, LPP was classified by a phase in which scholars were interested in not only classifying sociolinguistic arrangements in societies (e.g., Kloss, 1968) but also in crafting theories to, on one hand, develop languages (e.g., Ferguson, 1968; Haugen, 1966) and on another solve "language problems" (Fishman, Ferguson, & Dasgupta, 1968; Neustupny, 1974), in particular for newly independent post-colonial societies and nation-states (e.g., Kloss, 1969; see Hornberger, 1994 for a framework synthesizing many of the concepts and ideas emerging from these early scholars).

This developmentalist phase eventually gave way to a second wave of scholarship in the 1980s that was faced with the failure of post-colonial modernization policies. Inspired by conflict-based accounts of the world stemming from critical social theory and post-modernism, this wave of scholars questioned "neoclassical" approaches to LPP based on benevolent and rational decision-making and instead aimed for "sociohistorical" analyses to expose how the underlying categories and approaches of the former era actually "planned inequality" instead of efficiency or development (Tollefson, 1991). This line of work and its findings of world-wide "linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992) however, while doing important work to interrogate the roles and perspectives of

both governments, planners and LPP scholars, remained focused primarily on LPP from a top-down perspective (Kaplan, 1989).

Beginning in the late 1980s (Hornberger, 1988) and 1990s (Aikman, 1999; Freeman, 1998; Jaffe, 1999) and echoing a later trend in education policy research (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009; Sutton & Levinson, 2001), scholars sought to focus on LPP in educational settings by utilizing ethnographic research methods to study the “bottom-up” (Hornberger, 1996) actions, interpretations and appropriations of students, teachers, administrators and more broadly citizens. Tracing language policy across “layers” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), this trend has continued and expanded (Canagarajah, 2005) to culminate under the banners of the *ethnography of language policy* (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011a) and *New Language Policy Studies* (McCarty, Collins, & Hopson, 2011).

This turn towards ethnographic approaches emerged in tandem with LPP scholars’ concepts, such as *linguistic culture* (H. Schiffman, 1996) and *language beliefs* (Spolsky, 2004), meant to capture the ways language policy is constituted in everyday life (McCarty, 2011b). Hopson (2011, p. 284), for instance, suggests that LPP is ultimately definable as “language-regulating modes of human interaction, negotiation and production.” Given the reflexive understanding of language and metapragmatics outlined above, this definition is not surprising—humans are constantly engaged in talk about talk. But does this by extension mean that all of these individuals, in all of these instances, are engaging in the activity of language policy-making? How do we distinguish language policy from language in use and norms of interaction (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011b, p. 285)? While habits of evaluation and patterns of usage are essential parts of defining the

social value of speech and in turn a society's *de facto* language policy, that does not necessarily make all of them tokens of the policy-making that define a *de jure* institutional or governmental language policy (Schiffman, 1996, 2006). For the purposes of this dissertation and drawing on the tools of linguistic anthropology, I propose to distinguish these types of behavior by analyzing them as different kinds of metapragmatic discourse.

In the domain of explicit metapragmatic activity with an organizational locus one can use the term *language planning* to refer to the range of activities seeking to regulate language form, use and its connection to different kinds of people and activities. This falls in line with the definition of Robert Cooper (1989, p. 45) who defines language planning as "deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language code" (p. 45). This definition suggests that language planning activities, although always intertwined, can be usefully distinguished into three areas of focus: corpus, status, and acquisition planning. *Corpus planning* refers to language planning that acts upon the grammatical code itself. Most typically we think of corpus planning as pertaining to "orthographic, grammatical and lexical codification" (Hornberger, 2006, p. 26) or what is more commonly (and misleadingly) referred to as standardization. *Status planning* is the "allocation of languages or language varieties to given functions, e.g. medium of instruction, official language, vehicle of mass communication" (Cooper, 1989, p. 32). This is typically used to refer to a government's recognition of a language as official or of an institution's adoption of some language as a working language. But as suggested above, this may more generally refer to the attempt to have a way of speaking (whether in a particular

language or simply a register) accepted as appropriate in a certain domain or for a certain kind of behavior. *Acquisition planning* is language planning “directed towards increasing the number of users—speakers, writers, listeners or readers” (p. 33). This typically denotes activities such as language classrooms or radio shows that function either to explicitly teach a language or register or to disseminate competence in a particular language or register.

I conceptualize *language policy* in a broader sense and use it to refer to overall governmental, organizational or institutional stances towards language and the linguistic behavior of different kinds of people and activities. Language planning activities thus are subordinate to language policy, in that they alone do not define it. Language planning can be understood to make up an official or *de jure* language policy, but through routine metapragmatic discourse, both inside and outside of institutional contexts, *de facto* language policy is constituted and negotiated every day. This expanded understanding of language policy as constituted through both language planning as well as general metapragmatic discourse makes clear “we all have a stake in language policies” (Ricento, 2006, p. 21), whether we are official planners or not. These overall stances are of course language ideological and must be studied for the ways that they seek to produce and regulate links between types of people and behavior. As Blommaert (2006, p. 244) puts it, “[I]anguage policy is invariably based on linguistic ideologies, on images of ‘societally desirable’ forms of language usage and of the ‘ideal’ linguistic landscape of society, in turn often derived from sociopolitical ideologies”. The essential component of analyzing language policy then is connecting language ideologies to larger sociopolitical ideologies

and uncovering how they are utilized in the pursuit of social change (of both the positive and negative kind).

Informed by this theoretical and larger conceptual framework, I address the following questions in this dissertation:

1. How and under the influence of what socio-political projects did Sulemaana Kantè call into being both a script and language?
2. How do N'ko activists—in their educational and promotional activities—metalinguistically engage with the proper name *N'ko* as a label for both the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949 and the Manding language itself?
3. How is their engagement, use and promotion of N'ko—be it a language or a script—for mother-tongue education connected to larger socio-political projects and changes in West Africa?

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this dissertation, I engage with the questions introduced in Chapter 2, through a multi-sited ethnographic study that also draws on historical and linguistic research related to both Manding, N’ko and the history of West African literacy and language policy. This follows from the fact that my research focuses on the N’ko movement which, while not a geographically-bounded community, in many ways functions as a single “community of practice” (Mary Bucholtz, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991) of Manding-speaking educators, activists and language planners.

Figure 4: April 2016 Facebook post promoting N’ko as a single association [tón] (279)



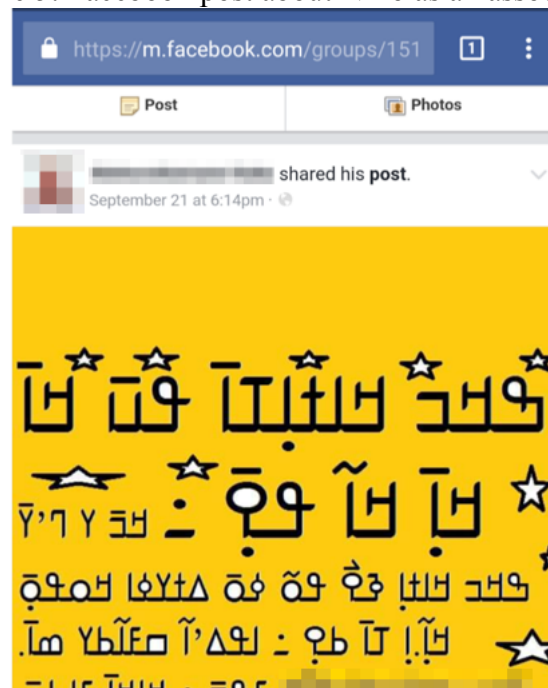
Án bée yé án fánká lú dón ná jònsá' N'kó' dí tède kó' bée dè. ò dè, án tóò lè N'ko. An' jàmún' fáná lè N'ko dí. Án ná kó lú bée ká kán kà ké N'ko lè dí. kìsikása' té bèn tón nìn dè. Álama sàbatii' síyad'án ná kéli lú dè, ál'à ké' tén [sic throughout]

Let us all make an effort so that N’ko is found in all matters. Thus, our first name is N’ko. Our last name is also N’ko. All of our affairs should be in in N’ko. This organization [tón] is no place for complexes. Make God increase zeal in our actions. May God make it so (279).

Indeed, N’koísants themselves often insist on such a dynamic and understand themselves as a specific constituency even when there is not one over-arching organization that connects or coordinates them all. See for instance, the Facebook post in Figure 4 that explicitly typifies the N’ko movement as an “association” [tón].

Activists, of course, recognize that there are a range of opinions within their group. Nonetheless, even in such cases, they insist there is an underlying thought and desire that holds them together. This dynamic is illustrated in another Facebook post in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Facebook post about N’ko as an association



*N’ko káranna’ lú [sic] ká kán kà [sic] lón, kó í n’í N’ko káran’ j’óò lè yé míriya’
kélen kàn, án ná tón’, álam’à sàbati’ [sic] dá*

Students of N'ko should know you and your fellow N'ko student are of the same mind. May God strengthen our group [tón] (1231)

As such, this study focuses on N'ko across a range of research sites and contexts that I frequented intermittently beginning in 2012 up until 2016 as outlined in the following section.

Access and Contexts

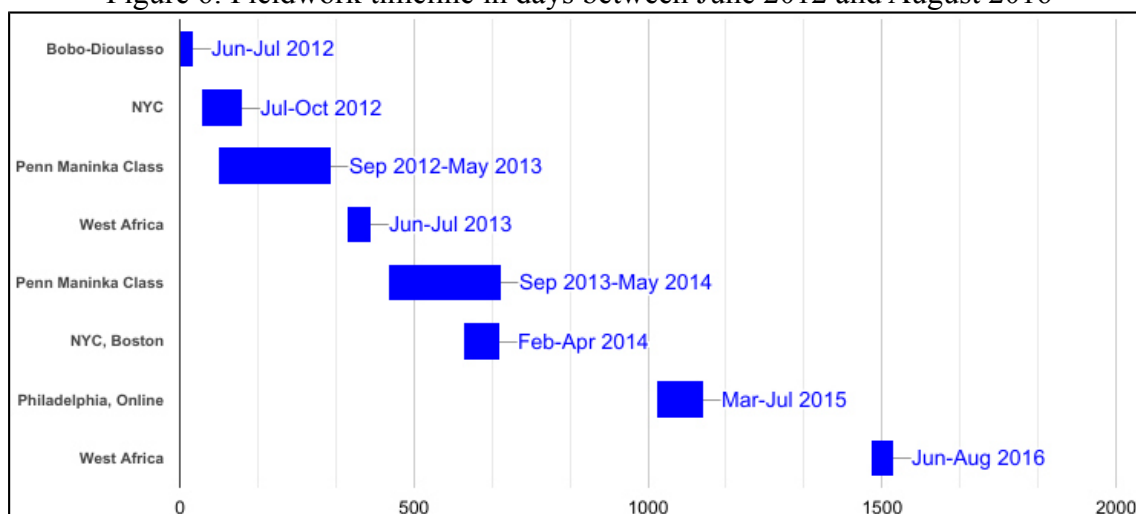
After having worked part-time in post-*alphabétisation* trainings in Jula for two years in rural Burkina Faso, I was originally interested in studying formal adult literacy centers and their place in the lives of the participants as well as the education system of Burkina Faso. However, while pursuing preliminary research on the history of adult literacy in West Africa and Manding linguistics at *l'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales*, I was introduced to the N'ko alphabet and movement in my coursework under Valentin Vydrin, a Russian researcher who himself has published a number of articles on N'ko (2011, 2012, 1996, 2001b, 2001a, 2010) and even the first volume of a Manding dictionary (1999b) that incorporates the script. Given that the N'ko orthography is in many ways the exact opposite of what Western-trained linguists believed was most appropriate for promoting African languages, I was fascinated to see that there were entire books, a grammar, a dictionary and an online community of N'ko users. In addition, my preliminary review of the academic literature on N'ko (e.g., Wyrod, 2003, 2008) and online explorations made it seem as if N'ko was expanding outside of Guinea. As a result when I returned to Burkina Faso in 2012, I decided that I would also be on the lookout for any signs of it. Assuming that N'ko may have spread from Guinea into Mali, I was nonetheless skeptical that it would have crossed another

border into Burkina Faso, especially since I had not heard of, let alone seen it over the course of two years of actively seeking out any and all forms of written Jula between 2009 and 2011. To my surprise though, my contacts and exploring over the first couple weeks eventually put me in touch with a small group of people gathering daily for N'ko lessons in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso. Having not planned to find any N'ko students and being busy pursuing other projects, I changed course partially and spent two weeks in total (with a small break in between when I was elsewhere in Burkina) as a full participant and student in their nightly N'ko courses while also interviewing some of them informally.

Following this 2012 fieldwork in Burkina Faso, and before beginning my coursework at the University of Pennsylvania, I resolved to look into N'ko's presence on the East Coast of the United States after having read a New York Times article (Rosenberg, 2011) profiling the efforts of one N'ko activist to get the orthography onto modern technological devices. Having seen some YouTube videos of N'ko events in the New York City area, I decided to go to the address of one of the stores listed as selling books. It was through this visit that I ended up meeting Ibrahima Traore (᠎ᠠᠷᠠᠬᠢᠮᠠ ᠲᠠᠷᠠᠬᠤ) (Íbrahimà Tárawele). We became fast friends and I spent time with him on a handful of occasions before the start of my first year at Penn; either running errands around the city, or assisting his N'ko heritage classes for children in a mosque in the Bronx. Since these two experiences in 2012, I have worked with, befriended and studied with a range of N'ko scholars, students and activists face-to-face across West Africa and the East Coast of the United States, and virtually in places such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Thailand, Europe and Angola (to name a few) by hanging out, tuning into and sometimes attending

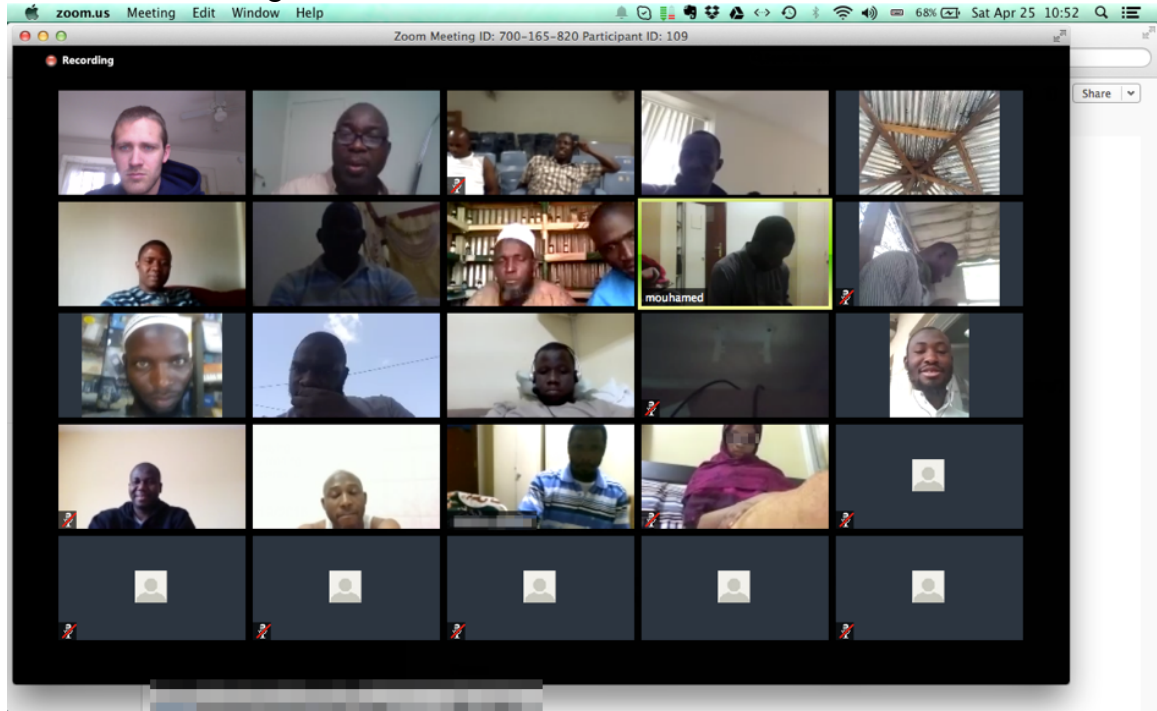
or speaking on radio shows, observing heritage language classes, going to events and receiving formal Manding instruction from N’ko scholars (See Figure 6 for a summary of this ethnographic fieldwork across time and locales).

Figure 6: Fieldwork timeline in days between June 2012 and August 2016



As this summary makes clear, my study’s N’ko participants are not from one site. That said, they do represent in many ways a coherent “community of practice” (Mary Bucholtz, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991); for even when they do not engage in regular face-to-face encounters, N’ko activists are connected either indirectly to one another through N’ko texts or, more often than not, directly through ever-growing forms of modern communication such as websites, Skype, Zoom video conferencing or Whatsapp, allowing “speech chain networks” (Agha, 2007) to form seamlessly across locales (see Figure 7). Since my initial contact in Bobo-Dioulasso and New York City in 2012, all of my subsequent interactions with N’ko scholars and circles in Bamako, Kankan, Sigiri, Abidjan, Conakry, Boston and Philadelphia have happened organically as I reached out to former contacts in one locale before setting out for another.

Figure 7: Online N'ko class via video teleconference.



Having approached the N'ko network ethnographically, I cannot speak of any formal participant selection criteria. My connections however have been overwhelmingly adult males. This stems in part from my own positionality coupled with West African gender norms, but also certainly from N'ko's own internal dynamic, which is overwhelmingly male (Vydrin, 2012, p. 65; Wyrod, 2003), despite some key female figures that I have encountered in both West Africa and the United States (see also Hellweg, 2013). In N'ko classes for children that I have observed, in both the US and West Africa however, there have always been female and male students and more often than not in equal numbers.

Over the years, I have had little difficulty making friendships with teachers and students of N'ko that have been eager to both teach me and have me participate in a range of their endeavors as a guest speaker at conferences, gatherings, on the radio or being

featured in online videos and articles. Some may see this as a sign of me simply being used as a form of external validation or publicity by savvy N'ko activists; and I have certainly played the role of the token White expert-researcher at times (in particular for Manding-speakers outside of N'ko circles themselves). Many N'ko students and scholars are well aware of my role as doctoral student at Penn and have long known of my dissertation's partial if not full focus on N'ko as a social movement built around literacy and language. Indeed, they support it and have urged me to pursue my doctoral studies to their completion. Part of this stems from the kind encouragement one gives a friend, but another part of it is that they are hopeful that my dissertation research can serve as an important next step for the movement. Indeed, as early as 2012, an N'ko activist recounted to me how he spoke with a number of other prominent N'ko activists about my potential dissertation project and whether he should take the job as my instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. (He said yes.) This same individual at numerous times has hinted at how he thinks the dissertation will be important for me career-wise, as a unique contribution, as well as something that will hopefully serve the N'ko movement, though he is less explicit about just how exactly it will do so. From my point of view, this belief that it will help stems from the fact that the N'ko movement remains largely a grassroots phenomenon without governmental support or official recognition. As such research conducted by an American from Penn is inevitably seen as something legitimizing in itself (just as is the news that N'ko is also being offered at the university).

My access to N'ko circles and classes has also always flowed naturally from the ways in which I believe I am also construed as an ally. And I gather that I am one. I sympathize in many ways with the goals of the N'ko movement. My own path into

academia stems from own personal belief that African languages have not taken their deserved role in African society and my desire to understand how they could better be utilized in governmental and educational circumstances. Moreover, my interest in the N'ko movement emerges not just from curiosity, but also a deep respect for the cause that they have dedicated themselves to. A passion for Manding language and literacy as manifested by my ever incomplete mastery of the language as well as N'ko itself has not hurt. As such, my research has always been guided by not just a desire to explicate N'ko for outsiders, but also to produce findings that would be embraced as at least plausible, if not completely correct, in the eyes of participants themselves. Note that this is in direct contrast to Amselle (2001, p. 134) who claims that his ability to research N'ko was ruined after a graduate student foolishly circulated one of his articles that revealed the “anti-arab” and “anti-European” tendencies of N'ko “doctrine” amongst his research participants.

This is not to say that I agree with everything that N'ko scholars and students say and I have been open about this. Some of the founder's writings for instance include historical information that in light of other research seems unlikely (see this explored in Conrad, 2001). These accounts however are frequently treated as the truth within certain N'ko circles. Moreover, my own linguistic training has led me to understand that yes, the N'ko orthography is a particularly well-adapted orthography for writing Manding, but it remains, nonetheless, just another set of graphic characters, and in theory Arabic- or Latin-script could serve equally as well. This interpretation differs wildly from the narrative that I have heard over the last five years within N'ko circles. In both of these cases and others however, I have found that most N'ko activists and especially those who

are the most engaged and learned are very sympathetic to differing interpretations. This likely stems from N’ko itself being a rationalist project that seeks to democratize knowledge through mother-tongue education (Kántε, 2004, 2008a, p. 4). My own questions, recordings, interviews and comments as an “educational linguist” (Hornberger & Hult, 2006; Hult, 2008; Spolsky, 2008) therefore fit right in with N’ko activists’ own dedication to understanding and mastering something—N’ko. In this light, I had nothing to hide and in return I have been welcomed into N’ko activists’ homes, stores, mosques and bookshops in many different ways since 2012.

From the Fall of 2012 through the Spring of 2014 I took one-on-one intermediate and advanced Maninka courses with an N’ko instructor and activist who traveled to Philadelphia for our weekly courses funded by a Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship that I was awarded for two academic years at the University of Pennsylvania. While these were organized classes, the fact that I was the only student and that the instructor knew of my research meant that they often also functioned as informal interviews when we were not focused on reading N’ko texts themselves.

During the summer of 2013 I was awarded a Summer FLAS to study advanced Maninka for six weeks with an N’ko instructor at l’*Université de Julius Nyérére* in Kankan, Guinea. Both my time in coursework as well as my hours outside of class functioned again as ethnographic research as I visited N’ko teachers, authors and attended events around town. In addition, before and after my time in Kankan, I also spent a number of weeks conducting similar ethnographic research amongst N’ko activists, students and authors in Bamako, Mali. During this same summer, I spent a

number of days with the N’ko activists of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso that I had befriended in 2012. In total I was in West Africa for eight weeks.

During the Spring of 2014 I conducted four overnight visits over three months to sit-in on, listen to, and participate in an N’ko radio-show produced and broadcast in the private home of an N’ko activist in the New York City area and attended N’ko cultural events held in Boston and New York City.

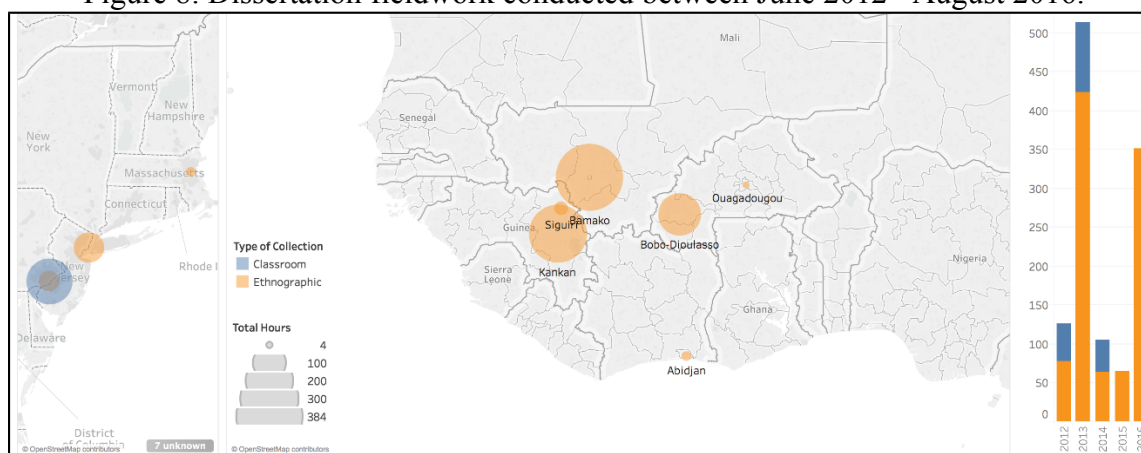
During the Spring and Summer of 2015, I conducted ethnographic research amongst a number of N’ko activists along the East Coast and in Philadelphia in their push to set up and promote N’ko literacy classes as heritage classes for children.

During the Fall of 2015, while working on an unrelated project in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire I met up with N’ko activists and attended and spoke at a gathering at a community mosque and N’ko study center.

Next, during the Summer of 2016 I conducted an additional six-weeks of research back in West Africa. Bouncing between locales, I spent approximately one month in and around Bamako, along with one week in and around Kankan and Bobo-Dioulasso each.

The totality of my fieldwork in terms of locales and hours is summarized in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Dissertation fieldwork conducted between June 2012 - August 2016.



Data Collection

The ethnographic research (Agar, 1980; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Heath & Street, 2008) of this dissertation relied primarily on the tools of participant observation, recorded and unrecorded informal interviews (Briggs, 1986; Weiss, 1994) and artifact collection. In collecting these diverse data types, I used discourse analytic methods (Blommaert, 2004; Wortham, 2001; Wortham & Reyes, 2015) to focus on both content and linguistic forms. This stemmed from both my own training and interest as well as the nature of the N’ko movement itself. Centered around orthography, literacy and language—at least inside of the classroom—the N’ko movement necessarily focuses on linguistic forms and thereby contributes to and interacts with linguistic registers and ideologies. Particularly important in this regard was my focus on metapragmatic commentary (or more briefly *metacommentary* [Rymes, 2014]) or when people “refer to and predicate about language in use” (Wortham, 2001, p. 71). My study therefore is an ethnographic sociolinguistic investigation (one might call it a “linguistic ethnography” in certain European traditions of today [e.g., Creese, 2008; Pérez-Milans, 2015]) because of its tracking of linguistic forms, associated metadiscursive behavior and ultimately the larger

linguistic ideologies that allow them to circulate in classrooms, lessons and other face-to-face encounters.

Concretely, I used ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) as a means of capturing data from both participant observation, unrecorded interviews and conversations. These fieldnotes were made through a two-step process of *jottings* taken in a notebook or on my phone, which I then utilized as a means of producing, as soon as possible and in private, full-fledged field notes with contextual details, quotes, paraphrases and my own preliminary thoughts. This typically took place at the end of the day or when I was back at home after my errands had been completed. For both jottings and notes completed from my phone, I used the Android app *Plain.txt* which allowed me to create simple .txt documents that could both handle the N’ko script and be easily transferred into other software such as *Atlas.ti* which I used for data analysis (see the following section). In the case of handwritten notes taken in class or elsewhere, I used a variety of notebooks but in the end embraced the Cambridge Business Notebook which has a durable hardcover (essential when there is no desk), perforated pages with a built-in date section, self-adhesive labels for archiving, an internal pocket for loose sheets and—best of all— it lays flat. On a few rare occasions I audio-recorded my post-facto fieldnotes or jottings using my phone.

Whenever possible I also did audio recording of interactions, events, radio shows or similar happenings. To do so I typically relied on a handheld recorder with a built-in USB dongle: the Olympus WS-600S. Later in my fieldwork I also utilized my phone when the recorder was not handy. In such cases, I used the Android app *Hi-Q MP3 Recorder*. All of these recordings were logged with summarizing transcriptions through

the use of either the software InqScribe or ELAN. Particularly compelling segments or recordings were transcribed in full (Bucholtz, 2007; Bucholtz, 2000; Park & Bucholtz, 2009) using ELAN in accordance with my interest in explicit metapragmatic discourse and later more emergent themes stemming from the research and analysis process (see Data Analysis below). When deemed both feasible and desirable, I conducted and recorded informal interviews utilizing both my research questions as well as emergent insights. In such cases, I used the recording devices describe above. In the end, I did 23 formally recorded interviews. I transcribed these in full using ELAN.

Figure 9: Summary of audio recordings by number and total hours

Subtype	Count	Total Hours
Conference	39	9.28
Interview	23	15.70
Radio	12	9.78
Classroom	7	2.20
Reading	4	0.33
Speech	2	1.24
Quranic Study	2	0.12
Online Class	2	0.03
Interaction	2	0.07
Grand Total	93	38.75

Early on, before my research relationships were well-established and recording may have been detrimental to relationship building, I opted to conduct a number of interviews informally via the same process used for participant observation fieldnotes outlined above. A summary of my audio recordings across different kinds of subtypes can be found in Figure 9:

Finally, I gathered both real life and virtual artifacts. Real life artifacts such as flyers, documents, ads, magazines and newspapers were either collected when possible or documented via a digital photograph or video using my cellphone in the case of signs,

billboards etc. Additionally, included in this category are digital forms of communication such as online postings, videos and interviews that were disseminated by N’ko students and teachers through Facebook, Twitter and various websites. If the posts were primarily text- or image-based I collected them via screenshots from my computer or cellphone and then subsequently uploaded into a single “notebook” of the software program *Evernote* (later selectively transferred into Atlas.ti). In the end then, this formed a sort of running digital archive of salient posts that I cherry-picked from the endless deluge of messages and social media postings. In the case of video or audio excerpts shared online, I saved the posts on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc., and then later digitally downloaded them using various third-party websites. In total, my dataset includes 22 digital videos that I either pulled from online or recorded myself.

Another critical source of so-called artifacts that I collected were print publications of various N’ko authors and organizations. Particularly important in this regard were the general and in particular linguistics works of Sulemaana Kantè (1992, 2004, 2003 2007, 2008, 2008, 2009) which I analyze formally in the chapters to follow. Focusing on Kantè’s own intellectual engagement with history, religion, language, writing and Manding registers allowed me not only to more properly situate him historically (see Chapter 4), but also to better understand his specific formulations about language, orthography and Manding itself (see Chapters 4-6). This in turn provided key insights for understanding what ideas of his are central to N’ko literacy’s continued spread and how they are shifted and mobilized by students and scholars today. Equally important in this regard were the other N’ko newspapers and books that I purchased or picked up throughout my fieldwork. A number of them are quoted from in this

dissertation, but they do not represent the total number of works that I consulted or now possess.

My ethnographic dataset as entered into Atlas.ti is summarized below in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Count of non-audio recorded “documents” in ethnographic dataset (sorted by document subtype)

Document Subtype	Count
Article	11
Book	41
Document	38
Fieldnote	183
Internal	3
Memo	3
Newspaper	3
Photo	415
Screenshot	201
Translation	1
Video	22
Grand Total	921

Note that this does not include any of my audio recorded interviews or interactions which I outlined above. While I did in fact enter many loggings and transcripts of these recordings into Atlas.ti, I have decided to keep them separate for clarity's sake and because during the writing and analysis stage, I continued to transcribe and log audio recordings without necessarily updating my original dataset as entered into Atlas.ti.

In terms of linguistic forms, in both my fieldnotes and transcriptions of audio data I always strove to mark Manding words as accurately as possible within the purview of a broad phonemic transcription and established orthographic conventions for certain words (e.g., *kósebe* in place of what is often pronounced *kósobe*). On occasion, readers familiar with Manding may be shocked to see certain so-called Maninka, Bamanan or Jula forms appearing in cities where they do not expect them. While I cannot be sure of my transcriptions that arise from my notebooks, and while I have not subjected every

utterance to spectrogram analysis using the software Praat, I have striven to be as saliently accurate as necessary and possible given the quality of the recordings. Inevitably however there are surely words and sentences where I have relied on convention instead of phonemic or phonetic reality. In other cases where a form looks truly out of place (e.g., <l> in place of <d> or <gb> in place of <g> and vice-versa), I would ask that the reader take my rendering on good faith or contact me for the recordings.

In the case of written Manding using N'ko, I have transliterated it when necessary using a specific transliteration scheme outlined prior to Chapter 1. This is entirely appropriate for analyzing written N'ko, but it unfortunately has the adverse effect of obscuring the divergences between written and read N'ko (this dynamic is touched upon primarily in Chapter 6). One should not therefore understand N'ko transliterations as evidence of people reciting the text as written. In fact, in some cases, I have seen N'ko activists “interpret” an N'ko text with different dialectal equivalents in real-time (e.g., changing the postposition *dí* to *yé* or the possessive marker *lá~ná* to *ká*). Of course, in Western languages like English we unflinchingly note words down by their conventionalized spelling. In the case of African languages with recently developed Latin-based orthographies though this is less common for two reasons. First, in many cases, linguists remain the dominant writers of African languages such as Manding. Second, when individuals are taught to write, they are instructed simply to write things out as they are pronounced.

Data Analysis

Starting in early 2016 I began to assemble my different kinds of data into the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti*. All of my text-based digital fieldnotes and

memos were added directly into the software. In the case of hand-written fieldnotes that I had not digitally typeset, I scanned them in their entirety and added them directly to the software as PDF files. Additionally, I directly added all of my personal photographs of people, events and artifacts as well as screenshots and downloaded video clips of digital artifacts. In the case of audio recordings, however, I opted to only input them into Atlas.ti as loggings or transcripts. The original files themselves therefore are not stored inside the software. Instead, I sorted and tracked them separately in their own spreadsheet with their own unique identifiers. This was similarly the case in terms of N’ko publications, which I also managed in a unique manner. Specifically, I tracked my personal archive of N’ko books using the reference management and annotation software Zotero. While I often worked through N’ko publications by hand as part of lessons or my own independent study, in the end, I used the software’s note feature to store my typesettings, transliterations, summaries and analyses. Given the interconnections between the texts and various ethnographic data that I collected, I ultimately exported these notes as PDFs which I then added to Atlas.ti to intermingle with the other kinds of data that I collected.

Regardless, across the data types I used a standardized file naming convention (TYPE_DESCRIPTION_CITY_YYYY.MM.DD [e.g., photo_speech-at-event_bamako_2015-06-30.jpeg]). This in turn allowed me to easily sort and search across my data within Atlas.ti. For instance, I could opt to search only through “Photos” or only for “Fieldnotes” from “Bamako”. Regardless, internally within the software I also created groups corresponding to each phase of fieldwork (e.g., Summer 2012, Spring 2015, etc.). In the case of two kinds of data I created groups not associated with particular fieldworks phases: “N’ko books” or “Online artifacts”.

Beginning in early 2016, I submitted this heterogeneous mix of participant observation, informal interviews and artifacts to inductive “open coding” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Using Atlas.ti’s coding and quotation features, I processed the data looking for salient moments and then providing them with preliminary labels. Following my last stint of fieldwork during the summer of 2016, I did a more guided review of my data, re-coding it with an eye to my research questions in particular. This is not to say that I developed “a priori codes” but rather that I used my original questions as a guide while also noting other emergent themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). One of my guiding principles therefore was tracking implicit and explicit *talk about talk*—that is, metapragmatic commentary. Ultimately, such discourse is interesting because of indexical links to other social processes that serve to explain how and why certain linguistic forms are taken up as social regularities. Nonetheless, such links are not always readily transparent just as the actual metapragmatic character of an utterance itself may not be. On principle though, I strove to identify and code all identifiable metapragmatic commentary even when its illuminating power or indexical links remained obscure to me before I moved onto to composition and formal analysis.

Another important component of my data analysis were my intermittent personal researcher *memos* (Maxwell, 2012). In fact, these memos initially figure into my data as part of my fieldnotes when I fleshed my initial loggings into proper fieldnotes. During this process, I would often write more interpretative segments with ideas of analysis for my future writing stage. Later more memos emerged while I transcribed, read, watched and listened to all of my data through 2016. These were variously incorporated into my

data as either their own “documents”²⁰ or as comments attached to quotations or documents within Atlas.ti. Whether as part of fieldnotes or as part of my post-fieldwork processing, such work was part of a formal effort to externalize the ethnographic process of iterating between data and interpretation. Concretely in my purely data analytic phase of 2016, it served to refine my labels into a set of codes that I continuously used, refined and added to in an effort to better categorize my data. Indeed, this was necessary—my final number of total codes was 233! The vast majority of codes however arose during inductive coding and did not apply to large number of “quotations”²¹ across the data. This dynamic is summarized below in Figure 10, which makes clear that 11 codes dominated by having anywhere between 40-59 quotations underneath them, whereas as 148 codes only applied to 0-9 quotations.

Figure 10: Frequency distribution of codes

# of Quotations Under a Code	Frequency
0-9	148
10-19	43
20-29	20
30-39	11
40-49	3
50-59	8
Total	233

In this sense, the writing process itself was in some ways also part of the coding phase. In many cases, as I drew on the various codes and their data-points (viz. “quotations”) to lay out an argument in prose, I was forced to return to the data. Sometimes this was because I needed to typeset a clip or take another look at associated pictures. Other times, it was because the act of writing itself sparked my memory and

²⁰ In Atlas.ti parlance, each token of data added to a project is referred to as a “document” regardless of format (viz. image/text/audio or video).

²¹ Again, Atlas.ti’s terminology to refer to any selected portion of a “document”.

sent me back into the data looking for a particularly striking moment of interest that I could use to illustrate a point. Regardless, it often led to me creating new codes or applying news ones to certain excerpts that had not struck me as belonging to a particular category originally.

Finally, it was throughout the writing phase that I iteratively improved and analyzed my transcriptions of recorded interactions and interviews. In this focused discourse analytic phase, I was guided by the linguistic anthropological theories and tools laid out in the methodological works of Stanton Wortham (e.g., 1996, 2001; Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Specifically, in focal transcripts I followed a three phase process of 1) identifying narrated events; 2) selecting, construing and configuring deictics, reported speech and “evaluative indexicals”²²; and, finally 3) interpreting the social action or process accomplished or furthered.

Historical Investigation

This ethnographic look at the N’ko movement was supplemented by historical research related to the historical emergence of both Latin- and Arabic-based script orthographies as forms of language planning and policy in West Africa. This work was primarily library-based because of the availability of sources as well as my limited means to pursue actual archival research in the colonial or West African Islamic archives of the region. I pursued this focus because these metadiscursive processes directly inform or lay in the path of the thoughts and actions of both Sulemaana Kantè and N’ko activists today.

²² Wortham & Reyes (2015, p. 51) use this term as a grab-bag for “indexes that point to relevant context in ways that potentially characterize and evaluate narrated characters and narrating participants.”

First, I conducted library-based research on colonial linguistics (Errington, 2001, 2008) in Africa (Blommaert, 2013; Fabian, 1986; Irvine, 2008; Peterson, 2006; Philips, 2000) and specifically the colonial encounter with Manding and the way French explorers, missionaries, linguists and colonial administrators engaged with and codified the Eastern Manding varieties that are widely known today: *malinké*, *dioula* and *bambara*. This entailed consulting both original sources (Binger, 1892; Delafosse, 1901, 1929, 1955; Labouret, 1934; Park, 1799; Travélé, 1913) as well as nascent secondary analysis (Bird, 1970; Calvet, 1981; Grosz-Ngaté, 1988; Jacobson, 2001; Mansour, 1993; Pawliková-Vilhanová, 2009; Sanogo, 2003, 2007, Van den Avenne, 2005, 2007, 2012, 2014, 2015b, 2015a) to track linguistic work and later French colonial policy vis-à-vis these named varieties. Finally, I turned to the transition from colonialism to independent State language policies in Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Utilizing both primary sources (e.g., UNESCO, 1964, 1966, 1974) and secondary literature (Sow, 1977; Sow & Abdulaziz, 1993), I investigated the countries' engagement with Manding language registers through orthography development (IILAC, 1930; Tucker, 1971) and literacy promotion.

Second, I also conducted library-based work on the Quranic education tradition (Kane, 2016; Ware III, 2014) and the historical emergence beginning in the 18th century of vernacular language scholars and so-called Ajami literacy in a variety of West African languages such as Fulani (Brenner & Last, 1985; Humery, 2013; Robinson, 1982; Salvaing, 2004), Hausa (Mack & Boyd, 2000; Philips, 2000; Zito, 2012), Wolof (Camara, 1997; Ngom, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2016) and Manding (Condé, 2008b; Dumestre & Vydrin, 2014; Tamari, 1994; Vydrin, 1998, 2014). Analyzing the words of Ajami scholars

themselves as well as secondary sources, in Chapter 4, I argue that N’ko is a particular iteration of the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition emerging from the Quranic schooling tradition that underlies Ajami literacy practices today.

Finally, to enrich prior historical analyses of N’ko (e.g., Amselle, 2001, 2003, Oyler, 1995, 2005; Wyrod, 2003), I utilized secondary sources and under exploited N’ko sources (Kánté, 2004, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Sangaré, 2011) to focus on Kantè’s actions as a form of language planning that directly challenged the institutional language policies of both the Quranic and the French colonial schooling systems. Building on prior work (Donaldson, In Press), in Chapter 4, I argue that his efforts were a particular iteration of Afro-Muslim thought that flirted with ethno-nationalism and used mother-tongue medium of instruction to offer a vision of West African society that was distinct from a major educational reform movement of his day: the madrasa movement that opted for Arabic-based education (see Brenner, 2001).

Validity

My study focuses on the N’ko movement across multiple contexts of the Manding-speaking world. By virtue of drawing from these diverse locales, I offer an ethnographic (albeit partial) account of the N’ko movement in the broadest sense.

But how do I know if my interpretations of are correct? Maxwell (Maxwell, 2012, p. 122) captures this notion under the rubric of *validity* or “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account”. While in quantitative research one typically tries to eliminate alternative hypotheses by following strict research protocols, this is not a possible or appropriate goal for

qualitative researchers. The validity of my own conclusions therefore stems from some of the defining characteristics of my study.

First, my study's data arises from a long-term engagement since 2009 working in and conducting research on Manding language and literacy contexts. Formally collecting ethnographic and linguistic data since 2012 has served as a means of establishing my own credibility to identify robust patterns in how Manding-speaking N'ko students talk and act.

Second, this long-term engagement has provided me with a range of heterogeneous data. I draw on participant behavior data, interviews, recordings, and real and virtual artifacts stemming from a range of events, participants and locales across five countries. Thus, despite not being bounded ethnographic research conducted in one place over a period of 12 months for instance, my dissertation nonetheless draws on extended ethnographic work conducted over more than four years that varies between sustained and intermittent contact. Another important component of this project research has been my use of informal interviews or so-called "member checks" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2012, pp. 126–127) in which I presented my emergent findings to research participants indirectly through my questions. These sessions themselves provided key data for identifying and understanding linguistic registers and ideologies through metapragmatic talk, but they will also serve as means of remaining open to alternative hypotheses throughout the research process.

Finally, my analyses of the N'ko movement has been buttressed by the range of primary and secondary historical sources from which I have drawn. By virtue of exploring the history of West African vernacular literacy through Ajami as well as

government-backed programs, I have been able to draw insights about the range of intersecting social processes that influence the Manding speech of N'ko's students, activists and interlocutors.

Chapter 4: *Kàramó Sùlemáana* ('Teacher Sulemaana')

Every day Màmádù “Bàkórɔba” Fófana commutes 20km from just outside of Bamako to his bookshop in the downtown shopping area and public transport hub known as *Àredá* (ḄḄḄḄ, < Fr. *rail* ‘train tracks’ + *dá* ‘entrance’). Youthful despite some wisps of grey, Màmádù fuels his ride with a steady stream of talk radio. One morning, shortly after Ramadan, when one could actually cross downtown in a car for the first time since the traffic of Islam’s holiest month, he pulled his motorcycle up before immediately walking down the road to address a police officer. He gestured towards some issue of public concern, offering sage advice before returning back to his shop where I was seated. Striding through his columns of water-coolers and buckets for sale—diligently but never correctly laid out by his assistant (a nephew or son)—he greeted me. Only then did I realize that the earbuds between his navy-blue ski jacket and flamboyant tinted glasses were still active. Màmádù assumed his position behind the counter where he sells sometimes one, sometimes twenty N’ko books a day. Suddenly, it was time: his words flowed freely into the microphone he suspended close to his mouth. It was a passionate denunciation of the inappropriate use of government funds for a still not complete building downtown.

A over head, amidst his floor-to-ceiling shelves of books, a portrait smiled down (786). The man in the painting, Sulemaana Kantè, can in fact be found across Bamako.

Figure 11: Portrait of Sulemaana Kantè (821)



A bit down the road for instance, in a bookshop by *Láginepilasi* (< Fr. *la Guinée* + *place*), the bus-stop where tired Peugeot congregates in anticipation of overloaded journeys to Guinea, he rests under the word “Toshiba”; a sticker affixed to a laptop of unpublished books (830). Back in Àredá, at another store, his image flanks the following words:

ጠጠጠጠ ጠጠጠጠ ጠጠጠጠ - ጠጠጠጠ - ጠጠጠጠ ጠጠጠጠ ጠጠጠጠ ጠጠጠጠ

Jó' y'álù mà [ʔ] Kólɔn' – Báara' – Telen' [ʔ] N'ko Lérada
Peace be upon you / Savviness - Work - Justice / N'ko Bookshop

Finally, to the east of the city near the *troisième pont* or ‘third bridge’ that spans the Niger river dividing the city, his likeness stands proudly at the base of radio tower broadcasting the sounds of 106.4FM Radio Yelen, the “first free radio of N’ko” (1038).

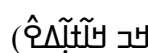
<p>ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ</p>	<p><i>kàfɔŋɔɔ' di méndiya' nákw' dɔ́</i></p>	<p>God make Africa's sage Sòlomana Kántè one of the prophet's kindred spirits in the garden of paradise</p>
--	--	---

Like almost all N’ko works, the text begins with the *basmala* (Ar. بسملة), the traditional Muslim invocation preceding an undertaking, translated from Arabic to Manding, followed by a number of benedictions. The second invocation of God and its focus on Sulemaana Kantè is of note for the respect that it confers on the man; the inventor of the N’ko script is upheld as a Muslim man both worthy and deserving of being a “kindred spirit” of the Prophet Muhammed in the afterlife. Subsequently, after laying out the subject of the book, Kùlibàli concludes:

<p>ᐱᐱᐱᐱ "ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ" ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ</p>	<p><i>Ní "gbòlofinna Músa" Kàramɔɔ Sòlomána' tòn má nà jède kàn nàtúnun' ní' jèdesuulasá' ò mɔ́ŋɔnkɔ, k'à m̀riindí' gbálon k'à lábó hákili lájɔŋŋa' ò dɔ́, à tòn dí ké b̀nɔ́' dáfanen' nè dí gbòlofinna bólo</i></p>	<p>If the “African Moses”, Professor Solomana, had not come and snuffed out the process of loss of mother-tongue and self- assassination by freeing the people and removing them from mental slavery then it would have been a total calamity for Africa.</p>
<p>ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ</p>	<p><i>Jó' yé kàranmɔɔ Sòlomana Kántè mà yàn f́oo s̀ula</i></p>	<p>May peace be upon Professor Solomana Kantè from here until the afterlife</p>

Here again, Kantè is showered with praise and respect. He is a man akin to Moses in the sense that he has led African people to freedom from “mental slavery” through his contribution—unnamed here—to preserve African mother-tongues and spirit. Such an act of course requires praise as the author makes clear in wishing Kantè peace “from here until the afterlife.”

Emblazoned on a radio station, book shops, personal computers, motorcycles and lauded in conversation and print, Sulemaana Kantè figures prominently in the modern N’ko movement despite his death from diabetes thirty years ago in 1987. The examples discussed above demonstrate that understanding what animates the N’koïsans of today is near impossible without a proper understanding of the first *N’ko kàramóó*

( ²³). This common label is a useful one for gesturing towards Kantè’s status amongst students, teachers and supporters of N’ko in the 21st century for a number of reasons. First, *kàramóó* is regularly applied to Kantè by N’ko activists today. Second, the label highlights his dual role as both a scholar and an intellectual leader in the West African Muslim tradition. Most simply, *kàramóó*, along with its range of direct West African language equivalents²⁴, can be glossed as ‘teacher’ (< *kàrán* ‘studies’ + *mòó* ‘person’). Interpreting it as just denoting someone who dispenses instruction however obscures the ways in which *kàramóó* typically refers to a class of Muslim religious specialists or clerics who act as both scholars and spiritual leaders (Ware III, 2014, pp. 78–79).²⁵

While not necessarily embracing the mantle, Kantè functions as *kàramóó* along both lines today. He wrote extensively and published what by all accounts seems to be the first written Manding-language translation of the Quran (Davydov, 2012; Kántè, n.d.). In

²³ Note that the N’ko written form typically preserves the nasalization of *kàrán* despite oral realizations in which it is absent (e.g., *kàramóó* or *kàramógo*). For my purposes here, I use the common Latin-based form *kàramóó* which more closely approximates speech.

²⁴ Wolof *sërin*, Fulani *ceerno*, Soninke *móodi* (< Ar. *mu’addib* ‘educator’, Baldi, 2008, p. 42)

²⁵ The majority of West Africans today translate the term into French using the colonial term *marabout* (< Ar. *murābit* ‘holy ascetic’). Given the colonial and often modernist denigration of *marabout* as religious charlatans however, *kàramóó* is often (especially in the Quranic schooling context) rendered as ‘Muslim cleric’ in religious or historical contexts.

addition, to this day he is revered as *kàramóo* both in name and practice. His picture adorns personal objects, much like other West African Muslim clerics such as Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara (Schulz, 2003). His students eagerly research his past actions and sayings (e.g., Kántè, 2013; Sangaré, 2011) much like the *murid* disciples of Amadu Bamba (Babou, 2007).

Figure 12: Tweet from a visit to Sulemaana Kantè’s grave which reads “The inventor’s tomb in Kolonin, may he rest in peace”



And people make pilgrimages to pay respect at his resting place much like others do for Tijani sheikh Ibrahim Niass (see Figure 12 above; cf. Seesemann, 2011).

These sorts of actions attest to Kantè not only as an inventor or author, but also a guiding intellectual figure for thousands of Manding-speaking West Africans. Given this fact, any account of N’ko today must in part reckon with his life and ideas. Thus, while the major part of this dissertation focuses on “talk about talk” and how it illuminates larger socio-political phenomena that animate N’koïsans in the 21st century, it would be foolhardy if not impossible to do so without touching on Kantè himself, given his status and relevance in their thoughts and actions today. Indeed, one way of beginning to

analyze the movement today is by asking: how are the various strands of Kantè's thought and life circulated, embraced, contested or upheld in N'ko circles and why is this so?

In this vein, it is unsurprising that previous scholars have centered Kantè in their investigations of N'ko (Amselle, 2001; Oyler, 2005; Wyrod, 2003). In doing so however there has been a tradeoff—their analyses rarely take us deeply into the actions and thoughts of modern-day N'koisants. Moreover, I would argue that, even as relates to Kantè, their accounts are lacking by not making important connections between the inventor of the N'ko alphabet and his historical and contemporaneous counterparts in what post-colonially became “the Islamic sphere” (Launay & Soares, 1999). As such, it is both useful and appropriate to begin the analytic part of this dissertation with a chapter on Sulemaana Kantè, as a means of both establishing the relevant context of N'ko today and refining previous analyses of his life. To do so, I propose focusing on Kantè the *kàramó* in the full Muslim clerisy sense of the term. Such a perspective fruitfully allows us to see Kantè not just as anti-colonial intellectual who happens to come from the Quranic schooling tradition, but rather as a particular iteration of the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition; one who embraced local language literacy like many West African Muslims before him, albeit with shades of pan-Africanism, ethno-nationalism, and Islamic reformism stemming from his own historical moment. In addition, it will lay the groundwork for exploring how some of these dynamics figure in modern-day N'ko circles in ways that are variously similar, unique and unexpected.

In what follows, I approach Kantè from three distinct vantage points that also match up nicely chronologically. First, I look at Kantè as a Muslim of the West African Quranic education tradition who figures within a particular lineage of vernacular literacy

use and promotion, often referred to as *Ajami*, which emerged beginning primarily in the 18th century. Second, I take colonialism as a starting point for investigating the inventor of the N’ko script as a Black man who took himself to be fighting for the intellectual liberation of a continent. Finally, I end by zooming in slightly on Kantè’s engagement and competition with various contemporaneous peers who pushed new forms of education and political organization that hinted at borders distinct from those of the colonial and later post-colonial states.

Kantè, the Afro-Muslim Vernacular Intellectual

On April 14, 1949 in Bingerville, Côte d’Ivoire, a young Maninka man from outside of the town of Kankan, Sulemaana Kantè, after five years of experimentation, unveiled a non-Arabic-, non-Latin-based script of 28 characters written right-to-left that he called N’ko. This budding scholar’s accomplishment was in some ways however not so unique (Vydrin, 2011, p. 197). A large number of orthographies flourished in late 19th and early 20th Africa as colonial subjects came to terms with the role of literacy and writing under colonial rule (Dalby, 1967, 1968, 1969; Juffermans, Asfaha, & Abdelhay, 2014a). Moreover, Kantè did not come from a milieu without a writing system or written tradition—he, like many West African Muslims for centuries before him (Hunwick, 1964), was literate in the Arabic script and language thanks to the Islamic education tradition.

Present in parts of sub-Saharan West Africa since approximately the 9th century (Austen, 2010b, pp. 85–86; Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, p. 4; Ware III, 2014, p. 85), the Quran, Islam’s holy book, is inscribed in Arabic and taken to be the direct word of God to his prophet, Muhammad. The Quran therefore is typically viewed as inimitable and

traditionally wholly untranslatable (Sells, 2007, p. 21). This fact combined with the centrality of Quranic verses to prayer and other religious duties means that Arabic inevitably plays a role in any Muslim community. In West Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the basic form of religious education for Muslims, and therefore the Arabic script and language, emanates from traditional Quranic schools which are divided into two levels (Middleton & Miller, 2008).

The vast majority of students only attend Quranic school at the basic level (in Manding, *mórikalan*, *kúranakálan*, *bùlonkɔ̀nɔ̀kálan* or *dùgumakálan*²⁶) and typically for a span of time ranging from a few months to a few years. This basic level focuses on learning the “fundamental elements of Islamic religious obligation” such as the proper techniques for ritual ablution, prayer and the recitation of at least some verses of the Quran (Middleton & Miller, 2008, p. 220). Given that Arabic is rarely the mother tongue of West Africans, this focus on the Quran inevitably entails some rote memorization, but it is far from mindless (e.g., Mairot, 1905 in Turcotte, 1983). The elementary cycle itself is divided into numerous stages (Mommersteeg, 1991; Tamari, 2006, p. 40; Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, pp. 7–8). Students begin by learning to recognize and name letters of the first and the later brief *sūra* (سورة, ‘Quranic chapter’) before proceeding to syllabic reading of the texts. Reading therefore is initially separate from writing. Only after having mastered this sufficiently do students advance to copying down *sūra* with the assistance of the teacher or an advanced student. Students proceed individually at their

own pace in their pursuit of the memorization and penning of *sūra* but receive at least

²⁶ This section on the contours of West African Quranic education draws extensively on the scholarship of Tal Tamari. See Tamari (2016), which builds on years of prior research and publications, for the most recent outline of Quranic education amongst Manding and other West African language speakers.

some degree of individual attention during each study session as the teacher or more advanced students float amongst them. Given that most students will not complete this basic education cycle, the direct practical hope is that “all pupils will memorize *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* [the opening *sūra* of the Quran] and several other short *sūra*, necessary for prayer” (Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, p. 7). Completing the cycle traditionally entails completing three recitations and one writing of the Quran from memory (Tamari, 2006, p. 40); a task that if completed typically happens between the age of twenty and twenty-five (p. 41).

From amongst these students, a select few continue on to what has been called “advanced-level” or “complementary” Quranic education but is known locally in Arabic as *majlis* (مجلس) or in Manding as *kitabukálan* (literally ‘book[s] study’) (Tamari, 2006; Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, p. 8). At this level, as at the basic one, students proceed at their individual pace with the ability to start or stop their largely personal course of study in accordance with life’s happenings. While the basic level focuses solely on the Quran, in the *majlis* students study a range of works penned in Arabic across the subjects of law (*fiqh*, فقه), ritual obligation, theology, Arab language & literature, and Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*, تفسير) (Tamari, 2006, pp. 41–43). Contrary to basic Quranic schooling, memorization is not at all the primary focus at the *majlis* level despite the fact that it may occur in the course of studying the texts for meaning (Tamari, 2006, pp. 43-44).

Through this educational tradition and system of schooling, the Arabic language has extensive roots and reach across West Africa giving it a status akin to the Latin of West Africa (Hunwick, 2004). But contrary to the subjects of Rome, West Africa never

አንባቢ ሆኖ ሠይቷል ኃይል ሃይማኖት ለገቢዎቹ ለቅዱሳን ገብሮቹ ለሰጠው ለዚህ ሆኖ ኃይል ሆኖ ለሰጠው ገብሮቹ ለሰጠው ሆኖ ለሰጠው ገብሮቹ ለሰጠው ሆኖ ለሰጠው ገብሮቹ ለሰጠው ሆኖ ሆኖ ለሰጠው ገብሮቹ ለሰጠው ሆኖ	<i>Kònin báò árabu' lù nànéen fàdafinná' sómɔɔya' dáfanen' nè tède lá, ò lé' k'à ké, án ná árabukán' tànén' fànbá' yé dīiná' kúma' lù lè dórɔn dí</i>	Yet because the Arabs came upon African civilizations as complete, the majority of borrowed Arabic is religious vocabulary only (p. 1)
--	---	---

Born in 1922, in the village of Soumankoyi outside of Kankan, part of a region known as Baté²⁷ (አባባ *báte* literally ‘between rivers’), Kantè was early on integrated into the Quranic tradition that gave rise to the borrowings he sought to account for. One of twelve children, his interest in the written word was instilled in him and his eleven siblings from an early age. While none of his brothers would follow their father’s career path as a *móri* (ሃብገል ‘Quranic school teacher’ often used interchangeably with አንባቢዎች {*kàranmóɔ*}), they all, at one point or another, attended his school that was their family’s livelihood (Sangaré, 2011, p. 6). Kantè proved himself to be particularly precocious when, prior to any formal enrollment, he was able to memorize and recite a Quranic chapter in its entirety. He thereby impressed not only the student body but even his own father who attributed the feat to God’s own hand (Sangaré, 2011, p. 7; see also Oyler, 2005, pp. 75). Given this trajectory and education, what compelled Sulemaana Kantè to write the above words in not Arabic, but his own language and a script that he himself had invented? And was his quest as unique as the script that he created?

While his education took place primarily in Arabic, he grew up in a Muslim milieu that had likely begun flirting with writing their own language sometime in the 19th century (Condé, 2008). Kantè himself reports having been introduced formally to this practice of *Ajami* in 1941 (Kántè, 2013). Presented with a history of the ethnic Fulani of

²⁷ See Kaba (2004) and Osborn (2011).

the pre-colonial polities of Batè and Wasolon that was written in Manding using the Arabic script by his grandfather and his maternal uncle however, he found that he could not read the text despite his deep background in Quranic schooling. His uncle's remark that the document served more as memory-jogging device for the author rather than as a stand-alone text did little to convince Kantè who in response recalled thinking:

<p> ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ </p>	<p> <i>N' kán n kó fàdafin kán' té</i> <i>föyì dí, bá' Ála má sòn à</i> <i>sébe ko' mà</i> </p>	<p> I said African languages are worthless because God has not allowed for them to be written </p> <p>(Kántè, 2013, p. 4)</p>
--	---	--

Blinded to facts demonstrating that writing did not in fact stem from God, Kantè thought little more of writing African languages for the next few years.

A number of other West Africans in the centuries before him had fortunately not come to the same conclusion regarding writing African languages. And while they did not arrive at his ultimate solution of inventing a script, these Muslim scholars often brought trajectories and ideas similar to those of Kantè to the endeavor of mother-tongue education. In what follows I therefore investigate various iterations of the West African Ajami tradition in order to connect Sulemaana Kantè with a particular strand of Afro-Muslim thought within the Arabic-literate clerical elite of West Africa.

The Mother-tongue Ajami Tradition

Important initial academic scholarship on N'ko analyzes it as a primarily anti-colonial intellectual movement (Oyler, 1995, 2005, Wyrod, 2003, 2008). Refining these analyses, Amselle (2001, 2003) rightfully highlights N'ko's connection with Islam and the wider Muslim world. On his account however N'ko is an ethno-religious

fundamentalist movement that utilizes the “invented tradition” (Ranger, 2010) of French colonial *Islam noir* (‘Black Islam’; see Monteil, 1908) to combat the efforts of West African Muslim Wahhabi reformists²⁸ and thereby preserve “a ‘negro-african’ specificity within the Muslim community” (Amselle, 2003, p. 257). His overly harsh positioning of N’ko activists as fundamentalists aside, Amselle’s analysis fails to properly situate Kantè’s thoughts and actions within the West African Quranic tradition.

Just as the script of Rome was eventually co-opted for penning a number of other languages besides Latin (such as French, Spanish, English, German etc.), the Quranic tradition of Arabic literacy also lent itself to the development of a written tradition for a number of sub-Saharan African languages. Today, this tradition of writing local vernaculars in the Arabic script is commonly referred to in West Africanist research today as Ajami (from the Arabic *’ajam*, عجم ‘non-Arab, Persian’) (Mumin, 2014; Mumin & Versteegh, 2014). The earliest evidence that we have of Ajami literacy dates back to the mid-17th century when a scholar residing in the Kanem state north of Lake Chad inserted interlinear glosses of Kanuri inside a copy of the Quran (Hunwick, 2004, p. 143). While the tradition may certainly be older, extant documents and research thus far suggest that it was during the 18th century that robust traditions of Ajami began to emerge for a number of West African languages. In many cases, Ajami was a “grassroots literacy” (Blommaert, 2008) that existed in the Quranic schooling system’s margins. In other cases, however, Ajami literacy was “undertaken by individual scholars to solve language problems and modify the linguistic behaviours in West African communities” (Diallo, 2012, p. 97).

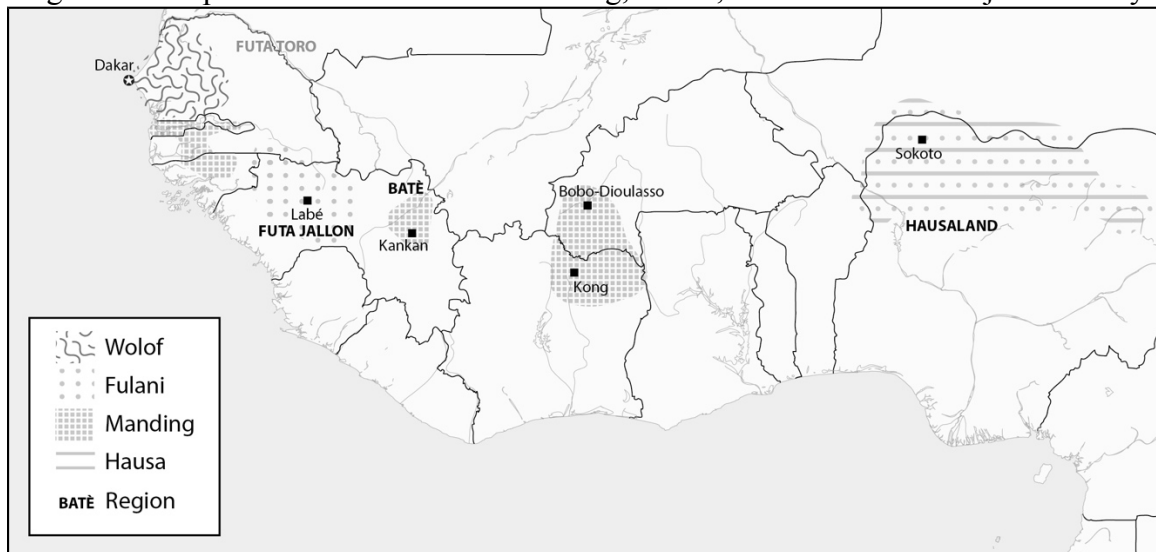
Efforts to modify linguistic and literacy practices, as all instances of language planning

²⁸ The label *Wahhabi* and these reformists are discussed in detail in the section below entitled “Kantè, the Traditionalist Reformist”

(Cooper, 1989), are typically part and parcel of quests for social change. Analyzing the voices of the Ajami tradition of mother-tongue literacy therefore allows us to better understand how Kantè did not simply co-opt French colonial *Islam noir* but rather innovated within a much longer tradition expressed in, though not exclusive to, vernacular thought.

In what follows therefore, I briefly sketch the intertwined emergence of Ajami literacy traditions in four major West African languages of the Muslim Sahel and savannah²⁹. Starting with Fulani, building through Hausa and Wolof, I end with Manding to demonstrate the ways in which Sulemaana's Kantè and N'ko are connected to a much older tradition of thought within the Quranic schooling system.

Figure 13: Map of select traditions of Manding, Wolof, Fulani and Hausa Ajami literacy



See Figure 13 for a map outlining these major West African languages with an attested Ajami tradition and the relevant locales discussed in what follows.

²⁹ Despite recent regionally focused scholarship (Kane, 2016; L. Sanneh, 2016; Kaba, 2011a-c), an overarching analytic work accounting for the historical emergence of African language literacy in Arabic script remains to be done.

Fulani and Hausa.

The 18th century gave rise to two regional traditions of Fulani Ajami in Futa Jallon and Hausaland, in modern-day Guinea and Nigeria respectively (Hunwick, 2004). In both cases the emergence of Ajami was tightly connected to the Fulani Jihads which aimed to spread Islam and gave rise to the aforementioned polities (Zito, 2012).

In Futa Jallon, the first known Ajami practitioner was Cerno Samba Mambeyaa (1755-1852) who explicitly justifies his decision to write in Fulani as follows:

I shall use the Fulfulde [Fulani] tongue to explain the dogma
In order to make their understanding easier: when you hear them, accept them!
For only your own tongue will allow you to understand what the Original texts say.

Among the Fulani, many people doubt what they read in Arabic and so remain in a state of uncertainty (Salvaing, 2004, pp. 111–112)

To this end, Mambeyaa's works were primarily religious texts written in verse form that may have emulated the oral commentaries traditionally performed to the public by Fulani clerics (Salvaing, 2004, pp. 111–112). His innovation therefore was to believe that regular Fulani should have access to these commentaries in written form. Such a shift in his mind would strengthen Islam and spread religious fervor amongst the Fulani people. This goal remained central; at the end of 19th century, all Futa Jallon Ajami writings continued to focus on religious matters (p. 112).

Similarly, Fulani Ajami emerged with Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio's (1754-1817) rise to power in establishing the 19th century Sokoto caliphate³⁰ in what is now largely northern Nigeria. Dan Fodio's zeal to spread Islam amongst the general populace led to the flourishing of both Fulani and eventually Hausa Ajami. While Dan Fodio himself wrote primarily in Arabic, he did pen a number of original texts as well as translations of

³⁰ For the Sokoto Caliphate see Last (1967).

his Arabic works into Fulani, his mother tongue, and Hausa, the dominant language of the conquered masses (Zito, 2012, p. 24). Echoing Mambeyaa's concern with propagating Islam, Dan Fodio began one of his poems as follows:

My intention is to compose a poem on the [prostration] of forgetfulness
 I intend to compose it in Fulfulde [viz. Fulani] so that Fulbe [viz. Fulani] could be enlightened.
 When we compose [a poem] in Arabic only the learned benefit.
 When we compose it in Fulfulde the unlettered also gain (Diallo, 2012, p. 1)

Thus while learned discourse took place in written Arabic, Dan Fodio believed that disseminating Islamic knowledge more broadly could be assisted by composing the kinds of verses that had served to spread Islam orally in years prior (Brenner & Last, 1985, p. 424). This trend and encouragement from Dan Fodio would give rise to a robust tradition of Fulani and increasingly Hausa Ajami that was carried out by his disciples and those in his entourage such his brother as well as his daughter, Nana Asmā'u (Mack & Boyd, 2000).

As evidenced by the declarations from both Dan Fodio and Mambeyaa, this evolution was not an unquestioned natural progression. Indeed, local tradition suggests that Mambeyaa's efforts were opposed by Umar Tal (1794-1864), the leader of the first major Fulani jihad that took place around Futa Toro around the Senegal River (Salvaing, 2004). Tal's opposition along with Futa Toro's proximity to the Moors of West Africa have also been advanced as reasons for the lack of an Ajami tradition in this other major Fulani area (Ngom, 2009, p. 101; Robinson, 1982). This tension and its connection to race debates within Islam of the African West emerge even more strongly in the Ajami tradition of Wolof.

Wolof.

The Ajami tradition of Wolof, commonly referred to as Wolofal, emerged primarily out of the Sufi Muslim brotherhood, the Muridiyya (المريدية *al-murīdīyya*) established by Shaykh Amadu Bamba (1850-1927) (Zito, 2012, p. 47). While born in the 19th century, Wolofal is still extensively practiced in Senegal in both formal publications and more mundane record-keeping, signs and correspondence (Ngom, 2010). While a full analysis of this movement is beyond the scope of this work, Ngom (2009, 2016) suggests that the flourishing of Wolof Ajami can be traced to the personality and teachings of Amadu Bamba and his Murid order. In particular, Bamba asserted a strong African identity as part of his broader Islamic message; he addressed French colonialism and its supposed superiority but he also “differentiated the essence of Islamic teaching from Arab and Moorish cultural practices with no spiritual significance” (Ngom, 2009, p. 104). Bamba, for instance, did not claim Sharifan³¹ or Arabic descent for prestige or to legitimize his message. While Bamba did not himself write in Wolofal, he supported its development and use by his senior disciples such as Muusaa Ka (see Camara, 1997) who used it to spread Islam and Bamba’s message to the masses. In this sense, Wolof Ajami emerged for the same reason as that of Fulani and Hausa—to more effectively promote the Muslim religion and Bamba’s teachings amongst the masses. As Muusaa Ka himself explains in the introduction to one of his poems:

"The reason this poem—which should have been sacred—is written in Wolof
Is that I hope to illuminate the unknowing about his Lord" (cited in Camara, 1997,
p. 170)

³¹ شريف *sharīf* ‘noble, highborn’ and typically used to refer to descendants of the Prophet Muhammad

This interest in using a local African language for pedagogical and religious effectiveness, according to Ngom (2009), is also connected to Bamba's own desire for African cultural autonomy. At least once in writing, Bamba explicitly engaged with the issue of race and hierarchy within Islam; in his work *Masāliku-l-Jinān* (مسالك الجنان 'Itineraries of Heaven') he writes:

Do not let my condition of black man mislead you about the virtue of this work, because the best of man before God, without discrimination, is the one who fears him the most, and skin color cannot be the cause of stupidity or ignorance (cited in Babou, 2007, p. 62)

From this position, Bamba (similarly to Sulemaana Kantè in the 20th century) had no qualms calling upon traditions such as Wolof proverbs as a means to translate his Islamic message to the Wolof masses (Ngom, 2009, p. 107). While he himself wrote in Arabic, perhaps because of spiritual desire to “commune with God and the prophet Muhammed” (Camara, 1997, p. 170), Bamba articulated an explicit Afro-Muslim identity that gave “ideological and implementational space” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007) for local language Ajami literacy to flourish. This overt engagement with issues of race and cultural autonomy within Islam makes the Wolofal tradition seemingly unique but it is critical to see that the same issues were implicitly a part of the previously analyzed traditions of Fulani and Hausa Ajami.

Manding.

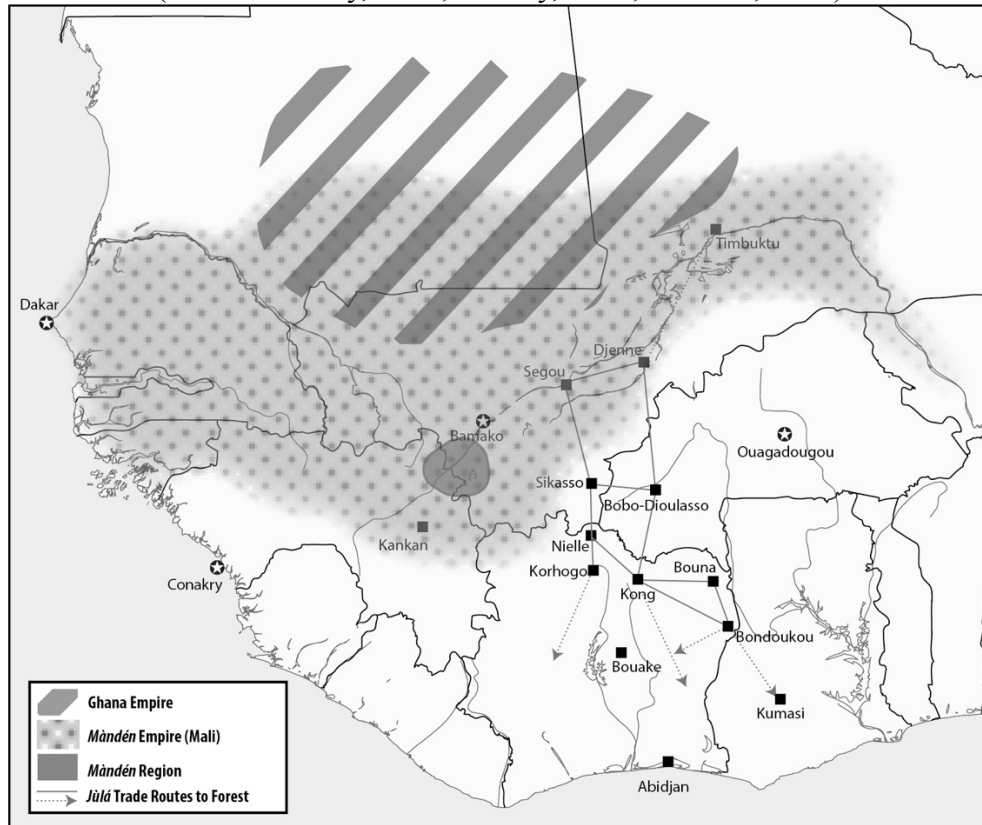
Sulemaana Kantè did not emerge directly from the Wolof, Hausa or Fulani traditions. Born outside of Kankan in the Manding-speaking savannah of Guinea however, his home has close ties to the historical region, *Màndén*, which gave rise to what historians refer to as the Mali empire (Levtzion, 1973; Simonis, 2010). While it is

unclear what role Islam played amongst the masses in the Mali empire, the Quranic tradition is unquestionably centuries old amongst many Manding speakers. We have evidence that Arabic was used both in Mali's court and even spoken by the empire's sovereign, Mansa Musa, when he performed his pilgrimage to Mecca in the 14th century (Hunwick, 1964). Quranic instruction may have originally taken place exclusively in Arabic thanks to the large presence of native Arabic-speakers (Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, p. 15). Nonetheless, a Friday prayer in Arabic was translated spontaneously into Manding in the 14th century and therefore it seems likely that it was a developed medium of oral scholarly discussion and religious propagation by the 15th century (Tamari & Bondarev, 2013, p. 15).

The oldest tradition of Islam amongst Manding speakers seems to be traceable to the *jùlá* network that originated first with Muslim Soninke traders that spread out across West Africa during the Ghana empire that preceded the *Màndén* or Mali empire (Wilks, 1968, 2000) (See Figure 14 below). During the Mali empire, which reached its apogee in the 14th century, the Muslim *jùlá* network of traders became increasingly Manding; that is, older Soninke members adopted the language of Mali and were additionally joined by other Manding-speaking Muslims along their trading routes and outposts (Massing, 2000). Thus, while the decline of the Mali empire led to many non-Muslim polities (e.g., Kaabu and Segou) where Ajami would have been less likely to emerge³², it is unsurprising that we find evidence of Manding Ajami traditions in a number of areas (Vydrin, 1998, 2014).

³² Though instances of Bamanan Ajami have been documented for the 20th century (e.g., Dumestre & Vydrin, 2014; Tamari, 1994).

Figure 14: Map of *Màndén*, the Ghana and Mali empires, and *Julá* trade network
(Sources: Dalby, 1971; Launay, 1983; Simonis, 2010)



Specifically, the Islamic tradition of the Jakhanke³³ Muslim clerics (a western iteration of the Jula network) in southern Senegambia gave rise to Ajami that was attested to as early as the first half of the 18th century (Vydrin, 2014, p. 201). It is also in this region that Manding Ajami practices are the strongest today. The earliest documentation of Manding Ajami elsewhere in the Jula network stems primarily from areas in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire (Delafosse, 1904; Marty, 1922 cited in Hunwick, 2004) and Vydrin (2014) suggests that this was surely an area with an older Manding Ajami tradition. Indeed, this part of the Jula network gave rise to the Kong Empire and its vaunted scholarly tradition (M.-J. Derive, 1978; Kodjo, 2006). Any Ajami documents that may have existed in Kong (in modern-day northern Côte d'Ivoire) itself were destroyed

³³ See Sanneh (1989) for a historically inclined ethnography of the Jakhanke.

when the town and its libraries were sacked and burned by Sāmòri Tùre³⁴, a Manding-speaking empire-builder and colonial resistant of the late 19th century (Fofana, 1998; Person, 1968; see also Peterson, 2008). While there is no evidence of major Jula Ajami archives today, my own fieldwork (Donaldson, 2013) has revealed that Ajami is still practiced in the margins of the Quranic schooling tradition in the area. It is worth noting that Sulemaana Kantè himself lived in and traveled through this Manding-speaking area as a young man (Sangaré, 2011).

It is only in the case of Kantè's native region around Kankan that we have any specific information on the older Manding Ajami tradition. According to Condé (2008b, p. 135; Condé, 2017, p. 117), Kantè considered himself the heir to the work of Alfa Mahmud Kàbá³⁵. Popularly understood as a skilled leader who unified the twelve villages of Batè under his chiefdom of Kankan beginning in 1852 before passing away likely in the late 1860s, he was also a man of letters (Osborn, 2011, p. 76). In this respect, he is known for both works in Arabic as well as his (presumably oral) translation of Islamic poems into Manding³⁶. Condé (2008) nonetheless also suggests he may have been the first to attempt to pen Manding in the Arabic script. In the early 20th century, a contemporary and friend of Kantè's father, "Diakagbe Taliby Kaba" (presumably,

³⁴ His name is commonly Romanized using French orthographic conventions as *Samory/Samori Touré*.

³⁵ Alfa Mahmud is also held as being responsible for introducing the Muslim Sufi brotherhood the Tijaniyya (التجانية *al-tijāniyya*) to Kankan thanks to time he spent studying and living in the entourage of al-Hajj Umar Tal (Osborn, 2011, pp. 74–82). This raises interesting questions about potential debates within the movement regarding the role of vernacular literacy within the brotherhood (see the section on Fulani in Chapter 4).

³⁶ The first poem in Kantè's (2010) first book of poems is entitled 𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤴𞤸𞤺 *Nóroo' lù bá'* ('The sea of lights') and is a translation of one of Alfa Mahmud Kàbá's Arabic language poems (بحر الانوار).

Jakagbe Talibi Kaba³⁷), was also concerned with translating Islamic rites and poems into Manding and is purported to also have attempted to create a unique writing system for the Manding language (Condé, 2008b, p. 135)³⁸. Despite not having access to any of their original texts³⁹, with both of these authors, we see that Manding Ajami arose alongside the Arabic-language tradition, in part, for the religious purpose of spreading the gospel of Islam.

In sum then, just as West African speakers of Fulani, Hausa and Wolof pondered the place of their mother-tongues in promoting Islam, so did Manding Muslims, despite a relative dearth of identified Ajami textual artifacts in the major Eastern Manding varieties of Bamanan, Jula and Maninka. Kantè was a direct intellectual heir to Alfa Mahmud Kaba and Talibi Kaba of Kankan. However, given the transnational character of the Quranic schooling system and clerical communities in West Africa, it is important to see that Kantè was also connected indirectly with vernacular Muslim thinkers amongst Fulani, Hausa and Wolof Muslims etc. This connection is most explicit in the parallels between Kantè's writings and those of the Ajami authors and writers explored above. Nevertheless, this line of thought, which emerges clearly in Ajami writings, is not exclusive to authors that penned words in their mother-tongue. In this sense, as Tamari (2006) astutely notes, we have severely underestimated the role of Kantè's Quranic education in his life and work:

³⁷ A picture of him is included in (Kaba, 2011a, p. 986)

³⁸ The beginning nine sections of Kantè's first song book are a translation into Manding of

³⁹ It is worth noting that during the summer of 2016 in Kankan I was shown a photocopy of a Manding Ajami manuscript produced by prior to the introduction of Kantè's N'ko. My interlocutor read the first few lines in Arabic introducing the text as such before claiming to be unable to continue when it came to the Manding-language body of the text.

In his reflection on the Manding language and his interest for its different regional varieties, in his quest for a perfectly adequate vocabulary to express theological, philosophical, logic or linguistic concepts, by strongly distinguishing between Islam and Arabness, [Kantè] was pursuing preoccupations and manifesting points of view well anchored amongst clerics [Fr. *les lettrés*] (Tamari, 2006, pp. 51-52)

Kantè’s Islamic Shortcut

Kantè (2008b, p. 7) viewed his life and work as fundamentally connected to Islam⁴⁰:

<p>ᄂᄃᄅᄇᄉᄊᄋ ᄌᄍᄎ ᄏᄑ ᄒᄓ ᄔᄕᄌ ᄍᄎᄏᄑᄒᄓ ᄔ ᄕᄖ ᄗᄘ ᄙᄚ ᄛᄜᄝᄞᄟ ᄠ ᄡ ᄢᄣ ᄤᄥ ᄧᄨ ᄩᄪ ᄫᄬ ᄭᄮ ᄯᄰ ᄱᄲᄳᄴ ᄵᄶ ᄷᄸ ᄹᄺᄻᄼᄽ ᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ ᄿᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ</p>	<p><i>Nné Sùlèemáana</i> <i>jàrabineen lónni' lè lá</i> <i>dùukólo' fén' bée dí. N</i> <i>y'à fê ò lé' dó, n báden' ní</i> <i>n sùjón' bée yé dónen</i> <i>lón kàrán' ní sébeli' dó.</i> <i>Lónin' súu' fána bée dó n</i> <i>jàrabinenbá' yé sàbá lè</i> <i>lá.</i></p>	<p>I, Sulemaana Kantè, am more passionate about knowledge than anything else on earth. As such, I would like for all my brothers and neighbors to have some knowledge of reading and writing. Of all the kinds of knowledge, I love three the most:</p>
<p>ᄂᄃᄅᄇᄉᄊᄋ ᄌᄍᄎ ᄏᄑ ᄒᄓ ᄔᄕᄌ ᄍᄎᄏᄑᄒᄓ ᄔ ᄕᄖ ᄗᄘ ᄙᄚ ᄛᄜᄝᄞᄟ ᄠ ᄡ ᄢᄣ ᄤᄥ ᄧᄨ ᄩᄪ ᄫᄬ ᄭᄮ ᄯᄰ ᄱᄲᄳᄴ ᄵᄶ ᄷᄸ ᄹᄺᄻᄼᄽ ᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾ ᄿᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ ᄿᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ</p>	<p><i>Fóló silamaya diina'</i> <i>bátó' n'à sàriya' lù</i> <i>lónin ! Ò lé' kà n lò</i> <i>kùraná' ní kéla' lá</i> <i>sàranún' nù yèleman ná</i> <i>N'ko dó, bá' ò lù lè diina'</i> <i>bánfèlélé' dí</i></p>	<p>First: Knowledge of Islam's worship rituals and laws. This led me translate the Quran and the Prophet's sayings into N'ko because they are the key [bánfèlélé⁴¹]of the religion</p>

Despite this sentiment and his Islamic scholarship on the Quran and the Hadiths however, there is an important distinction between him and the work of certain Ajami writers and

⁴⁰ This fact holds true for N’ko publications more generally too; Islam is the number one topic in Vydrin’s (2012) preliminary N’ko biography.

⁴¹ *Bánfèlélé* is a compound noun derived from the verb *bán* ‘finish’ and an adverb *fèlèle* (unknown to me and the major dictionaries at my disposal) glossed as follows by Bàbá Màmadí Jàane (personal communication, November 04, 2017):
“ᄂᄃᄅᄇᄉᄊᄋ ᄌᄍᄎ ᄏᄑ ᄒᄓ ᄔᄕᄌ ᄍᄎᄏᄑᄒᄓ ᄔ ᄕᄖ ᄗᄘ ᄙᄚ ᄛᄜᄝᄞᄟ [...] ᄿᄾᄿᄽᄾᄿᄽ”
“Fèlèle” states the manner in which the act of finishing is done; that is, easily’

ሂጉጋ ጌጌ ጊጋ ሽጠሽጎ ሽጎጎ ጌ ሽጎጎ ጌጌ ጌጎጎ ጌ ጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌ ጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌ ጌ ሽጎጎጎ ጌጌ ጌጎጎ ጌጌጌጌ ጌ ጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌጌ	<i>Ò l'à yìda lá kó móri' lú tún ká kán' n'ò dó k'án ná kán' nù sébe, kà dīina' náfò àlu dó, kàyii silamaya' dòn túma' án ná jàmaná lù kónò.</i>
--	---

All of this thus shows that ever since the time of Islam’s arrival in our lands, Islamic scholars [móri] should have written our languages and explained [the] religion in them

Keep in mind that Kantè did not call for an end to Arabic literacy & proficiency (or that of French for that matter); it is undoubtedly the language of Islam (Kántè, 2008a, p. 4).

Nonetheless, given that few African Muslims understand it, Kantè (2004, p. 6) questioned how realistic it is to focus on Arabic acquisition instead of mother-tongue education:

ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ሽጎጎ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌ ጌጌጌጌ	<i>Diina' dòn fàamun tó fàsó' kán' dó dì n'à má sébe? Wála bée kété árabu kán' lón ná⁴⁴ dí kànató' dīina fàamún ná?</i>
--	--

“How will the religion be understood in a mother-tongue [fàsó' kán'] if it isn't written? Or will everyone [need to] become Arabic proficient in order to [kànató] understand the religion?”

In sum, the inventor of the N’ko script was firmly rooted within the “discursive tradition” of Islam (Asad, 1986). While his writing system was unique, his concern with using a local African language to better spread the religion was not. Following in the footsteps of Fulani, Hausa, Wolof and Manding West African Muslims that arose starting at least two centuries before him, he believed that African languages had an integral role to play in disseminating Islam. While these languages and Manding had long been used orally to this end, Kantè, like Samba Mambeyaa, Uthman Dan Fodio and Amadu Bamba, saw the need for also reading and writing them. Indeed, for Kantè, literacy was not just essential to learning and logical thought but it was an Islamic responsibility that could be traced back to God’s Messenger, Muhammad.

⁴⁴ Almost certainly the tonally compact derived noun *árabukanlónna* ‘knower of Arabic’ despite the original N’ko spelling.

Kantè as anti-colonial pan-Africanist

As he makes clear in a 1965 letter to a French linguist, Sulemaana Kantè felt at times removed from the experience of the French rule over his natal part of West Africa beginning near the turn of the 19th century:

il m’est très difficile de m’expliquer en français, mes livres sont tout écrits en malinké, la seule langue écrite que je connais bien c’est l’arabe, et j’ai vécu jusqu’à 24 sans connaissance d’un seul mot français, et je ne jamais vu un blanc qu’a l’age de 12 ans qui était un missionnaire protestant [sic throughout]

It is very difficult for me to explain myself in French, my books are all written in *malinké*, the only written language I know well is Arabic, and I lived until the age of 24 without knowledge of a single French word, and I never saw a White person until the age of 12 [when I saw] a protestant missionary (Vydrine, 2001a, p. 146)

Raised in a communal courtyard, he was one of his mother Jàaká Kétà’s⁴⁵ seven children. His father, Ámara Kánte, provided for their large family as a pedagogically innovative Quranic teacher. Sulemaana, for instance, attributed their family’s move to a satellite village of Soumankoyi named Kolonin (Kòlonnén^{46}), to the fact that Ámara could not protect his students from the “crying” (Kàsi) of other “to-be-respected” (Mábonyata) student-instructors who respected⁴⁷ no one but their own Quranic teachers (Sangaré, 2011, p. 4). Presumably this was because Amara’s own students moved rather quickly through Quranic school, thanks to his father’s unique

⁴⁵ This last name is most most often spelled *Keita* in French orthography. Here I use the transliterated form of its typical N’ko rendering.

⁴⁶ *-nen/nin* are two variants of the diminutive suffix (akin to *-ito* in Spanish). In the N’ko register (see Chapter 6) one most frequently encounters Nén {*-nén*}.

⁴⁷ Here, Kantè describes them using an idiomatic expression:

Bàbá Mámádi Jàane ‘[they] did not see hair on anyone else’s head besides their own Quranic teachers’ related to the historical usage of head-shaving as a sign of social sanction (Bàbá Mámádi Jàane, personal communication, April 5, 2017)

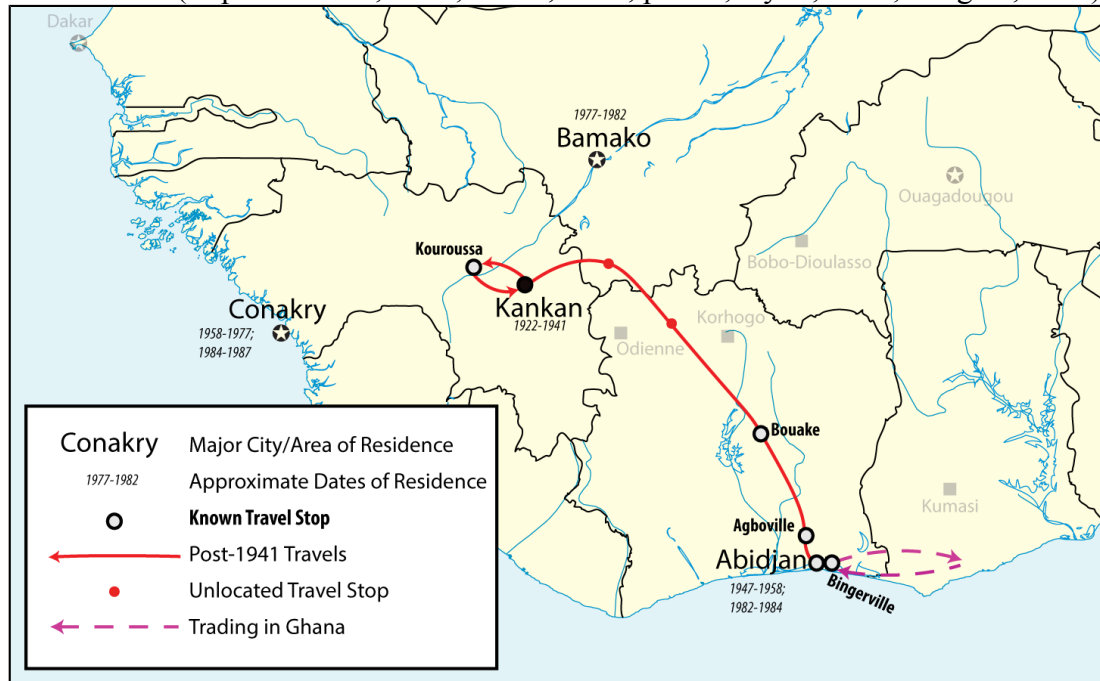
instructional method (Sangaré, 2011, p. 8). His accelerated program thereby attracted a large number of Manding-speakers with origins spread out across West Africa (Oyler, 2005, pp. 74-75). In 1941 however, the family's foundation was unexpectedly shaken when Ámara Kántè suddenly passed away. Per his father's instructions and his mother's wishes, Sulemaana initially took over responsibility of Ámara's students (Sangaré, 2011, pp. 10-11). However, as his mother put it, he was not their ultimate "care-taker" (ŷb *tii*) and thus by 1942 he had decided to seek his fortune away from home (Sangaré, 2011, p. 11-12, see also Oyler, 2005, p. 76; Amselle, 2001, p. 150).

The influence of colonialism in his adult life therefore was clear. Indeed, the choice of ultimately heading to the French colony of Côte d'Ivoire was far from unique in the 1940s. First of all, men such as Kantè had a long history in the region; Manding-speaking Muslim *jùlá* (جولا) or 'traders' had centuries ago established outposts and polities across parts of the savannah that make up what is now northern Côte d'Ivoire, as discussed earlier (Wilks, 1968, 2000). "In the colonial era, French military campaigns extended the Jula presence southward" thereby "creating a regional network of Jula settlements beyond their original northern enclaves well before independence" (Hellweg, 2011, p. 34). This would only increase throughout French rule as thousands of young Manding-speakers and others from the savannah headed south to both trade and labor "not only to pay taxes but to fulfill family obligations" (Hellweg, 2011, p. 35). Thus, while in his letter Kantè suggests colonialism was in some way removed from his childhood, in historical context his words seem to point to the injustices and denigration inherent in colonialism: the need to justify one's lack of French skills seven years after

Guinean independence; the civilizing mission behind both the protestant missionary and the French colonial regime as a whole.

In his travels Kantè more directly felt the weight of France's colonial administration (see Figure 15 for an outline of his travels).

Figure 15: Approximate map of Kantè's post-1941 travels and history of residence in West Africa (as per Amselle, 2003; Kántè, 2013, p. 200; Oyler, 2005; Sangaré, 2011)



Advised against setting out west from Kankan, he made his way east with the plan to settle either with “people looking for a Quranic teacher” or in “one of the White man’s cities” (Sangaré, 2011, pp. 12-13; see also Amselle, 2001, p. 150). The first town looking for a *móri* such as himself, *Kòjùla*, was in the Wasolon region of Mali (Sangaré, 2011). It was from here that his own father had been abducted and sent to Kankan for Islamic education as a so-called pagan child during Sāmòri Tùre’s conquest of the region (Oyler, 2005). After only twelve days however he headed onwards before setting up shop in Bunjala (possibly the modern town of Boundiali) in what is now Côte d’Ivoire. He

! ሰፊ ለገጠጠ ሠብኛኛቤ ሆኖ ሃ ! ለገጠጠ ሰፊ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ	<i>Í baa tubabú' sénen' yé án fádi' jònya lá, à sénen' án hákili' lè fòlò màra lá</i>	If you see that the White man was able to enslave us physically, it's because he enslaved us mentally first
--	---	---

Thus while his writing system would ultimately serve a range of distinct purposes, one major goal cited by Kantè was the decolonization of the African mind (Kántè, 2013, p. 8):

ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ ሆኖ	<i>Ñba miriya' hórɔyá' ò lé' jínin' kà ñne' ni' lá án ná kán' nù sébe kó' kàn ò yíla' béé</i>	The pursuit of liberation of thought set me immediately to the task of writing our languages
---	--	--

Paired with the plural *kán nù* ‘languages’ and appearing shortly after a discussion of how the White man enslaved the Black man, this *án* ‘we’ is the collective we of colonized Black sub-Saharan Africans.

For Kantè, education was the solution to this mental colonization. What distinguished man as a species amongst animals was his possession of *hákili*⁵¹ (ሆኖኛ) or a mental faculty for reasoning (Kántè, 2013, p. 21). Strengthening this capacity for critical thought (and Islam, as we saw earlier) passed necessarily through reading and writing (Kántè, 2013, p. 22). Kantè however knew how difficult studying (*kàrán* ተገኝ) and therefore the path to knowledge (*lónni* ለገና) could actually be in West Africa. The experience of actually ending a child’s “ignorance” (*kùnfinya* [sic⁵²]) at school was hampered by two major obstacles (Kántè, 2013, p. 23).

⁵¹ < Ar. عقل *‘aql* ‘mind, intellect’

⁵² One would expect *kùnfinya* ተገኝ

First, students went through the necessary step of learning to read and write an alphabet, a process which took about two years (Kántè, 2013, p. 22). Once this knowledge was acquired though, students were far from in the clear because they spent the next four to five years learning the medium of instruction of French or Arabic! Kantè reasoned that this system was simply inefficient. His own method in mother-tongue education could lead to the entire cycle being completed in a matter of two years for children or three months for adults because students could side-step the central issue of terminology and vocabulary which stands in the way of actual learning (Kántè, 2013, p. 23). Kantè’s belief in the power of mother-tongue education was not a cold instrumentalization or “banking model” of education however (Freire, 1968):

ḂḂ : ḂḂḂ, ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ
 ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ : ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 , ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ
 : ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ, ḂḂ
 ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ : ḂḂ ḂḂ
 , ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ
 [...]

Kó sísèn, òba, ní sébeli' ké dá lí' dí díya' mà, jède kàn sébe' dí ké lilàlì' dí. Sébeli' báa ké ná' mén' dí, jède kàn sébe' l'ò kòó' dí, ní kàrán' ké dá báara' mén' dí, jède kàn kàran' dí k'ò nónninnin' dí.

If writing is honey in terms of sweetness, then writing one’s own language is ambrosia. If writing is sauce, then writing one’s own language is the seasoning [lit. ‘its salt’]. If reading is work then reading one’s own language is its respite.
 [...]

ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ
 ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂ, ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ
 ḂḂḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂ
 , ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ

Mòò síyaman kálabu' màamáa wáli kán kàran' dó k'à mäsòdòn à lón gbóya' n'à kàrán' kùntáa' jànyá' lè fè, ò bée dí sé ké lá lónninba' dí jède kàn kàran' dó.

Many people are discouraged in foreign language education as a result of retention difficulty and its long duration. All of these people can be savants in mother-tongue education.
 (Kántè, 2008, p. 4)

His desire therefore was to democratize access to education in hopes of unlocking the intelligence and know-how of Africa’s popular masses. As the easiest means of learning (Kántè, 2013, p. 23), mother-tongue education was akin to an obligation for Africans looking to propel their homelands forward (Kántè, 2008a, p. 4):

<p>[...] 𞎎 𞎏 𞎐 𞎑 𞎒 𞎓 𞎔 𞎕 𞎖 𞎗 𞎘 𞎙 𞎚 𞎛 𞎜 𞎝 𞎞 𞎟 𞎠 𞎡 𞎢 𞎣 𞎤 : 𞎥 𞎦 𞎧 𞎨 𞎩 𞎪 𞎫 𞎬 𞎭 𞎮 𞎯 𞎰 𞎱 𞎲 𞎳 𞎴 𞎵 𞎶 𞎷 𞎸 𞎹 𞎺 𞎻 𞎼 𞎽 𞎾 𞎿 𞏀 𞏁 𞏂 𞏃 𞏄 𞏅 𞏆 𞏇 𞏈 𞏉 𞏊 𞏋 𞏌 𞏍 𞏎 𞏏 𞏐 𞏑 𞏒 𞏓 𞏔 𞏕 𞏖 𞏗 𞏘 𞏙 𞏚 𞏛 𞏜</p>	<p>[...] <i>hánkilima' bée ká kàn nè kà fàso kàn sébe' báara' lù mádèmen k'à dódiya, à ní k'à kókòdòbinbin já' bée mà dó mà, lónnin' nè bèn' ní hára' lù ní jóón fáamùn ní jóón kánin' ní ádamaya' sàbati kó' lù ní wúruki' síla' bée ládòn ná jàmana' kónɔ.</i></p>	<p>[...] all intelligent individuals must assist with and make enjoyable the efforts of fatherland-language writing as well as support them by all means so that knowledge will be fostered and strengthened in the father country. [This is] because knowledge strengthens entente, peace, mutual understanding, endearment and civility and maintains the path to development in the country.</p>
--	--	---

Kantè’s Invention Trial

Convinced of the necessity of mother-tongue education and encouraged by his knowledge of Vai, Yoruba and Hausa literacy, Kantè set out to devise a proper orthography for his own language (Kántè, 2013, p. 13). Shortly after encountering the vitriolic text of Kamil Muruwah, Kantè headed south, stopping in Agboville where he took French lessons, before continuing on to Bingerville on the coast. There he set up shop as a Quranic teacher before eventually entering the Kola nut trade. In Bingerville, and Abidjan following his relocation after the end of World War II, he dedicated his free time to devising a way to write his own mother-tongue of Manding (p. 19). Along the way he encountered many voices and in particular those of people educated in French colonial schools, whom he paraphrases in this way (Kántè, 2004, p. 2):

Ḅ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ : Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 : Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣⁵³ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ : Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣

Mòò 'fànká' b́án kún té
f̀adafin kán' ǹù lá, báò
̀alu kásiya kójuuya, àlú
dòn sédenen' ná mà fána
mén' d'̀a ké àlu t'̀sé lónko'
̀lù sébe' náfò' mànò lá,
kàtiun sé-n-kólaya'
kúmaden' ǹù ní à k̀untóó'
̀lù t'̀sé' sòdón ná án ná
kán' ǹù d́ó féu, k'̀ò t̀ènené
kà bó à lá, f̀adafin kán'
kólogbe' mén' báa sébe
árabu sébesun' ní làtén' tá
fén' _'é' _fén' d́ó, ò t'̀sé
kàran ná sébeli' kébáa'
bólo kúma té mòo gbéde
mà, ò d́ó, án ná kán' ǹù
sébe yé jède sèe gbánsan'
nè dí hánkilima' t'̀à f̀anka
bán mén' ná

There is no point wasting one's energy with African languages because there are too many of them, and they are flawed in such a way too that they can't be used for ((explaining in scientific writings)), because technological words and terms aren't found at all in our languages. Even putting that aside, anything in African languages written in the Arabic or Latin alphabet, they can't even be read by their author, let alone by someone else. Thus writing in our languages is simply a waste of effort that no one smart wastes their time on

Seeking to both create a proper system and prove them wrong, Kantè set out to devise an orthography from one of the scripts that he knew. From 1944-1947 he attempted to design a Manding orthography in Arabic script, but was discouraged by those affiliated with Quranic schooling as discussed in the previous section (Kántè, 2004, p. 2).

Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣
 Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣ Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣Ḅ̣

̀ò l̀ù lá f̀akan d̀ankunbáliya'
̀ò lánen' árabu sébe' d́ése'
kán màninka kán' sébe lá

Lacking mother-tongue respect, they were convinced that writing Manding in Arabic script would fail

While not explicit here, what Kantè faced was peoples' disbelief that a readable orthography could be developed for Manding in the Arabic script. Indeed, he encountered

⁵³ Almost certainly a typo by the typesetter of *désenen* 'failed'; I have corrected it in the transliteration and translation.



the same reaction between 1947-1949 when he tried to develop a Latin-based orthography (Kántè, 2004, p. 2):

ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃'ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ 'ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ : ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ : ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃ ɒ̃ɒ̃ɒ̃ ɒ̃'ɒ̃	<i>An kà ò fána làtɛnnamá'</i> <i>yìda án báden</i> <i>tùbabulamóó' lù lá,</i> <i>Bénzervil ní Ábijàn nù dó,</i> <i>bàri ò lù fána má sé ò</i> <i>fàamun ná</i>	We showed this Latin-based one also to our friends affiliated with White ways [<i>tùbabulamóó</i>] in Bingerville and Abidjan, but they also were not able to understand it
--	--	---

The orthographic testers were of course able to sound aloud or read his orthography so what were they not “understanding”? On one hand, Kantè was dealing with a problem that the unmodified Arabic or Latin alphabets did not naturally lend themselves to marking some of the phonologically contrastive sounds and features of Manding. The official orthographies of Manding today for instance are Latin-based orthographies but incorporate a number of IPA characters (i.e., ɲ, ɔ, ε, etc.) to distinguish Manding phonemes. In addition, many Manding varieties have contrastive vowel length (*báara* ‘work’ vs. *bára* ‘dance area’) as well as nasalization (*bá* ‘mother’ vs. *bán* ‘to finish’) that can be applied to any of the seven vowels of the Eastern varieties.

Kantè however was primarily grappling with the fact that Manding is a *tonal* language (see the following chapter for in-depth discussion of this matter). Pitch or tone is used both lexically to distinguish tonal minimal pairs where words are segmentally homophonous but tonally distinct (i.e., *bá* ‘river’ vs. *bà* ‘goat’ or *à* 3SG vs. *á* 2PL in Bambara) and grammatically to distinguish definite from indefinite (*mùsò' té yàn* ‘the woman is not here’ vs. *mùso té yàn* ‘no woman is here’). Without a set of conventions for marking tone and the other contrastive features outlined above Kantè was faced with the following kind of complaints (2004, p. 2):

ḰṖṖḴṐḴṖ ḴḴḴḴḴḴ ḴḴ ḴḴ Ḵ Ḵ ḴḴ ḴḴḴ Ḵ ḴḴ ḴḴ ḴḴ ḴḴ ḴḴḴ ḴḴḴḴḴḴ ḴḴ ḴḴḴḴ ḴḴḴḴḴḴ	<i>dí sé kán' kánmaserema' bée</i> <i>sébe lá fáranfasili dáfanen'</i> <i>dó</i>	one that could distinguish all tonal [<i>kánmaserema</i>] languages in full.
---	--	--

Kantè, thus, went to task, eventually revealing a completed draft⁵⁵ of the N'ko script on April 14, 1949 (Kántè, 2004, p. 4).

Kantè's invention of a unique script was a technical linguistic solution to the problem of properly writing African languages (see the next chapter for a further exploration of this point), but critically he saw his alphabet as an intellectual contribution in the fight for decolonization. As someone who directly faced the prospect of internment, forced labor or death for his travels in French West Africa, he was well aware of the physical violence rooted in colonialism. Nonetheless, he viewed the mental side of Western rule of Africans as ultimately more harmful. For him, the N'ko alphabet—which he viewed as uniquely capable of transcribing African languages—was an essential tool for providing Africans access to the liberating and enlightening power of literacy, schooling and knowledge.

Kantè as a Manding Muslim

Firmly situated within the historical Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition that gave rise to Ajami in West Africa and doing intellectual labor to combat the French colonial regime, Kantè innovated and thought in ways that also engaged in the political and religious debates of his peers. From Kantè's own perspective, his invention of N'ko was

⁵⁵ In truth, this was but a draft. Kantè modified a number of N'ko graphemes throughout his life. See for instance the “archaic” forms of Ṗ <j>, Ṗ <c> and † <r> which were nonetheless included in N'ko's original Unicode proposal (“Proposal to add the N'Ko script to the BMP of the UCS,” 2004). These and a few other archaic grapheme variations continue to circle in old handwritten manuscripts and their photocopies.

primarily a pedagogical tool for Islamic education and decolonization. From another point of view however, his script and push for mother-tongue education also shared clear connections with larger sociological debates in both the Quranic schooling system and West African society at large.

The crisis of World War II and its aftermath led to a major shift in French West Africa as well as European-held African colonies more broadly. For both ideological and material reasons, France was forced to re-consider its role and policies in its colonies. This is not to suggest that France began to entertain the end of empire or even that African subjects suddenly saw the coming light of independence. To analyze the situation thus would be to play into post-independence narratives or “read history backward from the triumph of African independence in the 1960s” (Cooper, 2002, p. 20). More accurately:

“The postwar moment presented opportunities to political and social movements to take on imperial administrations uncertain of their continued authority and aware of their need of Africans’ contributions to rebuilding imperial economies” (p. 26)

But such movements were far from exclusively focused on taking on “imperial administrations.” In French West Africa (Fr. *Afrique occidentale française*, AOF), the post-war moment also revealed tensions in what Launay & Soares (1999, p. 498) describe as the newly formed *Islamic sphere*, “separate [...] from ‘particular’ affiliations - ethnicity, kin group membership, ‘caste’ or slave origins, etc.— but also from the colonial (and later the post-colonial) state”. While West African Muslims had undoubtedly always debated proper membership in the Islamic community, it tended to be restricted to internal debates amongst the largely hereditary clerical class. The colonial period

introduced major shifts in political economy that disrupted their traditional religious authority and thereby carved out space for larger societal debates about Islam and Muslim identity (Launay & Soares 1999, p. 501).

Debates in this expanded Islamic sphere were intimately tied to schooling as Brenner's (2001) seminal work on French Sudan and post-colonial Mali demonstrates. Oddly though, Sulemaana Kantè's intervention has been absent from scholarly accounts of the debate over Islamic education between so-called traditionalists and reformists. And yet, as revealed above, Kantè was intimately connected to centuries-old debates within the Quranic system and directly concerned with its pedagogical reform through mother-tongue literacy. In what follows, I attempt to better situate Sulemaana Kantè's connection to the Islamic traditionalist vs. reformist debate of his day. To do so, I first outline the emergence of the reformist Muslim *madrassa* school movement and the "Wahhabiya" (Kaba, 1974) to make the argument that Kantè's N'ko must be understood as a traditional reformist counterpart and alternative to their ideas and actions. Second, I look at how the unique post-World War II moment of colonial Africa allowed Kantè to take the Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition beyond purely spiritual or pedagogical concerns to implicitly flirt with the ethno-nationalist ideas of his day.

Kantè, the Traditionalist Reformist

The post-War moment of the French colonial period with its expanded Islamic sphere provided a set of conditions that would lead to intense focus on reforming Islamic education. This was primarily articulated by a movement which emerged clearly in the 1950s with the establishment of a string of modernist Muslim schools or what I will refer

to here as *madradas*⁵⁶ (Brenner, 2001; Brenner & Sanankoua, 1991). The roots of these institutions however stem back into the 1940s. They were the product, on one hand, of so-called Wahhabi⁵⁷ doctrinal reformists that connected during or upon return from sojourns in the Middle East (Kaba, 1974) and, on the other, of educational reformists simultaneously questioning the traditional Quranic schooling elite and seeking to prepare students in a Muslim manner for integration into the emerging modern economy (Brenner, 1991, p. 65).

The madrasa school's main goal remains the use of Islamic instruction for religious knowledge (p. 65). Nonetheless, the schools are distinct from traditional Quranic schools in a multitude of ways. Physically, they are large school houses with multiple classrooms, equipped with blackboards and desks. Parents do not entrust their child to a teacher to study, work, be housed and become educated in the larger sense; they pay for them to attend a school where they will study religious knowledge as modules alongside other academic subjects before returning home (Brenner, 1991, pp. 63-64). In fact, one might mistake madrasas for government-run francophone public schools if it were not for a single feature that is central to their endeavor: their language policy regarding classical Arabic as the medium of instruction (Brenner, 1991, p. 63; Ware III, 2014, p. 67).

⁵⁶ From the Arabic, *madrassa* (مدرسة). Sometimes written as *médersa* per local Arabic pronunciation.

⁵⁷ *Wahhabi* is folk term common in West Africa (and in particular Mali) today to refer to reformist Muslim Salafists. The designation is generally rejected by Salafis who refer to themselves more commonly as Sunni thereby claiming to simply be followers of the normative example of the prophet (Ar. *sunna*) (for a discussion see Saint-Laury, 2012, footnote 2; Ware III, 2014, pp. 12-13; Wiktorowicz, 2006, footnote 1).

This language policy stems in part from a prevalent rationalist tenet in modernist Islamic circles “that texts are transparent and that grasping their manifest meaning makes their prescriptions clear” (Ware III, 2014, p. 70). As such the primary focus in *madrasas* is on “grammar, and the main skill to be acquired is linguistic facility in classical Arabic” (Ware III, 2014, p. 67) through the adoption of French pedagogical methods for foreign language instruction. While madrasa reformists may insist that they are simply hoping to offer popular access to Islam, the fact remains that the focus on Arabic acquisition in schooling also functions as means to short-circuit the elite role traditionally played by Quranic teachers as religious intermediaries. It is unsurprising then that those behind this shift to Arabic were also frequently engaged in larger doctrinal critiques of traditional Sufi clerics at the top of the Quranic schooling system (Kaba, 1974).

The rise of the Wahhabiyya and the Madrasa movement have led to a common conceptualization of a dispute between the traditionalist old-guard of the Quranic tradition and the new Arab-influenced reformists. But as Ware (2014) shows in his analysis of Islamic schooling in post-colonial Senegal, this division has incorrectly cemented a vision of traditionalists as static and unconcerned with innovation. Similarly, even in the case of Manding-speaking Muslims in AOF, Brenner’s (2001) account highlights the fact that some of the Madrasa pioneers had never been to the Middle East and belonged to local Sufi brotherhoods. Sulemaana Kantè and N’ko have not been situated within this Islamic schooling debate at all. Taking them into account provides further evidence that the traditionalist vs. reformist distinction breaks down upon closer inspection.

As demonstrated earlier, Kantè was clearly concerned with spreading Islam amongst West Africans. Additionally, similarly to the Madrasa movement pioneers, he was interested in assuring both understanding of and unmediated access to Islamic texts and knowledge. Democratizing the traditional Quranic system was for Kantè an Islamic responsibility. In recounting the history of Islam’s arrival and spread in sub-Saharan Africa for instance he writes (Kánte, 2007, p. 1, my emphasis)

<p>፡ ቫዛ ገ ሿዱ ለሸደገ ሆኑህደቲህህ ለፑ ሽ ሸዞ ለሸዞሃሽ ማ ኔጌ ሿደሽ ሽ'ዛ ፡ ትዳ ሸፑ ሸጋ ሸ'ገዛ ኔገ ሸጋ ሸጋ ለዛ ለሸሸደሽ ለዛ ስታ ፡ ሸጋ ለገ ሸደሃ ሸ ፡ ለገጌ ሸደሽ'ዛ ለሸሸደሽ ትዳ ሽጋ ሸ ፡ ሸጋ ባዳጌ ሸ ሸደሽገዳጌ ሸደ ጌዛ ሸ'ገ ሸ ፡ ሸጋ ፡ ሸጋ ሸደሽጌጌጌጌጌ ሸደ ሸ'ገ ሸደ ሸዞ ሸደ ለሸሸደሽ ሸጌ ሽ'ዛ ፡ ትዳ ለፑ ትዳ ሸደሽጌ ባዳጌ ትዞ ለጌ ለጌ ሸ ባዳጌ ሸ'ጌ ለፑ ሸደ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸ ፡ ትዳ ሸደሽጌ ሸደ ሸጌ ለጌ ሸጌ ትዞ ሸ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌ ሸጌጌጌጌጌ</p>	<p><i>Murabitu fànkamá' lù wá' kó, àlu tó dá sîlamayá' kàn ò bée dó fó kán'à sùì bì lá, k'ò kún' ké sîlamaya' ké' dí k'àlù héne: à síla' gbé' fê, à télen' fê, à jóo' lá nìnmayá' fê, à n'à kó' lù dónòoyá n'à lá dèn-ń-jèdeláya' fê, báò sîlamayá' yé Ála lè kélén' yida lá bée lá, k'ò bée y'à télen' ì jède né Ála lá sùu, diina' tǝ' lù dòn yé mòò gbéde lù lè yida lá, í yé tàmin ò báda fê kà Ála lásòdòn</i></p>	<p>After the departure of the powerful <i>Murabit</i> [Murabitun⁵⁸], they [Africans] stayed with Islam through it all up until today, because Islam agreed with them: for its clean path, its justice, its good morals and for the easing of problems and independence it provided, because Islam reveals God alone to all and says that all should [seek] God directly. Other religions in contrast propose other people through whom people must pass to reach God</p>
--	---	---

The possibility of unmediated access to God is thereby intrinsic to Islam in Kantè’s view. Of course, as a Quranic teacher himself, Kantè understood the necessity of schooling and instruction. But for Kantè these individuals were not to become flawed gatekeepers that could distort the original and true message of the religion (2008a, p. 4 my emphasis⁵⁹):

ለጌጋ [ታ] ት ሸ'ዛ ሰጋዞ | *Ñné k'an' ná [kán'] sébe* | [...] I quickly started our

⁵⁸The *Al-Murābiṭūn* (Ar.) or Almoravids refers to an 11th century Arabo-Berber empire centered in what is now Morocco and popularly reported to have sacked the West African empire of Ghana (see Conrad & Fisher, 1982 regarding this debate).

⁵⁹ Exclusively in the N’ko typesetting and Latin transcription here, [brackets] mark insertions into Kantè’s text as marked by by the copyist Bàbá Màmádi Jàane.

reform. They would however arrive at radically different solutions. For the Madrasa reformists, the response was and is schooling through the medium of Islamic texts: Classical Arabic. For Kantè, on the other hand, the response was to translate the texts and opt for mother-tongue education. These linguistic solutions however were not random and reveal how N’ko and the madrasa movement were in fact indirect competitors emerging from separate traditions of West African Muslim thought and with distinct visions for society going forward.

The actors that were central to the Madrasa movement coalesced in the 1940s and 50s in the very same locales that Kantè’s own coming-of-age travels and his invention of N’ko took place. Kaba (1974) tracks the arrival of Wahhabi reformist tendencies in AOF to a man, Al-Hajj Tiekodo⁶¹ Kamagaté, who actively preached in the same areas of Mali and Côte d’Ivoire that Kantè began traveling in 1942. In fact, the very town where Kantè encountered Kamil Muruwah's book denigrating African languages, Bouaké, was central to the circles that gave rise to the madrasa movement (Kaba, 1974, p. 33). By 1948, the city’s first madrasa school had already opened (LeBlanc, 1999, p. 492). Regardless of whether he ever directly encountered Kamagaté, as a young Muslim man seeking his fortune in trade, Kantè was unquestionably a part of the rising generation of young *jùlá* traders in Côte d’Ivoire from which Kamagaté and the Wahhabiyya drew many followers (Kaba, 1974, p. 37). By the 1950s, Manding Muslim society was polarized and people had to take a stance vis-à-vis the reform movement (Kaba, 1974, p. 50). Was the invention of N’ko thus his own personal response to the increasingly numerous reformist or “Wahhabi” voices that he undoubtedly encountered and likely

⁶¹ A common proper name that literally means ‘old man’ and would be rendered in Manding as *Cèkòdò* or *Cèkòrò*.

viewed as committed to the further Arabization of West Africa (see allusions to this in Oyler, 2005, p. 40, 73)? Kantè's own writings suggest a direct concern with his fellow Muslims having such a vision (Kántè, 2008a, p. 4):

Ḳ̄Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄Ḳ̄	<i>Árabu kán lónna' mén' nù yé n' báda yàn, ò fànbá' yé díina fátò' lù lè dí, mén' nù té fóyì sébenen' fê árabu' kán' dós díina' kúma' kós, ò lù yé kúma sébe' tš' bée mída lá káfiri' kán' nè dórɔn dí`</i>	Where we are from, most people who master the Arabic language are religious fanatics [<i>díina fátò' lù</i> . lit. 'crazy religious people'], they don't want to see anything written in Arabic unless it pertains to religious affairs; anything that is written on other matters is considered by them as heathenry [<i>káfiri kán'</i>]
--	--	--

Clearly, Kantè did not consider people literate in Arabic such as himself, his father and his Ajami-penning predecessor, Alfa Mahmud Kaba, as fanatics that would condemn knowledge outside of the religious sphere. In this sense, we must understand Kantè, in this quote and his intervention more broadly, as partially addressing the Islamic reformists with whom he traveled and lived throughout his orthographic experimentations between 1944 and 1949.

Kantè's intervention however cannot be limited to the Islamic sphere. N'ko and the madrasa movement both used medium of instruction as a means to simultaneously undermine Quranic schooling hierarchy and French colonialism. If the madrasa movement sought to use Arabic to re-insert West Africa into a global Islamic community, what did Kantè seek in promoting mother-tongue education for Manding speakers?

Kantè, the Ethno-nationalist

While clearly Islamic on one hand, his focus on mother-tongue orthography and standardization along with his writings on Manding history and culture tie Kantè's work

and vision to other ethno-nationalist rumblings of the late colonial era on the other. In Guinea, these tendencies prevailed in the political arena of the 1940s. Prior to the rise of the pan-AOF party, the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA), following its founding in 1946:

The political arena was dominated by regional and ethnic associations promoting the interests of their particular constituencies: Peul [viz. Fulani], Malinke [viz. Maninka/Manding], Susu, and the people of the forest region (Schmidt, 2005, p. 33)

Colonial understandings of the primacy of ethnicity aside, drawing people into these kinds of associations required intellectual work regardless of where it took place on the continent:

Often, the first or second generation of western-educated people attempted to weave together—in local publications, mission journals, and other forums—their knowledge of “traditional” myths and local histories with their command of written language to foster coherence and self-consciousness within a given area, strengthening ethnic solidarities, which in turn could be used by political parties (Cooper, 2002, p. 59)

While capturing the general dynamic, Cooper’s account glosses over two major features that apply to N’ko as well as other ethno-nationalist tendencies stemming from the same period: African languages and Islamically-educated intellectuals. Of course, there is a clear connection in the case of Kantè’s focus on standardized Manding language literacy and cultural traditions. But Kantè was not at all Western-educated. Other Muslims in the region writing in local languages such as the Fulani of Futa Jallon also expressed such ethno-nationalist leanings (Salvaing, 2004, pp. 122–131). Echoing Kantè’s sentimental moments regarding his native Manding, Cerno Abdourahmane Bah (1916-2013) for instance writes:

It is not because I do not know Arabic that I compose poems in Fulfulde [sic. Fulani], but because Fulfulde is what everybody hears and understands. And because Fulfulde is the language I like better than any other language (cited in Salvaing, 2004, p. 129).

Ethno-nationalism therefore was far from being a preserve of the secular political realm⁶². It also had connections to writers such as Kantè through the older Afro-Muslim vernacular tradition. Nonetheless, N’ko can be understood as a partial intellectual counterpart to the relevant ethnic association of Kantè’s home region of Upper Guinea, the *Union du Mandé* (‘The Union of Manden’) (d’Avignon, 2012, p. 10). This is not to say that Kantè was commissioned by or working directly for the group; these sorts of connections would have been difficult given that Kantè spent most of the 1940s in Côte d’Ivoire. Even following independence, Kantè never seems to have been directly involved in politics whether in Guinea, Mali (1977-1982) or Côte d’Ivoire (1982-1984) before his death in 1987. Regardless of this lack of connections with political parties pre- or post-independence, his writings on Manding language, history and traditions were certainly works that could “foster coherence and self-consciousness” (Cooper, 2002, p. 59) amongst Manding people as Oyler (2005) and Wyrod (2003) argue.

This is perhaps most evident in his conceptualization of language. For Kantè, the proper name given to his alphabet, N’ko, is first and foremost the name of the Manding language itself. As he explains in his very first grammar book (Kántɛ, 2008b, p. 1):

𞤎𞤥𞤫 𞤢𞤫𞤮 𞤥𞤮 𞤮𞤮 𞤎𞤫𞤮 𞤮𞤮, 𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮 : 𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮) : 𞤮𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮 𞤮𞤮 : 𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮 : 𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮𞤮	<i>Màndén’ nù lá N’ko’yé kánbolon kùnbába 4 nè dí. Ò lù fěle nìn: (bànbàrán’, mànenká’, màndenkó’, à ní jùlá’)</i>	The language which the Mandings speak is N’ko. The Mandings’ N’ko is 4 principal dialects. Take a look at them: (Bamanan,
---	--	---

⁶² Though it was quite important, especially in Guinea. See for instance the anti-ethnic stance in the early Independence era speeches and writings of Guinea’s first President, Sékou Touré (1967, pp. 572–574).

Kantè’s N’ko thus is the baptismal hypernym for what linguists conceptualize as the Manding language-dialect continuum of West Africa (e.g., Vydrine, 1995). Theorizing the difference between language and dialect, Kantè though does not call for simply writing one’s so-called vernacular but rather what he regards as the true or proper form of Manding (Kántè, 2007, 2008a, 2009). Central in this respect is his concept of *kángbè* (كأنغبه), a prescriptive pedagogical grammar that is also the basis of a normative standard language register by the same name (see Chapter 6). Thus, Kantè articulates a unique vision not of pure Bamanan, Maninka or Jula as codified by colonial borders, but rather of Manding, writ large. Kantè did more than believe in language having a proper form however — his linguistic works, primers and writings implicitly or explicitly call for a regimentation of Manding that will allow for the unification of its diverse speakers across the colonial borders of West Africa that are in place to this day. This much he makes clear in the opening chapter of his first N’ko grammar book (Kántè, 2008b, p. 1):

سِيدَا ١: كَانْ نِي كَانْبُولُونْ	<i>Siidá' 1: Kán' ní kánbolon'</i>	Chapter 1: Language and Dialect
١) ٢) ٣) ٤) ٥) ٦) ٧) ٨) ٩) ١٠) ١١) ١٢) ١٣) ١٤) ١٥) ١٦)	<i>A⁶³) Fúla' lù yé kán' mén' fǒ lá, ò lè Pólar' dí</i>	A) The language which Fulani speak, that is Pular
١٧) ١٨) ١٩) ٢٠) ٢١) ٢٢) ٢٣) ٢٤)	<i>E) Mòssi' lù yé kán' mén' fǒ lá, ò lè mòssé' dí</i>	B) The language which Mossi speak, that is Mòoré
٢٥) ٢٦) ٢٧) ٢٨) ٢٩) ٣٠) ٣١) ٣٢)	<i>I) Tánzani' kán' mén' fǒ lá, ò lè Sùwàli' dí</i>	C) The language which Tanzania speaks, that is Swahili
٣٣) ٣٤) ٣٥) ٣٦) ٣٧) ٣٨) ٣٩) ٤٠)	<i>E) Mándén' nù yé kán' mén' fǒ lá, ò lè N'ko dí</i>	D) The language which Manding speak, that is N'ko

⁶³ Here, as in N’ko texts in general, the alphabetic list follows the letter order of the N’ko orthography.



In a poetic use of parallelism, Kantè lays out the case later taken up by anthropologists (e.g., Bazin, 1985) that just as the recognized ethnic groups of the Mossi and the Fulani have their own distinct languages, the groups carved up as distinct, albeit related such as the Bambara, the Jula and the Malinké, are in fact sub-categories of the Manding people. Kantè also mentions *the* language of Tanzania, but he does not suggest that Manding is the language of any West African State at all. Here he implicitly uses linguistics to gesture towards alternative political formations not congruent with colonial and post-colonial borders.

In another work, however, he directly engages with the state borders when clarifying the distinction between a language and a dialect (Kántè, 2008a, p. 3):

𐎓 𐎛𐎑 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡 𐎠𐎣 𐎡𐎢
 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎛𐎑 𐎡𐎢𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎛𐎑 𐎡𐎢
 𐎛𐎑 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎛𐎑 𐎡𐎢 𐎛𐎑
 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢
 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢 𐎠𐎡𐎢 𐎡𐎢

Mòó' yé mén' fò l'à dá' lá,
 à kúmanɔɔn y'à lámén à
 tólo' lá, k'à fàamún à
 sònɔmɛ' lá, ò lé' tɔɔ kó
 kúma', kònin, kúma' yé
 fàamun ná dèri nɔɔn ná lè
 fê, kúmala' filá' mén' nù té
 jàmaná' kelen mòɔ dí, à
 síyaman' dɔ, ò lù té nɔɔn
 fàamun ná, yó Màliká'
 wálá Jèneká' báa kúma
 Nípɔnka' fê mìsali dɔ

Speech is the name for the sounds that one produces orally in order for one's interlocutor to aurally perceive them and then process them in their mind. But, speech comes to be understood through mutual socialization. Frequently, two interlocutors who are not from the same country [*jàmaná*] do not understand one another, just as a Malian or Guinean wouldn't [understand] when speaking with a Japanese person

Here we see the implications of Kantè's linguistic intervention. What is the difference between Malians and Guineans and what is the point of the borders between them (and other Manding speakers) if they really just stand between one people with a common language and history?

In sum, Kantè's N'ko was a two-pronged intervention in West African society. On one hand, he shared the rationalist and democratizing ideals of *madrassa* reformers who wished to provide unmediated access to Islamic knowledge and God. On the other hand, while they also shared a goal of preparing students to live and develop their countries in the modern era, they differed in their preferred visions. Madrasa reformers desired to create Arabic-speaking subjects for the purposes of better plugging West Africa into the transnational community of Islam. Kantè did not share this goal. He arguably therefore used N'ko to counter-act what he viewed as the de-Africanizing move of *madrassa* reformers. This desire was in part connected to his strong sense of Manding identity, which he sought to fortify amongst other speakers of the language in his theorizations of grammar and dialectology (see Chapter 6 for a full exploration of this point.)

Conclusion

While Sulemaana Kantè is best known for his invention of the N'ko alphabet in 1949, this accomplishment, his intellectual work and life more broadly can be understood as stretching far beyond the confines of a room in Bingerville, Côte d'Ivoire. In embracing mother-tongue literacy as a means of better disseminating the Muslim faith for instance, he followed a long-line of Quranically-educated individuals. While his ultimate path was not graphically the same, he expressed similar sentiments as other Afro-Muslim vernacular intellectuals such as Usman dan Fodio, Samba Mambeyaa, Muusaa Ka and Alfa Mahmud Kaba who throughout the 18-20th centuries experimented with Ajami or Arabic-script-based literacy for Hausa, Fulani, Wolof and Manding. Designed during the critical Post-War period of French colonial rule, N'ko was also conceptualized as an important intellectual tool in the fight for decolonization. Kantè primarily understood

Africans as successfully controlled by the French and other Europeans because of a slavery of the mind. For him, his alphabet was therefore designed not just to propagate the Muslim faith but also to contribute to the mental liberation of Black Africans across the continent. Finally, Kantè must also be understood vis-à-vis his African peers in the partially intertwined Islamic and political spheres. The N'ko script served a dual purpose in this regard. On one hand, it was the Afro-Muslim version of the rationalist and democratizing vision of education promoted by pan-Islamic and Arabic-medium *madrasa* schools. On the other, Kantè's alphabet was the linguistic means for articulating an ethnically-coherent vision for society with borders potentially distinct from those of the post-colonial states.

In short, Kantè can be understood schematically in three ways: as a Muslim, a Pan-Africanist and an ethno-nationalist. His relevance however goes beyond intellectually contributing to the often-nebulous abstract nouns behind these identities. Indeed, as I made clear in the introduction, Kantè is in many ways still present in West Africa. And what of the entity, N'ko, that he called into being? In what follows, I draw on ethnographic data collected from 2012-2016 to explore the N'ko movement of today. Stepping into a range of locales and contexts, I reveal, through N'koïsants' talk about talk, how the movement is connected to larger socio-political projects and changes related to pan-Africanism, ethnicity and citizenship.

Ethnographic Interlude

“*Án yé sòsòlí’ kéla kúma’ dǎ kàn*” (‘We don’t agree about a word’)

After over two hours of presentations and audience questions, the audience at the *l’Université Julius Nyéréré de Kankan* was tired. In a conference with N’ko as its theme however, the next question garnered a wave of requests for the microphone (A11, 1251):

	Transcript	Translation
1	Q <i>Báden nù, á ní jǎ</i>	My brothers, hello
2	<i>jìninkalí sàbá lè nê bólo, e fila</i>	I have three or two questions
3	<i>ń ná jìninkali fǎloman’</i>	My first question
4	<i>ń ní dǎjǎǎn (baa???) bádo’ dǎ</i>	Chatting with my friend (???)
5	<i>án yé sòsòlí’ kéla kúma’ dǎ kàn</i>	We got into an argument about a word
6	<i>án té bènna</i>	We couldn’t agree
7	<i>bée dí à fǎ í tá ná’ mà</i>	We each stuck with our side
8	<i>kà bèn N’ko kǎdǎ’ mà</i>	regarding the meaning of N’ko
9	<i>Dó lù kó í b’a fǎ kó N’ko</i>	Some say that if you say “N’ko”
10	<i>kó Máninkakán’ nè</i>	that it’s Maninka
11	<i>Dó lù kó n’í kó kó N’ko</i>	Some say that if you say “N’ko”
12	<i>kó sébeli’ lè</i>	that it’s a writing system
13	<i>Dó lù kó kó à fila bée</i>	Some say that it’s both

This seemingly simple question emerged during a small conference organized in 2013 around the question of whether N’ko “is scientific” (336). The university had recently become a place of interest because just a year prior the school had found some funding for an N’ko instructor. Their primary responsibility was teaching a new requirement of all students pursuing degrees related to language (e.g., Arabic, English, Linguistics): an N’ko class. Stepping down from his role as the director of a Franco-Arabic-N’ko Madrasa school in the mining town of Banankoro, the prominent N’ko intellectual and author, Màmadi Sùwaré, who also happened to be my N’ko instructor at the university for the summer, jumped on the opportunity to relocate to Kankan.

Figure 16: Author and his teacher Màmadí Sùwaré in 2016



The first individual to respond was not a panelist, but he had been involved in the preparation for the conference in the days leading up to it. He had strong words regarding the young man's query:

	Transcript	Translation
80	K <i>Bádenma nà jìninkali' mén' kéla, kó "ní N'ko yé sébeli' lè dí? N'ò té ní kán' nè?"</i>	Our brother has asked a question, "is N'ko a writing system? Or is it a language?"
81	<i>Bádenma', án yé kìsikása' bó án ná</i>	My friends, let's free ourselves from this inferiority complex

He went on to explain that N'ko was a writing system (*sébeli*) but that like any script it necessarily resembled the language for which it was designed. A writing system therefore was like a language's photo. For him, the confusion about N'ko stemmed from the fact

that the inventor of the script was a Maninka speaker who naturally created a script that in part resembled his own language. Just after finishing, another person, this time an official panelist, chimed in:

	Transcript	Translation
106	T <i>Bon, Ála à (lakuraya). Un additif pour ce qu'il vient de dire</i>	Alright, may God (renew) it. One thing to add to what he just said
107	<i>Bon, kúma 'násurunya ' dó</i>	Basically, in short
108	<i>N'ko yé sébeli ' dí</i>	N'ko is a writing system
109	<i>Sébeli ' lè</i>	It's a writing system

The matter was settled then; N'ko was writing system.

The man responsible for inventing the writing system in question, however, had also previously weighed in on the issue in a 1968 interview with an unknown Guinean journalist:

: Ȳ (Ⲙⲏⲛ) ⲟⲩ ⲛ ⲛ ⲛ Ἰ' b Იⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛ Მ Იⲓⲛⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛ Იⲓⲛ	<i>Án ná kán 'nè (N'ko) dí, sébesun kúda ládannen ' t'à dí dè, mòɔ síyaman té yóɔɔ 'ò lé' fàamun ná</i>	[O]ur language is “N'ko”; it is not a newly created alphabet. Many people have not understood this point (Kántɛ, 2013, p. 15)
--	--	--

In fact, this stance had been echoed back at the conference when the same man responsible for opening this can of worms initially introduced his second question.

	Transcript	Translation
19	Q <i>Án baa túbabú' lá kán' tà</i>	We take the language of the White man
20	<i>ní í wára Fàransí</i>	if you go to France
21	<i>àlú lè kàrán' kéla àlu lá Fàransí' lè dó</i>	They are studying in their French
22	<i>àyi dí avancer à dó jóona</i>	They advance quickly in it
23	<i>í baa wá Allemagne</i>	If you go to Germany
24	<i>allemagne-kan nè kàrantó</i>	German is being studied
25	<i>í baa wá Chine</i>	If you go to China

26	<i>àlu lè àlu lá chinóis-kan kàranna</i>	They are studying their Chinese
27	<i>àlu béé kà àlu lá lónni' dila àlu lá kán' nè dó</i>	They all have built their knowledge up in their language
28	<i>N'ko bó' kóro</i>	After N'ko came out
29	<i>Kantè Sùlemáana, Ála à lá néma' jidi</i>	Kantè Sulemaana, Peace be upon him
30	<i>à ká sùkú' dó</i>	in his poem
31	<i>kó fàkán' nè lónni' jidila</i>	he said that one's mother-tongue strengthens knowledge.
32	<i>án (báa) kúma ò tà</i>	We take this notion
33	<i>tùṅagbé' lè ò dí</i>	as unblemished truth
34	<i>ònhón!</i>	Indeed!
35	<i>N'ko (lábɔnen') án báda lè</i>	N'ko (comes) from our home
36	<i>án ná kán' nè</i>	It's our language

Why don't African countries educate in their own languages and why does the Guinean government not integrate N'ko into the national education system, he asked. Citing the cases of France and Germany, he responded to his own query by invoking one of Kantè's lyrical poems (see also 2010a, 2010b); the responses of the panelists notwithstanding, for this audience member, N'ko was in fact "our language" and not simply a writing system. How could establishing the "meaning" (*kódo*) or more properly the *referent* of N'ko be so troublesome?

This seemingly simple task is confounding even outside of N'ko learning and promotion circles. In 2012 the French researcher Gilles Holder published an in-depth piece on the West African religious group and movement known as Ançar Dine⁶⁴ and its charismatic leader Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara. To do so he relied on three pieces of literature. One, a biography of Haïdara, he details as a "booklet in [the] N'ko language"

⁶⁴Ançar Dine is the commonly used French spelling of the faith-based organization of Cheikh Ousmane Madani Haïdara that was established in the 1980s in southern Mali. It stems from the Arabic أنصار الدين *'anṣār al-dīn* 'Adherents of the faith'. It is not to be confused with the militant Islamist group of Iyad Ag Ghaly that emerged in northern Mali in 2012 under the same name.

(Holder, 2012, p. 392). Later in his text, he indirectly provides us further instructions for identifying the idiom in question: “[...] Haïdara pays particular attention to vernacular languages—which N’ko is not” (p. 410).

Holder’s use of “N’ko” is confounding for two intertwined reasons. First, it fails to pick out N’ko’s prototypical referent and that preferred by the conference participants discussed above: the script devised by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. Second, while he approaches mutual coordination with Kantè by calling N’ko a language, he ultimately veers away by insisting that, whatever its linguistic status, it is not Malian; odd considering the fact that over 80% of the country speaks a variety (viz. Bamanan) of the language that the N’ko script is typically used to write—Manding. How did N’ko activists in Kankan in 2013, Sulemaana Kantè in 1968 and a renowned French *islamologue* in 2012 come to such wildly distinct conclusions? And in particular, given their deep admiration and respect for Sulemaana Kantè and his ideas, why would multiple N’ko activists in 2013 publicly proclaim the opposite of *Fóde*⁶⁵ (𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤴 ‘Professor’)?

Answering these questions requires delving into N’ko as a word, and more particularly, as a proper noun. Proper names differ from common nouns in the sense that instead of denoting a class of objects (e.g., dogs, cats etc.), they represent a unique pairing between a word and referent (e.g., Paul Newman, Hilary Clinton etc.) (Dixon, 2010, p. 102). In one sense, each person mentioned above has used N’ko to identify distinct entities. For some it is the proper name of a writing system invented by

⁶⁵ In N’ko circles, this title is often used as a short-hand proper name for Sulemaana Kantè. It is derived from word, *fóde*, which is typically applied to those who have successfully memorized and recited the Quran in full. Kantè (1992, p. 220) himself glosses it as follows, “𞤵𞤴 𞤵𞤲𞤴 𞤵𞤴 𞤵𞤲𞤴 𞤵𞤴 𞤵𞤲𞤴” (‘he or she who memorizes some [form of] knowledge’). It is also a common first name in certain areas.

Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. In the minds of others it is that of a language, Manding, though its contours have not yet been outlined for us. Finally, another group concurs that N’ko is a language, but views it as a foreign tongue of unknown origin. These diverse stances make transparent the fact that a proper name is not an arbitrary linguistic coincidence but rather the fruit of socio-historical interactional work that pairs a particular string of phonemes with an entity of the real or imagined world. In the case of N’ko, the fact that a supposed expert, Sulemaana Kantè, and N’ko activists of today could take such varied stances on its referent is not a matter of imprecision. It is, rather, indicative of the contentious nature of referential practices and in particular, the diverse positions that individuals take both regarding and within a social movement built around a writing system created in Bingerville, Côte d’Ivoire in 1949.

My goal in the following two chapters is to tease apart a partial range of things that are successfully referred to with the proper name N’ko. In doing so however, I am not interested in offering a definitive account or definition of N’ko. I am rather motivated by a desire to determine (a) the various processes that have led to /ŋko/’s range of “reference standards” (Agha, 2007a, p. 128) and (b) how diverging stances on and deployment of the same phonological shape are connected to larger sociological debates over phenomena such as decolonization, pan-Africanism and ethno-nationalism.

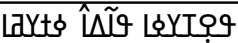
In Chapter 5, I explore the understanding of N’ko as script. In particular, I focus on typifications of N’ko as a uniquely capable tonal African alphabet. Through both explicit statements of reference standard and talk about linguistic facts of tone, N’koisans utilize N’ko-as-script as a means to both pursue pan-African ideals of liberation through literacy and temper readings of their movement as an ethno-nationalist one.

In Chapter 6, I explore understandings of N'ko as language. Through an investigation of talk about Manding language variation and standardization, I uncover how N'koisants create and uphold Manding as a single language united by the prescriptive register known as *kángbɛ*. In addition to gesturing towards a language community that supersedes the borders tacitly endorsed by linguistics and the post-colonial states, this form of speech also serves as the discursive means for N'ko students to hone themselves into the kind of hard-hardworking and logical citizens that they believe their home countries desperately lack.

Chapter 5: *N'kó yé sébenni'yé* ('N'ko is a writing system')

In the context of a botched coup, a northern rebellion and the deployment of French troops in the country, our entrance into Mali's National Assembly was disconcertingly simple. Composed of myself and select members of the N'ko association La.Ya⁶⁶, our delegation was eclectic. Our leader was a well-known personality to many Bamako residents because of his long-standing gig co-hosting a show on one of Mali's national radio channels, and his success in the traditional medicine business. One of the women, on the other hand, was university-educated, fluent in French and English, but recently let go by an American study-abroad program shut down in the months following the coup and military intervention in the north. Our appointment was with the National Assembly's "Education and Culture Committee⁶⁷" to discuss how N'ko could fit into the legislative agenda. Once inside, we seemed to know where we were going; a fact stemming either from a history of prior visits, or possibly because one member of La.Ya was himself a Malian deputy.

Besides the francophone sign-in sheet and a few opening words, nearly the entirety of our discussion with the all-male body was conducted in Manding. Well into the proceedings, it was the turn of one of our delegates, an older gentleman named Dúnbuya, to speak. Looking regal in his flowing blue robe, he made the point that, contrary to some peoples' view, "N'ko is not Maninka, N'ko is a writing system' (*N'ko té*

⁶⁶  *Lónniya (Lámáa) Yiriwa* ('Knowledge Strengthening [Movement]'). Just as in English, in N'ko acronyms are pronounced using the name of the letters. To approximate the acronyms as used locally, I have transliterated the acronyms as the letters are pronounced. Thus: *Lónniya Yiriwa* → L.Y. → La.Ya.

⁶⁷ Currently the *Commission de l'Education, de la Culture, des Nouvelles Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication*.

mànkakán' yé, N'ko yé sébenni' yé). To prove his point, he recounted a recent event he attended where someone composed a beautiful poem in Fulani (*fúlakan*) using the N'ko script. Detailing its intricacies, he stated that such a work could not have been transcribed in the Latin script because—he ummed, searching for the right words—“*kògɔ t'à lá*” (‘It’s got no salt’) (330:4). Continuing on, he reiterated that “N’ko isn’t Bamanan, it isn’t Maninka. It’s a writing system” (*N'ko té bámanankan yé, à té mànkakan yé, sébeli lò*⁶⁸) (330:4). It wasn’t long into the general questions and comments from the committee members that one of them hit upon on Dúnbuya’s idea. Encouraging the N’ko delegation, the deputy proclaimed it a “reality” (*réalité*) that in his own experience the N’ko alphabet was able to accurately write Mali’s Dogon language whereas the Latin alphabet couldn’t capture it (330:9).

This segment of our June 2013 consultation at the National Assembly neatly encapsulates one of the central ways of understanding N’ko. As Dúnbuya makes clear, N’ko is not Bamanan. It is not Maninka, nor any other Manding variety. It is a script. More implicitly however he articulates the argument that N’ko is an African alphabet. Not because of its origin, but because it is uniquely capable of representing African languages such as Fulani and Dogon. What linguistic features N’ko was uniquely capturing in these cases is unclear⁶⁹. Regardless, this exchange makes clear one of the main ways that N’ko is embraced and promoted by its supporters, the general public and in this case, a legislative deputy: as a writing system often heralded as the “African phonetic alphabet” (“N’ko yeta-menta,” n.d.).

⁶⁸ *Lò* and not *dòn* for the copula as noted in my fieldnotes.

⁶⁹ Fulani is not a tonal language, but does include a range of phonemes that are typically represented by non-standard Latin-based graphemes such as , <d>, <ɲ>, <ɲ> and <y>.

My aim in this chapter is three-fold. First, I demonstrate how—despite the claims of Sulemaana Kantè and some N’koïsants today—the referential pairing between *N’ko* and Kantè’s alphabet as a uniquely capable pan-African script is established and maintained by activists today. Second, I explicate how this line of reasoning is deeply connected to the linguistic feature known as *tone*; that is, the lexically and grammatically contrastive use of *pitch* that relies on the relative frequency of one’s vibrating vocal folds as air passes through the glottis in speech. Third, I analyze how this understanding of N’ko as (a tonal African) script galvanizes and is drawn on by N’ko supporters to both temper the idea of N’ko being an ethnic Manding project and pursue a pan-African vision of decolonization through written language. To do so I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in N’ko classrooms, events and social circles since 2012.

Script, Not Language

As the opening vignette above and moments highlighted in the interlude make clear, many students and proponents of N’ko actively work to establish N’ko’s reference prototype as the unique script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. Such a pairing is not self-evident.

/nko/ as Language

First, individuals often use the phonemic string /nko/ to refer to the Manding language. In the prelude to this chapter, for instance, I highlighted how Kantè explicitly made this argument:

ḱ Ƴḱ (ḱḱḱ) ḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱḱ ḱḱḱḱḱḱ ḱḱḱḱ ḱḱḱḱḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱḱḱḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱḱḱ ḱḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱḱḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱ ḱḱḱ	ḱḱ ḱḱḱ ḱḱḱ ḱḱḱ ḱḱḱ <i>án ná kán’ nè (N’ko) dí,</i> <i>sébesun kúda ládannen’ t’á</i> <i>dí dè, mòḱ síyaman té</i> <i>yórc’ò lé’ fàamun ná</i>	[O]ur language is “N’ko”; it is not a newly created alphabet. Many people have not understood this point.
--	---	---

(Kántɛ, 2013, p. 15)

Úsman Kùlúbàli (2015, p. 1), an active N’ko teacher and author based out of Bamako, echoes this usage in the introduction to one of his pedagogical linguistic works:

ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ'ɓ ɓɓ : ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓ : ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ.	<i>N’ko ye kán’ mànkán’ yèlematá’ lè dí, mén’ t’sé sébel’ à ná béde’ mà féu màsére’ dó lù kó, mén’ nù yé yèlemá’ ò séreya lá</i>	N’ko is a sound-changing language that cannot be written properly at all without some markings [màsére] that attest to these changes.
---	--	---

This practice of typifying N’ko not as writing (*sébeli*) but as language (*kán*) is not limited to textual documents. For instance, in the spring of 2015 I conducted an interview with Bába Mámádi Jàané, a prominent N’ko author, largely responsible for the computer work that has led to the digital preservations of Kantè’s works today. In it he recounted the following about the historical efforts to print N’ko books while he lived in Egypt (458, A18):

	Transcription	Translation
883 CD	<i>Àni í hákili’ lá, mògó’ m- kátugu í m’ à fɓ kó fàrafɩnw tòn ká cá</i>	And didn't you say that there were a lot of Africans in Egypt?
884 BMJ	<i>Kósebe, hálibi àlu bé yèn</i>	Yup, even today they are there
885 CD	<i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
886	<i>Mais minw tòn bé gwère N’ko lá, k’ à sòrɔ k’ù yèrɛ wári’ tà k’ à kà fàra jónn kàn</i>	Both those that would come close to N’ko and take their own money and put it together
887	<i>kà fènke, kà kàfáw láse Làgine, òlú tòn yé jón’ yé?</i>	and whatchamacallit, send books to Guinea, who were they?
889 BMJ	<i>Ò tòn bé N’kofɔla’ lè dí kè, ménnu sèbe N’ko-karan’ mà.</i>	They were all N’ko speakers [N’kofɔla] who were serious about N’ko studies.
890	<i>Làgineká’ lù b’ à lá</i>	There were some Guineans...

Here, Jàané responds to my query about the individuals behind typeset N’ko texts.

Specifically in line 4 he typifies them as “N’ko speakers”. In all of these instances,

whether overtly or tacitly, /ŋko/ clearly denotes *kán* (‘language’) not *sébeli* (‘writing’).

The African Phonetic Alphabet

In contrast to this usage by Kantè and certain N’ko scholars today—explored further in chapter 6—in practice, the prototypical referent of *N’ko*, for the general public, is the alphabet invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949.

This understanding is confirmed by the many N’ko associations across West Africa that typically work not for the promotion of the N’ko language but for the N’ko *alphabet*. The local N’ko association of Bobo-Dioulasso which I began frequenting in 2012 for instance is known by the name AEPA-N’ko or ‘The Association for Education and the Promotion of the N’ko Alphabet’ (*l’Association pour l’Education et la Promotion de l’Alphabet N’ko*).

This use of /ŋko/ as the proper name of an alphabetic script also holds true in the many ways that students talk about Sulemaana Kantè. While revered for many accomplishments and ideas, he is perhaps most regularly upheld in book prefaces and postfaces, general commentary and artwork as the “inventor of the N’ko *sébesun*” or ‘alphabet’ (ᠠᠶᠤᠨᠠᠷᠠᠶᠤ ᠠᠨᠠᠷᠠᠶᠤ ᠠᠨᠠᠷᠠᠶᠤ, see the Figure 17 below).

Figure 17: Portrait of Kantè with N’ko script calligraphy of a bird, formed by the words “Inventor of the N’ko alphabet”, which carries a branch reading “Sòlomaná’ Kánte”



This term for alphabet (*sébesun*) stems from Kantè’s early linguistic writings. In the second of Kantè’s foundational texts on N’ko grammar, $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ ('The big book of N’ko grammar'), he lays out his understanding of writing as one kind of communication alongside speech and gesture (Kántè, 2008a, p. 3):

<p> $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ $\text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA } \text{LAFLELA}$ </p>	<p> <i>Sébeli’ lè kúma’ sínkɔn’</i> <i>bílá’ dí káyidi’ kàn</i> <i>dúba’ ní kàlá’ lá.</i> <i>Sínkɔn’ , ò lù 1-1 na lè</i> <i>tóó kó sébeden’ . Kán</i> <i>kélen’ sébeden’ bée</i> <i>ládénén’ nè tóó kó</i> <i>sébesun</i> </p>	<p> Writing [<i>sébeli</i>] is putting signs [<i>sínkɔn</i>] of speech on paper with pen and ink. These individual signs’ names are graphemes [<i>sébeden</i>]. The name of all of the graphemes of one language put together is an orthography [<i>sébesun</i>] </p>
--	--	---

Note that my usage here of technical terms such as *graphemes* and *orthography* are not the likely translation choices of most English speakers, who would probably opt for *letters* and *alphabet* respectively. This is similarly the case with N’ko students when

translating their works and terms into other languages and also the solution adopted by the N’ko association of Bobo-Dioulasso in its French language name discussed above.

Regardless, all of these terms in Manding are derived from the root lexeme *sébe* ‘write’:

Figure 18: Writing system terms derived from *sébe*

	Gloss	Interlinear Gloss
<i>sébe</i>	‘write’	
→ <i>sébe-li</i>	‘writing’	write-NOM
→ <i>sébe.den</i>	‘letter’	write.child
→ <i>sébe.sun</i>	‘alphabet’	write.trunk

N’ko activists however do not restrict their usage to the expression *N’ko sébesun* ‘N’ko alphabet’. For instance, while interviewing Bábá Mámádi Jàane, I queried him about his childhood and trajectory regarding N’ko. Born outside of Kankan in Guinea in 1961, Jàane left his mother and father's courtyard at an early age for the purposes of his education. When he was 11-years-old he began his studies in a *Madrassa*, the kind of modern Islamic school covered in Chapter 4 (458:3) :

	Transcription	Translation
1	CD <i>Ayiwa donc í</i>	Alright so
2	<i>í bóra í ká lú’ mà</i>	you left home
3	BMJ <i>Mmm</i>	Mmm
4	CD <i>n’í bóra lú’ mà kà wá Kankan</i>	And you left home and went to Kankan
5	<i>kà dòn madarasa lá</i>	and started Madrasa (school)
6	<i>Ò té?</i>	Right?
7	BMJ <i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
8	BMJ <i>Kósebe</i>	Right
9	<i>mais</i>	but
10	CD <i>Ò tuma í tòn té N’ko lón?</i>	At that time didn’t you know N’ko?
11	BMJ <i>N tòn bé N’ko lón</i>	I knew N’ko
12	CD <i>I tòn kà kàran ou i tòn kà tógó’ mèn?</i>	You had studied it or you had heard its name?

13	BMJ	<i>Ón-hòn dé</i>	No, no
14		<i>Í y'à lón, Kàramɔɔ Súlemaana yé N'ko-sebeli bɔ Côte d'Ivoire lè yé</i>	You know, Karamɔɔ Sulemaana came out with (the) N'ko writing (system) in Côte d'Ivoire
15		<i>Ñ hákili lá, í yé dɔɔnin kàlá' mà ò dɔ</i>	I think you know some things about that
16	CD	<i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
17		<i>ònhón</i>	yeah
18	BMJ	<i>Ò kófɛ uh Laguinée yé dén-n-yere-laya sɔɔ túma mén' na</i>	Afterwards, when Guinea got independence
19		<i>Bon Sékou Touré tòn b'à nínin à yé dòn</i>	Well Sékou Touré was trying to make him return
20	CD	<i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
21	BMJ	<i>Ò fána kúma' ká síya sá, ò kòni mòò' látaara, à nàda</i>	There's lots of noise about all of that too, in any case someone was sent and he came
22	CD	<i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
23	BMJ	<i>Ònhón, kòni kó' lá</i>	Yeah, but afterwards
24		<i>Uh à dòn kɔ à jàmaná' kɔɔ yèn</i>	After getting back into his country

After a brief interlude where I sought clarification about Sulemaana Kantè's time in Côte d'Ivoire, we returned back to the matter at hand:

42	BMJ	<i>à fà dɛɛɔɔn síyamanba' mén' tòn bé Bâte-jamana ò dɔ yèn</i>	His father's many companions that were in Baté ⁷⁰
43		<i>Kàramɔɔ Súlemaana sébeli lá bóli' kó dɔ</i>	After Karamɔɔ Sulemaana's writing came out
44		<i>À táara lè kà yáala àlú fɛ háketo ní à séra kà ò mén' láfaamuya</i>	He went and toured around their area so that
45		<i>à y'ò n'à táalibeden kàran N'ko lá</i>	he could teach N'ko to those that he convinced as well as their students

In this exchange, in line 10 I use the proper name *N'ko* with no further specificity or explicit instructions for identifying its referent as either the Manding language, a script

⁷⁰ Baté (*Bâte*) refers to the historical clerical region where Kantè was raised as a child. See Chapter 4.

or an orthography: “Didn’t you know N’ko?”. As the *author, principal and animator* of this phrase (Goffman, 1981), I can affirm that I was referring to the script invented in 1949. More importantly though, we can confirm this in the actual interaction. In line 11, for instance, Jàane aligns himself with my propositional stance by parroting my very words in response: “I knew N’ko.” But how do we know that we are not actually discussing separate entities? To be sure, we have to wait until line 14 where Jàané explicitly typifies N’ko as a “writing system” using *sébeli*⁷¹ as a generic hypernym instead of *sébesun*:

Figure 19: *sébeli* as ‘writing’ and ‘writing system’

	Gloss	Interlinear Gloss
<i>sébe</i>	‘write’	
→ <i>sébe-li</i>	1. ‘writing’ 2. ‘writing system’	write-NOM

This could potentially be interpreted as a difference stance on the proper name, but by the time we get to line 44-45, Jàane once again uses the unspecified proper name that I myself used earlier to refer to the script: “He went and toured around their area so that he could teach N’ko to those that he convinced as well as their students”. Thus while earlier we saw that Jàane *does* at times use the term *N’ko* to refer to the Manding language, here he both recognizes my usage and does not offer any significant alternative name to refer to Kantè’s script.

In these and the vast majority of cases then, N’ko—regardless of the subsequent term employed (e.g., *sébeli*, *sébesun* etc.)—is used to refer to the non-Latin, non-Arabic

⁷¹ Thus while the Manding nominalization suffix *-li* in Bambara is most typically used to refer to actions or processes (Vydrin, 2016a, p. 124), colloquially N’ko activists and Manding speakers often use it in combination with *sébe* as a generic hypernym to refer to ‘a writing system’ or ‘script’. See Creissels (In Press, pp. 10-11) for a look at the Mandinka cognate *-ri* which can be used to express an antipassive voice.

based writing system invented in 1949 by Sulemaana Kantè. It is a *script* (*sébeli*) in the broad sense of an inventory of graphic characters or *graphemes* (*sébeden*). It is an *alphabet* (*sébesun*) because its inventory of graphemes are *letters* meant to represent phonemes, as opposed to syllables or entire words. Put into use as a script to write a particular language, N’ko is also an *orthography*; that is, a conventional model of use of a writing system for representing a particular language (Sebba, 2011, pp. 10–11). From this perspective then, Sulemaana Kantè's invention may be variously typified as the N’ko writing system, script, alphabet or orthography depending on the context and one's desired degree of specificity.

Indeed, despite my earlier remarks, even Kantè himself tacitly recognizes this fact. For instance, in one of his most enduring and popular books, “The Veritable Proof of N’ko” (2004), he recounts his travails to both invent and promote a suitable writing system. Subsequently he presents two sentences, identical in all but tone, along with the following line of reasoning (Kántè, 2004, p. 2)⁷²:

Ḳ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ (I ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ :	A) <i>Némɔɔ' lú lè kɔ̀nɔ̀gben ná, kà àlu lánen' tó sùnɔ̀ɔ̀' dɔ̀</i>	A) The bosses were being watched over while they remained asleep
Ḳ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ (I ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ :	E) <i>Némɔ̀ɔ̀' lú lè kɔ̀nɔ̀gbén' ná, kà álu lánen' tó sùnɔ̀ɔ̀' dɔ̀</i>	B) The bosses were keeping watch while you [all] remained asleep
ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ	<i>Kúmaya fila nìn té sé d̀anf̀ad̀ab̀è lá sébeli sí d̀ó, f̀ó án nà áfiriki sébesun kánmaserema' mén' síndi lá nìn</i>	These two sentences cannot be distinguished in any writing system except our invented African phonetic [<i>kánmaserema</i>] alphabet

⁷² Here I follow the N’ko practice of glossing *kánmaseere* as ‘phonetic’. See the following sections for a discussion of *kánmaseere* as referring to both N’ko’s system of superposed diacritics as well as linguistic phenomena of tone and length.



Here Kantè does not explicitly use the name *N'ko*. Nonetheless, his description clearly refers to the writing system he invented in 1949. Absent any other instance where he attributes a different name to his creation, Kantè indirectly allows for *N'ko* to stand as the name of his script. Thus while Kantè may have viewed the ideal reference prototype of *N'ko* as the Manding language itself, in practice, he himself recognizes the name as denoting his “invented African phonetic alphabet⁷³” (See Figure 20 below).

Figure 20: A display of the N'ko alphabet's letters and their Latin-based equivalents

Consonants																	
Ƒ	ɓ	ɓ	ɗ	∇	ɥ	ɣ	ɥ	ɣ	Δ	ɾ	ɤ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ
<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>gb</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɲ</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>y</i>
	[tʃ]					[dʒ]											[j]
Vowels																	
ɪ	o	ʌ	ɔ	ɤ	Y	u											
<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ɛ</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ɔ</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>u</i>											
Syllabic Nasal																	
ɲ																	
n																	
[ɲ]																	

“*Sébeli-ko’ dè doñ*” (‘It’s a matter of writing’)

Despite the fact that *N'ko* is recognized and commonly understood as referring to Sulemaana Kantè’s alphabet, activists regularly labor to maintain this referential pairing. In the introduction to this chapter, for example, we saw it happening in Bamako at the National Assembly in 2013. Similar instances however occurred during my fieldwork across different times and places.

⁷³ It also worth noting that the disciplinary linguistic distinction between writing and language is also not strong in Kantè’s writing (see the earlier quote on how writing serves to clarify language etc.).

In 2016 while in Bobo-Dioulasso, I attended the monthly meeting of a local branch of the Islamic association, *Ançar Dine*, with a former N'ko teacher of mine, Sáliya Tárawele. Our visit was in the name of local N'ko students and activists and we aimed to solicit Ançar's assistance in obtaining a brick and mortar location⁷⁴. It had rained earlier but it was nonetheless shockingly cool as upwards of seventy members assembled under cheap fluorescent bulbs and a low and rusty tin roof hangar. The first hour was dedicated to the local branch's official business; an exclusively male stream diligently paid their monthly dues of roughly \$2 in West African francs. When it was our turn to speak, Sáliya's speech rang out clearly despite the intermittent amplification of the faulty portable speaker and microphone system. A former radio-repairman sometimes hard to hear during his lessons as a teacher, he made the following powerful plea as he asked Ançar, as allies, for help (1165, A100):

		Transcription	Translation
1	ST	<i>án bé nétaa' lè jínin à kóno hálibi</i>	We're still seeking progress within it [viz. N'ko]
2		<i>k'à sábuya' ké</i>	Because
3		<i>uh</i>	Um
4		<i>án b'à ké án ká sinijesi'gi' lè kánmà</i>	We're doing it for a better tomorrow
5		<i>N'ko té dó wére yé sébeli' kó</i>	N'ko is nothing but a writing system
6		<i>N'ko yé sébeli' lè yé</i>	N'ko is a writing system
7	Crowd	<coughs>	<coughs>
8	ST	<i>N'ko té kánko yé, sébeli-ko' dè dòn</i>	N'ko is not a matter of language, it's a matter of writing
9		<i>Sébeli' mín' dòn, án y'à f5 à nàna fàrafinya-kísi' lè kánmà, án ká sé kà án ká yèretigiya' sòro</i>	It's a writing system that we say came to save African-ness, so that we can gain our independence

⁷⁴ See Holder (2012) for passing reference to Ançar Dine's connection to N'ko activism.

10	<i>Kó bì-bì ná</i>	Today
11	<i>Bon, hákiliba' bée b'à dón k'à fǒ án ká hórɔnya' té án bólo</i>	Well, everyone smart knows that we don't have our independence
12	<i>sábu ní mǎgǎ' hórɔnyara, n'í ká kán' má hórɔnya</i>	Because if you've been freed, but your language hasn't been freed
13	<i>í má hórɔnya bán</i>	You haven't yet been freed
14	Crowd <i>Wálayi!</i>	Walayi! [viz. Ar. 'By god!']
15	ST <i>Bon [ánnù]</i>	So
16	<i>Ù békà án ká fàrafín-jámana' négen, kó án yé án ká hórɔnya' sòrɔ, kó án yé án ká indépendance⁷⁵ sòrɔ</i>	They are misleading our black countries, saying we're free, saying we're independent
17	<i>Ò yé négeli-kan' lè yé</i>	That's a delusion
18	<i>N'ò té, án bé jònyá' mín' ná bì, àle ká júgu ní kúnù tá yé</i>	In fact, the slavery we're in today is worse than that of yesterday
19	Crowd <i>Tárawele⁷⁶! <Group reaction></i>	Tarawele ⁷⁷ ! <Group reaction>

Saliya first explains his and other students' motivation for studying and promoting N'ko (lines 1-4), before moving to explicitly define this entity. In lines 5, 6 and 9, he overtly typifies N'ko as a writing system (*sébeli*) and in line 8 he clearly juxtaposes this understanding of N'ko being about writing with one of understanding it as being about language. Subsequently and to the encouragement of the audience (lines 14 and 19), he explains that the N'ko script was created to help rescue both Africans' independence and their African-ness from the pseudo-freedom of their current political situation (lines 9-19). Oddly, in the course of this explanation (lines 11-12), he actually uses the word *language* despite maintaining that N'ko is a writing system and not about language:

“Because if you've been freed, but your language hasn't been freed, You haven't yet been freed”. Why insist that N'ko is a writing system and that it is not about language when

⁷⁵ Realized *indepandansi*, I've nonetheless preserved the French orthographic form.

⁷⁶ Typically spelled <Traoré> in French orthography.

⁷⁷ In Manding like other West African languages of the Sahel, peoples' last or clan names [*jámú*] are regularly used in exclamations to laud the good deeds of them and their heroic ancestors.

part of the struggle for freedom is itself connected to language? Later in the speech, Saliya provides further relevant information in this regard:

	Transcription	Translation
59	ST <i>Fàragwé' má sé án fàrikólo' lá, ù séra án hákili' lá ní sébeli' ní kàlán' lè yé</i>	White people didn't conquer our bodies, they conquered our minds with writing and reading
60	<i>Ò lá, N'ko sébeli' lè fána nàna wálasa k'án bó ò jǒ' kónɔ</i>	Therefore, (the) N'ko writing also came to free from this trap [jǒ]
61	<i>kà án ká fàrafīnya' sègin án mà</i>	to bring our African-ness back to us
62	<i>Bon, N'ko sébeli' nàkun fóyi té à la</i>	(The) N'ko writing system's reason of being is nothing other than
63	<i>án ká sé kà à dón kó án fána yé mǔgɔ jógɔn lè yé comme díje mǔgɔ' tǔw bé cogo' mín' ná</i>	allowing us to know that we too are human beings just like the other people of the world
64	<i>Fàrafīn' bé tìgè à yèrè lá bì-bì in ná, án b'án bó ò jǒ' kónɔ</i>	Africans doubt themselves today, let us remove ourselves from this trap [jǒ]

Again, in line 60, Saliya typifies *N'ko* as a writing system (*sébeli*). Just before, in line 59, however, he talks of other kinds of *sébeli*—that used by White people to colonize and purportedly mentally enslave African people. Reading and writing takes place in languages, of course, so why does Saliya make a point of distinguishing *N'ko* from language and related affairs in the lines we saw earlier? I argue that Saliya's reliance in lines 59-64 on broad racial categories such as *fàragwé* 'white person', *fàrafīn* 'black person' and *fàrafīnyá* 'blackness' does important work in this regard. Speaking in terms of Black Africans and writing, instead of specific ethnic groups or languages, facilitates a stance that *N'ko* is not an ethno-nationalist project, but rather a more palatable pan-African one built around mother-tongue literacy and education. From this standpoint, the repeated insistence in lines 5, 6 and 8, on *N'ko* being a writing system is not bizarre. It is

rather an affirmation that presupposes the critical voices of those that claim or would claim that N’ko is a language—the Manding language.

To this point, let us return to the event from the prelude. The 2013 conference held at the University of Kankan more explicitly brings the tension between N’ko as pan-African script versus as a Manding ethno-nationalist orthography to the fore. One talk of the event, entitled “African languages facing the challenge of modernity: The experience of the N’ko Academy”, was particularly illuminating in this sense. Fittingly, Sulemaana Kantè’s own words took center stage during the public remarks of the speaker (1253):

	Transcription	Translation
3	IC <i>Án dínà kúma</i>	We are going to speak
4	<i>N’ko yèré kán’ ná dɔ̄fɔ̄’ kàn</i>	about the history of N’ko
5	<i>Kàramɔɔ Sùlemáana k’ à fɔ̄ lè kó</i> <i>fàrafinná sébesun</i>	Karamɔɔ Sulemaana said “The African alphabet”
6	<i>Ò y’ à kéla, dó y’ à yéla kó “mànkakó’</i> <i>lè”</i>	For this reason some see it as a Maninka thing
7	<i>À kán kó "L’alphabet phonétique</i> <i>Africain"</i>	(but) he said “The African phonetic alphabet”
8	<i>Kàramɔɔ Sùlemáana mén’ yèré k’ à tɔɔ’</i> <i>lá</i>	Karamɔɔ Sulemaana, he who named it
9	<i>k’ à tɔɔ’ lá tɛn nè</i>	He named it thus
10	<i>kó Fàrafinná sébesun kánmaseerema’</i>	[he said] “The African phonetic alphabet”
11	<i>Álé kün’ tède mànká’ lè lá, à k’ à</i> <i>mànkakán’ lè lón</i>	He was thinking of Maninka, he knew Maninka
12	<i>À kà báara sýaman’ ké mànkakán’ dɔ</i>	He did a lot of work in Maninka
13	<i>kòní àlé kà à síndi lè</i>	But he invented it [thus]

In lines 5, 7 and 10 the speaker draws on the reported speech of Kantè (2004, p. 24), though he also partially distorts the message from *Áfirikì* ‘Africa’ to *Fàrafinná* ‘Africa’ (lit. ‘land of the Blacks’). At the same time he also draws on the reported speech of

another person in West Africa or Guinea; in line 6, he voices an unnamed individual who views N’ko as “a Maninka thing”. While he does not overtly go on to say this individual was wrong, he implicitly suggests this in lines 7, 9, 10 and 13 by highlighting that Kantè himself did not consider his alphabet a Maninka or Manding alphabet. In this way, the presenter is able to frame any interpretation of N’ko being connected to ethnic identity as the erroneous conclusion of unnamed individuals. Kantè’s earlier written typification of his invented script as the “African phonetic [viz. tonal] alphabet” becomes important fodder in an interactional move downplaying N’koisants as engaged in a “Maninka thing”—that is, an ethno-centric Manding project.

In both of these cases, as well as in the earlier case at the Malian parliament explored in the introduction, N’koisants labor to establish and maintain the referential prototype of /ŋko/ as ‘the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949’. As suggested earlier, this is odd in two regards. First, Sulemaana Kantè explicitly used the same word to baptize the whole of the Manding language-dialect continuum. Such a usage is also attested in N’ko circles and writings today (see Chapter 6). At the same time—and in seeming contradiction—insisting that *N’ko* refers to a script and not a language also seems to belabor the point since the broader public, including N’koisants themselves, often recognize the name *N’ko* as denoting a writing system. Understanding the metalinguistic work of N’ko activists around the phonemic string /ŋko/ therefore requires attending to a larger context in which activities that potentially marginalize minority groups or destabilize a Western post-colonial ideal of an un-ethnic state are unacceptable. Whether explicitly metasemantic (“N’ko is a writing system”) or indirectly voiced through reported speech (“He named it thus ‘The phonetic African alphabet’”), claiming

that the prototypical referent of N'ko is not Manding, nor any other language, but rather the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè, is important because it allows N'ko activists to combat the assumption that their activities are connected to any form of ethno-nationalism.

Pan-African Tones

The claim that N'ko is primarily a writing system however is *not* rooted simply, or even primarily, in a desire to temper any potential reading of activists as being part of an ethnic Manding movement. For many of its advocates today, N'ko is a technically advanced alphabet with a singular capacity for linguistic accuracy, in particular for African languages. The following Facebook post from an active N'ko student who regularly writes motivational updates, for example, reads as follows:

Figure 20: Facebook post on N'ko as a human writing system



Fó án y'à lón nè kó N'ko sébesun' má síndi kàranmóó' Sòlamáana Kantè bólo mândenká' kán' kélen sébe kánmà. À síndinin' à bólo jòns' ádamaden' bée dí sé à lá ménta bée sébe lá já' mén' mà, Ála ma N'ko làwanká' báara' lù nòoya d'án mà ; Ála à ké tèn⁷⁸. Álu báden ----⁷⁹ ----. Kánkan, Bâte, Jine kánben.

We must recall that the N'ko alphabet was not invented by Sulemaana Kantè for writing Manding people's language only. May God ease the work for which N'ko was invented; that all human beings may write all of their speech appropriately. May God make it so. Your brother, ---- ----. Kankan, Batè, Republic of Guinea. (304)

⁷⁸ *Ála à ké tèn* ('May God make thus/so') is a common benediction in N'ko circles and is often used in place of the Arabic loanword *ámíinà* 'amen'. In his dictionary, Kantè (1992, p. 2) also offers the alternative *nbárin*.

⁷⁹ Name removed to preserve anonymity.

Noteworthy in this posting is the explicit insistence that Kantè invented his script not just for the language of the Manding people. Such an idea puts it in line with the many instances that we saw in the previous section where people typified N’ko as a script. Of note for our purposes now is the follow-up line in which the user states that N’ko was invented so “that all human beings (*ádamaden*) may write all of their speech (*ménta*) appropriately”. This line presupposes people and systems that do not appropriately or accurately write their languages. In what ways are people not writing their languages in the correct manner? While not made explicit here, this posting gestures towards not prescriptivism, but rather N’ko’s system of diacritics for representing linguistic phenomena distinct from the phoneme⁸⁰. The belief that N’ko is meant to serve not just Manding speakers, but all Africans (or even all people!) stems in large part from the diacritics that Kantè devised to accompany the letters of his alphabet and mark the linguistic features of nasalization, length and, most importantly, tone.

Sound-changing Languages

The use of contrastive pitch or *tone* was at the center of Kantè’s typification of his creation as “our African phonetic alphabet” (2004, p. 2). The term “phonetic⁸¹” itself is the folk-term derived from the French translation (*phonétique*) of Kantè’s own technical term “*kánmasere*⁸²” (𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤸𞤴). Partially collapsing the distinction made in linguistics between written and spoken language, *kánmasere* refers to both the superposed

⁸⁰Tone of course being the most important, given that nasalization and vowel lengthening are taken into account in Latin-based orthography.

⁸¹ The term is common today in N’ko circles as well as Kantè’s own writings. Kantè (2013, p. 36) for instance glosses *kánmasere* as “phoneticism” (*phonétisme*).

⁸² Often *sére* is lengthened (*séere*) both as a free and bound morpheme meaning ‘witness.’

diacritics⁸³ that Kantè devised for his script as well as the linguistic phenomena that they represent: length and tone. As the N’ko author Úsman Kùlúbàli (2015, p. 1) explains in his pedagogical book for mastering the system, *The Tones of N’ko: Kàla and Kàlá*:

<p> ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ : ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ : ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ , ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ : ɓɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ , ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓ ɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓɓ ɓɓɓɓɓɓɓ </p>	<p> <i> N’kó ’yé kán ’mànkán ’ yèlèmàtá ’lè dí, mén ’t’sé sébé’l’á nà bédé’ mà féú màséré’ dó lù kó, mén ’nù yé yèlémá ’ò séréyá lá, N’kó ’sébé’lí ’sindibáa ’kà séré ’ò lú lè ládán sébé’dén’ màkànmá ’lú kunnà k’àlù kílí kó kánmàséré’, báò àlù yé màkán ’yèlèmàyélémá ’lè mà séré’ dí, ò lè kós’èn nà t’sé ké l’àlù kó N’kó’ kánbólónbá náanín ’sébé’ dó fésékúdú </i> </p>	<p> N’ko [Manding] is a sound-changing language that cannot be written properly at all without some markings [<i>màsére</i>] that attest to these changes. The inventor of the N’ko script designed markings [<i>sére</i>] that he called “kánmasere” to go above the pronounced letters. [This is] because they are the signal [<i>sére</i>] of the sound variations. For this reason, one cannot ever do without them when it comes to writing N’ko’s four major dialects [<i>kánbolonba</i>] </p>
--	--	--

The *kánmasere* diacritics (plus a single subposed *kánnadiyalan* to mark nasalization) coupled with N’ko’s letters, offer, in essence, a perfect linguistic analysis of Kantè’s native variety of Manding (Vydrine, 2001b, pp. 128–129). Kantè’s alphabet is thus “phonetic” (*kánmaseerema*) in the sense that it is a systematic means of marking contrastive sounds beyond the phoneme. His and others’ designation of his script as “the African phonetic alphabet” therefore is not limited to his racial identity as a Black inventor, but also his and others’ understanding of tone⁸⁴ as something shared by African languages and around which he built his script.

⁸³ Commonly referred to as ‘accents’ in folk terminology.
⁸⁴ Except when quoting others, for the purposes of this section, I will henceforth gloss *kánmasere* and related terms as ‘tone, tonal’ etc.

It was only in crafting a grammar that Kantè came to the ultimate conclusion that he should draft his own alphabet. Indeed, he experimented with the Arabic and Latin systems for years; as he put it:

<p>ሃሉጴ። ሠጠሌ። ደጃ ሽፋ ሃ ሃጠ ህጠ ህፃ ሃጠሃ፣ሃ፣ሃ ሽ፣ገ ኝ ደጠሃ ሃሉጴ። ሽፈ ጻ ሽፈደገ በገ፣ ሃጠ ሃ፣ኝ ለጠሃ ደጠ ሃ፣ኝ</p>	<p><i>Í y'à lón sébesún 'sébeli' n'à gbirindili' bée tède dí nòyá n mà sébeli kódo' ò lù dós kúda' jìn dí páún</i></p>	<p>You know the writing and publishing of the alphabet would have been much easier for me in the older systems than in the new one (Kántè, 2013, p. 13)</p>
---	---	---

While writing his first language-focused works in one of his Latin orthographies however, *Fóde* began to realize that his system was not up to snuff:

<p>፩። ሽገገ ፡ ራ። ፲፱ ፡ ፩። ፵፩። ለጠህፍ ለ፵፱፣ ሃገ ሰፈሃጠ። ኝ ፡ ራ። ሽፈ ሰፈ፳፤ፈ። ሃ፣ሃ፣ኝ፣ ፲፱ ለ። ሽፈ ሽፈ ጻ ፩። ሽፈ፳፣፡ ደጃ ሰፈ፳፣፡</p>	<p><i>1949 ná sá, kàna sé mélekuya 'ni kángbe' jèdè' jáninin 'dámìná' mà sá, ò tùma lè n kà kán sébe' lá gbèleyá 'lón</i></p>	<p>It was beginning in 1949 and through my deep investigation into literature and grammar [kángbe] that I realized the [true] difficulty of writing a language (Kántè, 2013, p. 11)</p>
---	---	---

While we cannot know just what specific features⁸⁵ overwhelmed his orthography, his writings brought him face-to-face with a fact about not only Manding, but also the vast majority of more than 2,000 African languages; they are tonal (Odden, 1995, p. 444). As Kantè himself put it:

<p>ኃ፣ ሽፈ፳፣ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ፳፣ ለ። ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ፳፣ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ፳፣ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ፳፣ ሽፈ ሽፈ ሽፈ፳፣ ሽፈ ሽፈ</p>	<p><i>Kófè n nà dá à fàamun kó N'ko kàrán' ní à sébe' gbèleya dá án Bénba' lú mà árabu sébeli' dós lè, kà à kün' ké à kánmasere' lù lá síyaya' dí.</i></p>	<p>Later I came to understand that reading and writing N'ko [Manding] in Arabic script was difficult for our ancestors because of the large amount of tones</p>
--	---	---

⁸⁵ It is likely that Kantè was wrestling with the role of downstep or tonal compactness in Manding grammar (see the following sections).

<p> ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ </p>	<p> ḲḲḲ Ò lé' kélen' kà à gbèleyá túbabu sèbe lònna' lú mà, báò sébéli filá ò sí má ládan án ná kán kánmaserema' lù sèbe kánmà </p>	<p> [kánmasere]. This same issue made it difficult for those that knew White writing because neither one of these writing systems was created for writing our tonal [kánmaserema] languages (Kántè, 2004, p. 2) </p>
---	---	---

This fact about Manding, made explicit just as some Western⁸⁶ linguists⁸⁷ begin to elucidate Manding’s tonal nature⁸⁸, left a deep mark on the then young scholar.

Foreshadowing Halliday’s (1983, p. 28) notion that languages most often get the sort of writing system that they (typologically) deserve, Kantè reasoned that their use of pitch distinguished African languages as a specific type requiring their own writing system:

<p> ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ </p>	<p> Kán' mén' nù baa ké síu kélen' dí, ò lú lè sé lá dè lá sébesun kélen ná, yó iran kán' ní wúruđu kán' n'áfukan pásito' ní mále kán' nù dènnen árabu sébesun' ná ná' mén', à ní ércpù kán síyaman dènéń làten sébesun' ná ná' mén', bàri kán' mén' nù té síu kélen dí, ò lù t'sé ké lá </p>	<p> [...] languages which are of the same type, they can come together around one alphabet like Persian and Pashtun and Malay have done around the Arabic script or like lots of European languages have done around the Latin script. But languages which are not of the same </p>
---	---	---

⁸⁶ Throughout this chapter and dissertation I use the term “Western linguists” as a convenient stand-in for those working within the Western linguistic tradition of academia. In this sense, and as my references suggest, many “Western linguists” are Africans.

⁸⁷ In fact, Manding’s tonal nature was implicitly recognized by native informant and writer Moussa Travélé (1913, p. 15) in his work on Bamanan, but denied by the colonial expert of the day Maurice Delafosse (see Van Den Avenne, 2012, pp. 262–263 for a brief discussion). Interesting in this regard is the fact that one of Travélé’s sets of tonal minimal pairs is that same as that which figures in and is the common namesake of one the primary N’ko grammar books: *Bála' ní bàlá'* ‘Balafon and porcupine’ (Jàané, 2014)

⁸⁸ Working on Maninka of Kankan, Welmers (1949) began to outline downstep and the two-register tonal system of Maninka at around the same time as Kantè. In turn, Bird (1966), focusing on Bamanan, laid out downstep’s relationship to definiteness.

: Ḳ̄ Ȣ̄ Ȣ̄ Ȣ̄ Ȣ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄
 Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄ Ḳ̄

*sébesun kélen dí, ò lù t'sé
 dè lá sébesun kélen ná ná'-
 a-ja mà, yó túbabu kán' nù
 t'sé dè lá sébesun' nù dó ná'
 mén', (árabu' ní ébere'), ò
 lú fána lá kán' nù t'sé sébe
 lá làten sébesun' dó féu,*

type, they cannot be in the
 same script. They cannot in
 any way come together
 around one alphabet just as
 Western languages cannot
 be written in Semitic
 scripts, just as Arabic and
 Hebrew also cannot at all
 be written in the Latin
 alphabet.

(Kántè, 2004, p. 3)

This idea that *kánmasere* or contrastive tones are a unique characteristic of African languages is shared by many N'ko students today. For instance, Bàbá Mámádi Jàane, related the following to me in 2016 in a discussion in suburban Philadelphia (1166, A30):

	Transcript	Translation
5 BMJ	<i>Àn ná kán' ná, fàrafînkán' tùma cáman'</i>	In our language[s], in African language[s], frequently,
6	<i>phonétique⁸⁹ bé kán' mén' lá, fó í b'ò traïter kà nà sébeli' fê</i>	languages that have <i>phonétique</i> , you must deal with them in writing
7	<i>bon à ká gèlen</i>	it's difficult, you know

Jàane's thoughts in this regard parallel those of Sulemaana Kantè when he typified his invention as the “African phonetic alphabet”. In contrast to the earlier quote from Kùlìbàli who describes tone's relevance for Manding, Jàané suggests that “*phonétique*” are something common to African languages across the board. N'ko in this sense is not simply an African alphabet—it is *the* African tonal alphabet because it was designed to write the unique sounds of the Continent's languages.

Arabic Can't, Latin Can't

⁸⁹ Realized *fonetiki* and therefore a largely assimilated borrowing, I have nonetheless preserved the French orthographic spelling.



Jàanɛ’s above remarks that tone “must” be marked also points to one of the major distinctions between N’ko and other forms of Manding literacy that are either Latin- or Arabic-script-based. N’koïsants regularly make the case to both the general public, academics and their own students that, in contrast to other scripts, N’ko is uniquely capable of representing Manding and African tones.

For example, one morning in Bamako in June 2013, after a particularly hot night stemming from a rain-induced power outage, I attended a regular Sunday morning N’ko class held at Mali’s National Art Institute (*l’Institut National des Arts*, INA). This was not a typical class, but rather an event of sorts because I was visiting with two prominent N’ko personalities who regularly appeared on the national radio as part of their show *Yèreya Fónɔ* (‘The footsteps of selfhood’). Despite the rain, we arrived to a classroom filled with thirty or so students that were surprisingly diverse: there were five or six women, teenage boys and girls, and an elderly man alongside the typical middle-aged males. After a long and moving intervention from the first N’ko personality about the progress of N’ko and the direction it was headed, it was my turn to introduce myself to the room. Recounting how I came to learn Manding, I inevitably brought up my formative experience working with Jula-trained adult literacy groups in Burkina Faso during the Peace Corps. The second personality, Sàkó, now sadly deceased, used this mention of government-sponsored Latin-based Manding literacy, or what he calls *bálikukalan* (literally, ‘adult studies’; discussed further below), as a segue into his final words for the class (1252; A7):

Transcription	Translation
6 <i>Ni i ye balikukalan ni N’ko lájèrɛ</i>	If you put <i>bálikukalan</i> and N’ko together

7	<i>i b'a ye différénci min b'u cé, o de ye an ka fɔ fen ma ko kanmaseere</i>	You see that the difference between them, we call it <i>kánmaseere</i>
---	--	--

Next he drew on a tonal tongue twister akin to a pitch-based version of ‘She sells sea shells by the sea shore’:

ĩɔ-l-ĩɔ ĩɔ ĩɔ ĩɔĩɔ ĩɔĩɔ ɟ uũf ĩɔ

{*Sàn Bàrú lá sànsán' sànsán sǎn' mà sà-n-á'-sàn*}

[*Sǎn Bàrú lá sànsán sànsán sǎn mà sǎnsàn*]

‘Install Bàrú of San’s corral in the course of the year, every year’

This sentence’s effectiveness as a challenge and teaching tool depends on distinct tonal realizations over the sequence /san/ in the following words: *Sàn* ‘(the town of) San’, *sànsán* ‘corral’, *sànsan* ‘install a corral’, *sǎn* ‘year’. Walking the audience through the various minimal pairs, tone’s relevance in verbalization (*sànsán* ‘corral’ → *sànsan* ‘install a corral’) and morpho-syntactic ellipsis (where the tone of the nominal distributive marker⁹⁰ remains despite its segmental support being dropped: [*sàn á sà/* → [*sǎn sà*] ‘each year’]), he explained as follows:

Transcription		Translation
18	S <i>Kúma' in, n'à fɔra</i>	This saying, if uttered
19	<i>N'í bé kán' mén, i b'à kórɔ' lón</i>	If you understand the language, you know its meaning
20	<i>Mais n'í té kán' mén</i>	But if you don’t understand the language...[good luck]
[...]⁹¹	[...]	
47	<i>Mais fɔli' tũn dũn k'à bó jógɔn ná, mais ní í kó kà nìn sébe bálikukalan' ná</i>	Speaking distinguishes this saying, but if you say “write it in <i>bálikukalan</i> ”
48	<i>báara' sòrɔla dé</i>	you’ve got your work cut out for you
49	<i>donc, ò lá</i>	So

⁹⁰ Typically fixed as *ô* in Bamanan — see Vydrin (2016, pp. 193-195)

⁹¹ Skipping redundant lines for clarity.

50	<i>án bé mín' fɔ́ hálisa, kánmaseere'</i>	Even now, we reiterate that <i>kánmaseere</i>
51	<i>nê bé mín' jínin kàlandénw fê, ù k'ù jijà kánmaseere-kalan' fê kósebe</i>	What I really hope is that students make a big effort with <i>kánmaseere</i>
52	<i>Báwo m̀̀gɔ́ cáman' nê béna tila kàlan kúnfɔ́lɔ́' lá</i>	Because many people will finish with the first part of studying
53	<i>(???) kánmasere (???)</i>	<i>(???) kánmaseere</i>
54	<i>Ní í dùn táara jéfê</i>	But if you go forward
55	<i>ní kánmaseere' kó</i>	without <i>kánmaseere</i>
56	<i>problème b'í lá, háli ní í yé lívuru' b́</i>	You've got a problem. Even if you put out a book
57	<i>í ká lívuru' bé ké, c'est-à-dire í ká kàfá' bé ké kàfa núman' yé mais m̀̀gɔ́' b'í (lágòsi ???) kàn</i>	your book will be, well your book could be good but people (belittle???) you
58	<i>k'à s̀̀rɔ́ à kónɔ́kumaw ká jì</i>	when in fact its contents are good

Here Sàkó makes explicit the common idea that Latin-based transcription cannot adequately represent a contrastive and therefore fundamental feature of Manding. To make this claim he uses the neologism, *bálikukalan*, which in the narrowest sense refers to Mali's government-sponsored adult literacy programs that began with major UNESCO support in the 1970s (see Dumont, 1973; Sow, 1977; Turriffin, 1989). The name however is also commonly used in Mali and regionally to refer to the particular orthography promoted by the programs as well as Manding written in the Latin-script more generally. Sàkó thus explicitly (lines 6-7) outlines the major difference between N'ko and Latin-based Manding orthography as one of the marking (or not) of tone. It is not however simply the case that one script opts to mark tone while the other does not; in lines 47-48 he implies that orthographies using the Latin script are incapable of capturing the linguistic features that he presented in his tonal tongue twister: "Speaking distinguishes this saying, but if you say 'write it in *bálikukalan*' you've got your work cut out for you".

This reasoning quickly leads to a plea for students to dedicate themselves to the study of *kánmasere* so that their own writing and thoughts will be properly embraced and understood. In lines 54-58 he paints the picture of a hypothetical N'ko student whose ideas—worthy of dissemination—are belittled because they write without the marking of tone. While this would be a poor choice if one did not exploit N'ko's *kánmasere*, in Latin script it would simply be impossible given Sàkó's previous framing of *bálikukalan* in lines 47-48.

This attitude regarding the Latin script's inadequacies also spills over into judgements of other scripts in general. For example, in an interview with Bába Màmádi Jàane I asked him about why he took to N'ko early (458):

		Transcript	Translation
1122	CD	<i>ònhón, mais í sònna mùnna?</i>	Why did you accept [N'ko]?
1123	BMJ	<i>Í!</i>	Hey!
1124		<i>À fǒlǒfǒlǒ' yé mén' dí fǒlǒ...</i>	First, first of all
1125		<i>ń yèré k'à lón, né yèré, í bé sé kà árabukan' sébe</i>	I myself know that one can write Arabic
1126	CD	<i>Ònhón</i>	Yeah
1127	BMJ	<i>án mǎké' lù, án bènba' lù, KS k'à fǒ cógo' mín', ń yèré kà ò dǒ lù yé</i>	Our grandfathers, our ancestors, that which Teacher Sulemaana said, I saw some of them myself
1128		<i>Àlu yé N'ko sébe, íkomi án ná kán', árabu alphabet lá</i>	They wrote N'ko [viz. Manding], that is, our language, in the Arabic alphabet
1129		<i>Kónǒ, ń hákili' lá, í fána bé árabu alphabet lón</i>	But I think you know you the Arabic alphabet?
1130	CD	<i>Né b'à lón</i>	I know it.
1131	BMJ	<i>Kòni í k'à lón kó N'ko bé phonétique mén' nù fǒ, kó àlu té árabusebeli' lá</i>	Well, you know that the phonetics produced in N'ko, they aren't in the Arabic writing system.
1132	CD	<i>Jón lè b'à fǒ tèn?</i>	Who says that?
1133	BMJ	<i>í kòni bé ò kàlá' mà</i>	Well, you anyways are aware of it
1134	CD	<i>Kó ò té-</i>	They say that-

1135	BMJ	<i>íkomi í y'à fɔ́ sísèn kó kónɔ́' ní kònó', í y'à lón, án té sé k'ò sébe árabu' lá</i>	Like as if you said “ <i>kónɔ́</i> ” and “ <i>kònɔ́</i> ” now. You know, we can't write them in Arabic.
1136	CD	<i>À kòni, í té sé.</i>	One can't (easily) at any rate
1137	BMJ	<i>ón!</i>	You see!

Here, Jàane speaks of the Manding Ajami tradition to explain why he gravitated towards and ultimately accepted N'ko as a writing system for mother-tongue literacy. While he is familiar with the historical use of the Arabic script to write Manding—indeed, he even saw samples of this practice himself—he ultimately regards it as inadequate for the “phonetics” or tones of the language. Jàane thereby makes clear that just as the Latin-script does not lend itself to writing Manding and African tones, neither does the Arabic script.

Meta-tonal Awareness

Today, the power of *kánmasere* is manifest not only in demonstrations meant to wow speakers of other African languages or in theoretical discussions of the merits of different writing systems, but also in Manding-speaking N'ko classrooms across West Africa. The teaching, learning and mastery of *kánmaseere* is a central concern of many N'ko students and teachers and it plays an important role in convincing pupils of the value of both the script and the richness of their own language. To illustrate this, in what follows, I will draw largely on one specific N'ko classroom session which focused heavily on tone. The teacher, Sékù Jàkité's lesson is far from unique in this respect. Nonetheless, the class is exemplary for its comprehensive treatment of the essentials of *kánmasere*. As such, his examples will serve usefully to both demonstrate the role and power of tone in the classroom, and to present the Manding tonal system so that non-

specialists may grasp why the *kánmasere* diacritics make N’ko so compelling. Let us start however by heading to school.

In the summer of 2016 I sat in on and participated in a number of N’ko classes with different instructors in various parts of Bamako. One such class led by Sékù Jàkité took place in the morning, twice a week, underneath a tin-roof hangar, seemingly airdropped amidst a flood of outdoor mechanics’ workshops and vehicle carcasses. I had met Sékù and one of his students earlier at a conference on N’ko at a private medical and pharmacological school, *l’Université Kanku Musa*, and was pleased to discover that their *kàrantá* (roughly ‘classroom’ or ‘school’, regardless of size or infrastructure) was not too far from where I was living. I was already sweaty after my ten-minute walk to meet one of Sékù’s adult students for a moto-ride to class. A mechanic himself, we made a short pitstop at his meager *atelier*, marked by a simple scrawl of N’ko on his parts-bin—
*Kàramóko í ní jó*⁹² (‘Hello, teacher’, see Figure 21), before heading to class.

⁹² Literally ‘You and peace’, this phrase is a Manding-ized version of “*Jó’ yé í mà*”, a literal calque of the traditional Arabic *al-salām ‘alaykum*. Both greetings are widely used as in-group greetings in N’ko circles.

Figure 21: Sékù's student's atelier



This same style greeting was exchanged repeatedly as we and other students gathered for class. Poised in front of a long blackboard with a black Robin Hood style hat, Sékù opened the lesson with the traditional penning of the date using the unique set of day and month names by which Kantè sought to replace the Arabic and French loanwords that one typically hears in Manding today. This however gave the students little pause. Instead, the lesson—as was often the case with lower-level N’ko groups that I observed across Bamako—focused heavily on *kánmaseere*, which the instructor glossed as ‘*les phonétiques*’ (1292). Indeed, according to Sékù, the “soul” (*ni*) or “true motor” (*sèn yèrɛ-yɛrɛ*, lit. ‘wheel, foot’) of N’ko was *kánmaseere* (770). To demonstrate this point he expounded on the importance of them for writing Manding. First, he highlighted that through the application of *kánmaseere* any of Manding’s seven vowels could be realized in one of 16 ways depending on whether it was high/low, unlengthened/lengthened, abrupt/full or nasalized/un-nasalized. Over the course of the next hour or so he used his lesson to demonstrate four major ways that tone figures into

Manding grammar. Here I will present his examples with an accompanying discussion of the various characteristics of the Manding tonal system that they describe⁹³.

High and low.

First, *kánmaseere* are used for a two-way contrast between high (𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎 *kánmayeɛ*, H, examples 1a and 1c) and low (𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎 *kánmajii*, L, examples 1b, and 1d) pitch that are marked over each vowel (𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎𐤎 *sìiralán*).

- (1) a. 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎
bála'
 'xylophone'
- b. 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎
bàlá'
 'porcupine'
- c. 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎
*bási*⁹⁴
 'evil'
- d. 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎
bàsí'
 'cous-cous'
- e. 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎
Kòno' kóno ká bòn
 'The bird's stomach is big'

This analysis, in line with Western academic models of Manding's tonal system (Vydrin, 2016, p. 17)⁹⁵, posits two pertinent tone registers and allows for the seamless contrasting

of minimal pairs such as 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 *bán* 'finish' and 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 *bàn* 'refuse' or 𐤀𐤎𐤎𐤎 *kúnu* 'wake up' and

⁹³ For the purposes of this chapter, I do not recount Sékù's examples sequentially but (1), (4) and (5) are his classroom examples.

⁹⁴ Note that Sékù did not lengthen this word's first syllable as per normal transcription: *bási*

⁹⁵ For a review of the linguistic debates about the tonal system of Manding and related African languages see Green (2010, pp. 27–52).

ḱḱ *kùnu* 'swallow' or the examples given in (1). Indeed, most estimates suggest that around 90% of the Manding lexicon is made up of words that can be considered as underlyingly H or L regardless of syllabic length or contextual realization (Green, 2010, p. 27).

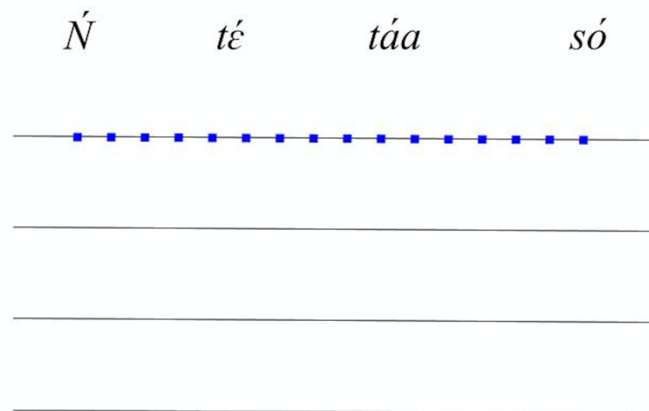
This underlying binary distinction between H and L holds in N'ko despite the phenomenon of *downdrift* in which there is an “automatic lowering of the pitch of H separated from the previous H by L” (Odden, 2016, p. 8). In short, this leads to the fact that two syllables carrying the same underlying tone can be realized at different pitches.

Let us look at a visual example to make things clearer:

- (2) *Ḷ té táa só*
'I don't go home'

Note how in (2) all of the vowels are marked as H via the acute diacritic. Ignoring other contextual factors that potentially influence pitch, such an utterance can be understood as being tonally realized across one register (see Figure 22):

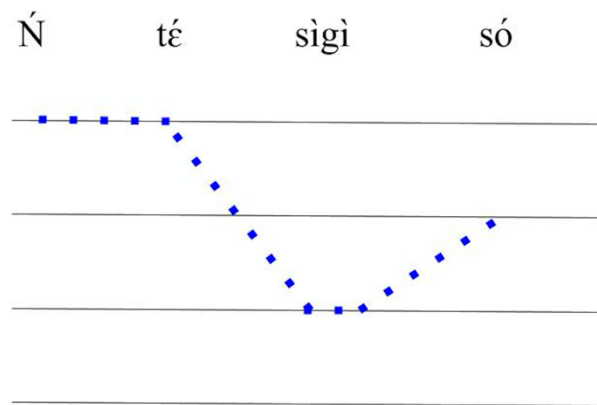
Figure 22: Utterance *Ḷ té táa só* with all H tone lexemes



In instances where there is a mix of H and L tones, however, things do not remain uniform. A sequence of H L leads to a two-level drop, whereas an L H sequence engenders a one-level climb. Again this is most easily understood visually:

- (3) *ń té sǐgǐ só*
 ‘I don’t sit at home’

Figure 23: Tonal realization of *ń té sǐgǐ só*, illustrating downdrift



Note how the tonal register between the first two words (*ń* and *té*), which are both H, remains the same. Subsequently however there is a two register drop from *té* to *sǐgǐ*. Given that both syllables of *sǐgǐ* are L in this sentence, the register remains the same throughout the word. Finally, between *sǐgǐ* (LL) and *só* (H), notice how there is only a one register increase. This leads to the fact that the H tone of *só* is not at the same height as that of *ń* and *té* and thereby demonstrates downdrift; *ń*, *té* and *só* are not realized at the same fundamental frequency despite the fact that they are all H tone because of the “two-step-down, one-step-up” logic of the phenomenon. Similarly, syllables or words bearing L are not realized on the same tonal register if they are separated from one another by a H tone.

The concept of H and L tones in both N’ko and Western linguistic analysis therefore is relative, or a phonological abstraction of what is in fact a range of phonetic variations in pitch into two pertinent registers: H and L or *kánmayele* and *kánmajii* respectively. N’ko marks this distinction in tone by way of superposed diacritics placed above the alphabet’s vowels. This is summarized in Figure 24a below with an additional column for contrastive length.

Figure 24a: N’ko *kánmasere* system for marking tone and length using <a>

	- Unlengthened	<i>Sàmanen</i> Lengthened
<i>Kánmayele</i> High	ī	ī̃
	á	áa
<i>Kánmajii</i> Low	ĩ	ĩ̃
	à	àa

This stems from the fact that in contrast to the Western linguistic convention, which marks tone with diacritics and lengthening by reduplicating vowels (e.g., *báara* ‘work’ with two *a*’s to mark lengthening and the acute diacritic to mark tone), N’ko’s uses its *kánmasere* markers for both phenomena. A lengthened vowel, be it H or L, is known as *sàmanén* (𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤸 lit. ‘pulled’).

Abrupt and full.

Sékù also lectured on what can be translated as “abrupt” (𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤸 *lábaranen*) and “full” tone (𞤎𞤵𞤲𞤸 *máfàné*)⁹⁶ (respectively represented as exclusively *a* and *b* in (4-6)).

⁹⁶ To mark “full tone” in Latin-based orthography I will add an additional apostrophe following the word in question. This reason for this seemingly odd “floating” convention will be made manifest in what follows.

This distinction plays an essential role in differentiating definite (ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *málɔnnɛn*) and indefinite (ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *máfilinén*) usages of nouns:

- (4) a. ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
Mòkò má nà
 ‘Nobody came’
- b. ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
Mòkò’ má nà
 ‘The person didn’t come’

In addition, the use of abrupt versus full tones can signal whether a noun is common (ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *fòdobatɔɔ*) or proper (ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *kèlennatɔɔ*):

- (5) a. ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
yíri
 ‘Yiri’ (proper name)
- b. ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
yíri’
 ‘tree’

This use of tone also applies to proper names without a natural common noun counterpart as I learned in an N’ko class in Bamako distinct from Sékù’s:

- (6) a. ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
Ádama
 ‘(particular person named) Adama’
- b. ᐱᐱᐱᐱ
Ádama’
 ‘(people named) Adama’

In these cases, an abrupt tone like (6a) signals a *referential* use (e.g., a particular person named *Ádama*) whereas a full tone like in (6b) signals an *attributive* use (e.g., people named *Ádama* in general) (Donnellan, 1966; 1292:1).

Other classes that I attended were often equally focused on the distinction between full and abrupt tone in Manding. At times they even revealed tonal distinctions that neither the students nor myself were fully aware of. During the summer of 2016, for instance, I regularly attended a three day a week early afternoon adult class in the school and radio compound of the association N.Fa.Ya (*N'kó' ní Fàsokán nù Yiriwa* 'The Strengthening of N'ko and Fatherland Languages'). While writing tone was always a part of the students' education, it played a particularly large role for the most advanced group that was working through Sulemana Kantè's *Kángbε Kùnfɔ́ɔ* book (Kántε, 2008b). During these lessons, they were also introduced to the tonal distinction between the *attributive* (7a) and *referential* (7b) use of proper names discussed above (767:5)⁹⁷:

- (7) a. ˌkɑ́ːntɛ̀ ɪ̄
 Í kánte'
 'To you Kantè(s)'
- b. ˌkɑ́ːntɛ̀ ɪ̄ : ˌkɑ́ːntɛ̀ ɪ̄
 Kántε, nà yàn
 'Kantè, come here'

In addition though, they also focused on mastering the tonal distinction made in Kantè's book between toponym and demonym⁹⁸ (Kántε, 2008b, pp. 3–4)

- (8) a. ˌmɑ́ːndɛ̀
 Màndén
 '(the place known as) Manden'
- b. ˌmɑ́ːndɛ̀
 Màndén'
 'a person from Manden'

⁹⁷ Specifically, Kantè distinguishes the tonal distinction between (7a) and (7b) as one of *ɪ̄ɪ̄ɪ̄* *fòli* (litt. 'greeting') and *ɪ̄ɪ̄ɪ̄ɪ̄* *kilili* ('calling'), respectively.

⁹⁸ Sometimes referred to as a *gentilic*.

In (8a) an abrupt final tone signals *Màndén* as a place whereas the same word with a full tone denotes a person from Màndén. This lexical use of tone—akin to New York/New Yorker—to distinguish toponym/demonym has not traditionally been covered in analyses of Manding’s system. In fact, it is not entirely clear whether the distinction is naturally occurring in all varieties of Manding today. Nonetheless, N’ko students learn, embrace and ultimately exploit the distinctions in their writings.

These examples of “abrupt” and “full” tones from the N’ko classroom show how beyond high and low, Kantè’s system of *kánmaseere* is particularly innovative as an implicit theorization and set of graphic conventions for marking a more subtle feature of Manding’s tonal system: a “floating tone” that often serves the grammatical function of distinguishing definite/indefinite (Vydrin, 2016, p. 18). Often conceived of as an L tone that has remained despite its loss of a segmental “tone-bearing unit⁹⁹” (Odden, 1995, p. 448) (such as a vowel, syllable etc.), postulating its existence alongside other rules such as *downdrift* allows one to phonologically account for the phonetic variations of Manding pitch within the framework of the two-tone H-L system outlined above. More importantly, in certain contexts it also allows one to account for the key semantic difference between definite and indefinite.

In affirmative constructions and citation form however the presence of the floating L or what Kantè calls a “full tone” is not marked or noteworthy as expressing a clear idea of definiteness. For instance in (9) the tonal article on *jàbá* ‘onion’ does not actually encode the idea of ‘the onion’ as opposed to ‘an onion’:

⁹⁹ While the floating L tone is generally regarded as an element without segmental support, there are a handful of examples for which it appears to have fused itself to a word’s lexical tone (Vydrin, 2016, p. 18, Footnote 3): *mîn* REL, *jôn* ‘who’, *bî* ‘unit of ten’, etc.

- (9) - *Nin tógɔ' kó dì?* - *Jàbá'*
 -What's this [thing]'s name? - [An] onion

In fact, the example of (9) is one of *citation form*. That is, when metalinguistically discussing or citing nouns in isolation, speakers will regularly use this form. In such cases, the tonal article is not simply theoretically present but in fact realized; or, using Kantè's terminology, *jàbá* is “full” because on the second syllable one perceives a clear tonal dip in its fundamental frequency, and one can segment out a slight lengthening of the second syllable. In this sense, what is orthographically represented as <*jàbá'*> is phonetically [*jàbâ*]. To account for the HL contour tone pattern seen on the second syllable ([â]) however, neither N'ko nor Western linguists posit tone patterns in addition to H and L¹⁰⁰. This stems in part from other non-citation instances where nouns like *jàbá* do not phonetically manifest the L tone that we see in citation form as in (9). Let us look at the example in (10) to understand this point:

- (10) *Nin yé jàbá'yé*
 /Nin yé jàbá ˥yé/
 ‘This is (the/an) onion’

Here we see that the phonetic tonal realization of this sentence is not one of “full” *jàbá* which carries a contour tone, but rather one of “*downstep*” (Odden, 2016, p. 9; marked by ˥) between the second syllable of *jàbá* (which is H) and the final word *yé* (also H). This phenomenon of downstep and its relationship to both Kantè's “fullness” and Western linguistics' posited floating L tone can perhaps best be understood by looking at instances where tone plays a key role in the semantic difference between definite and indefinite.

¹⁰⁰ In the case of N'ko, by “posit”, I mean simply that N'ko activists do not claim that Manding requires additional tonal diacritics beyond those of the script. This is an implicit recognition of two underlying tone registers.

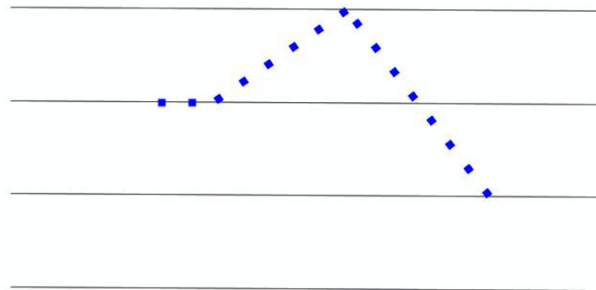
Let us have a look Sékù's examples from (4a) and (4b) again. A simple gloss from a skilled native language informant can confirm that the two sentences are distinct in both meaning *and* form, but how are they different? First (4a):

- (4) a. $\tilde{\Gamma} \bar{\Delta} \tilde{\Psi}\Delta$
Mòkò má nà
 'Nobody came'

In this case, and using the visual representation of Figure 22, we can easily see that the tonal realization respects the rules we established earlier regarding downdrift. That is, for the transition from L to H we go up one register and for that of H to L we go down two registers.

Figure 22: Tonal realization of *mòkò má nà*

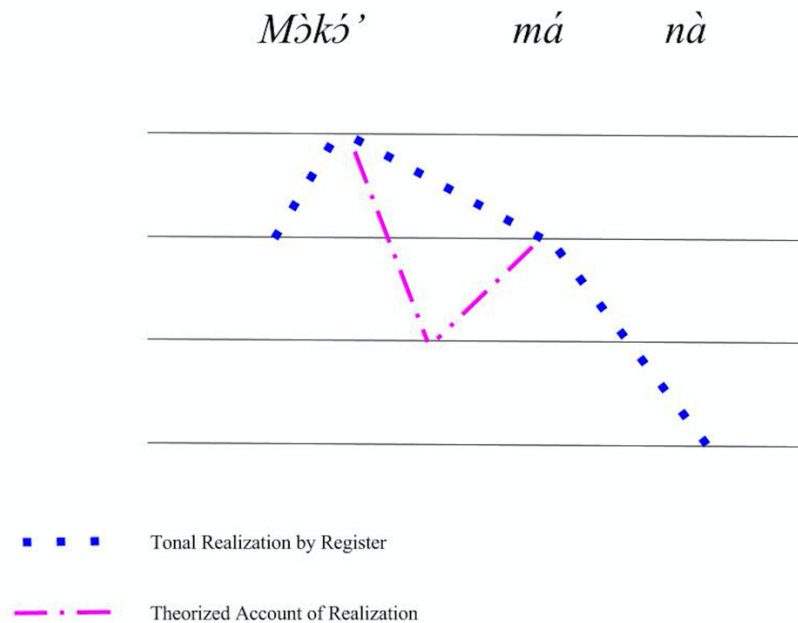
Mòkò má nà



In (4b) however things do not go as expected:

- (4) b. $\tilde{\Gamma} \bar{\Delta} \Psi\tilde{\Psi}\Delta$
Mòkò' má nà
 'The person didn't come'

Figure 23: Tonal realization of "mòkò' má nà" in terms of registers



Following the square dotted line of actual realization we see that the transition from *m̀̀k̀́*'s second syllable (H) to *má* (H) does not remain at same tonal register as we would expect, but rather drops one level. Accounting for the H tone of *má*, which is not realized as the same register as its preceding H tone, requires postulating the floating L tone attached to *m̀̀k̀́* that is orthographically noted as <'>. This theorized path which would call for a two-step drop followed by a one-step rise is represented by the dash-dot line. It is important to grasp that this floating L is not a phonetic reality. Indeed, in some cases, its existence may be purely theoretical:

- (11) a. *M̀̀s̀́ ò̀̀n*
 'It's [the/a]
 woman'
- b. *Ñ́ b́́ ẁ̀l̀́ f̀̀*
 'I like dog[s]'
 'I like [the] dog'

In examples like (11), one cannot know if there is a floating L tone at all because in both cases the H tone second syllables of *mùsó* and *wùlú* are already followed by words bearing L tones. That is, one cannot trace an imagined dash-dot line because the square dotted line already follows it.

Note then that in the cases explored here N’ko’s *full* and *abrupt* in essence captures not a segmentable reality of a floating L tone, but rather a contextually salient phonological extraction akin to a “psychological reality” (Sapir, 1985/1933). Within the N’ko script, Kantè’s solution to the presence of the floating L tone was to introduce additional diacritics to mark a third distinction, alongside that of H/L

(*kánmayele/kánmajii*) and lengthening (*sàmanen*), which I have glossed as *full* (ᐱᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ) *màfànéen* and *abrupt* (ᐱᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ ᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ *lábáranen*). In Western linguistic terms, the distinction between the two however stems from the presence or absence of the floating L tone. The totality of the N’ko *kánmasere* system can therefore be summarized as follows in Figure 24b:

Figure 24b: N’ko *kánmasere* system for marking tone, length and the floating L tone using <a>

	<i>Lábáranen</i>		<i>Màfànen</i>	
	No Floating Tone		Floating Tone	
	- Unlengthened	<i>Sàmanen</i> Lengthened	- Unlengthened	<i>Sàmanen</i> Lengthened
<i>Kánmayele</i>	̄ (word finally) (word internally)	̄	(word finally)	̄
High	á	áá	á’	áá’
<i>Kánmajii</i>	̃	̃	í	̄
Low	à	àà	ǎ’	àá’

Tonal Compactness.

Finally, Sékù lectured on examples related to tone's role in lexical morphology, or more specifically compounding:

- (12) a. Ȳɔɔ̃ ʎɛ̃ɔ̃ ɔ̃ɔ̃ ɔ̃ɔ̃
 Mádù báda fàlí' gbàsi
 'Madu hit the/a donkey'
- b. Ȳɔɔ̃ Ȳɛ̃ɔ̃ ɔ̃ɔ̃ ɔ̃ɔ̃
 Mádù báda fàli-gbási
 'Madu was hit like a donkey'

Note that in the N'ko orthography the difference between the two utterances is purely at the level of the tonal diacritics. The word boundaries themselves do not change at all. In the Latin transcription, on the other hand, I have taken the liberty of altering them (*fàlí' gbàsi* → *fàli-gbási*) to demonstrate the Western linguistic perspective on tone's role in Manding word formation. Sékù's example clearly demonstrates a final required element for grasping the language's tonal system: what researchers in Mande linguistics call *tonal compactness* (< Fr. *compacité tonale*) (Vydrin, 2016, p. 19).

The phenomenon of tonal compactness refers to the way in which, in general, in Manding compound word formation, the tone (H or L) of the initial element's dominant syllable spreads across the entirety of the compound word.

- (13) a. *màndén* 'Manden' + *kán* 'languge'
 → *màndenkán* 'Manding language'
- b. *dùgu* 'town' + *kónɔ* 'inside + *mògɔ*
 'people'
 → *dùgukɔnɔmògɔ* 'city dwellers'
- c. *sò* 'horse' + *fà* 'father'
 → *sòfá* 'cavalry soldier'

In (13), all of the examples are ultimately written as single words to capture the fact that they can likely be considered single compound words if one takes into account Manding phonology and morphology. In N'ko orthography such word boundaries are, in a sense, less important because of its conventionalized system for marking tones as necessarily high/low and full/abrupt¹⁰¹. Such information in essence gives one the relevant information on compounding (as well as tonal pronunciation) without a need to orthographically connect words that form a single compound.

Sékù's examples from (12) exploit this fact and highlight the role that tone plays in Manding compounding by being divergent in nothing but the tone on three syllables. Such a difference nonetheless converts *fàli* 'donkey' and *gbàsi* 'hit' into a single tonally compact compound word: the nonce verb *fàligbasi* 'hit like a donkey'. Thus, Sékù radically alters the sentence's meaning from an active transitive sentence ('Madu hit the donkey') to passive intransitive sentence ('Madu was hit like a donkey') with no changes on the segmental level of the sentence constituents. All of these instances of using writing to clearly distinguish words and utterances that differed only in tone fascinated the thirty- and forty-something-year-old mechanics that had all taken a break from work to sit on cramped benches meant for public schools students at least half their age.

¹⁰¹ I do not mean to suggest that N'ko-based orthography marks something that a Latin-based system cannot. In practice, however, most Latin-based texts do not fully mark tone and therefore rely on word boundaries to provide relevant information on tonal compactness.

Figure 25: Sékù's lesson on tones



The lesson and the discussion of these examples, coupled with an aside about the marking of nasal and nasalized consonants in N'ko¹⁰², led to excited talk amongst the students and one voice remarked, “We all respect (*lábàto*) this, but we don't know it”. Sékù however was quick to point out that *kánmasere* are far from fixed; they “vary” (*yèlemá-yèlemá*) and you can't just plan on writing them one way because it depends on what you want to say. Indeed, for Sékù, “*kánmaseere* is the steering mechanism of Bamanan” (*bámanankan direction yé kánmaseere' yé*) (770).

¹⁰² N'ko uses 5 different graphic elements (Ꞗ ꞗ Ꞙ ꞙ Ꞛ) to distinguish phonemes and nasalization that is often conflated by being solely or partially represented by the grapheme <n> in Latin-based orthography (e.g., *n n ny n* and *ny/n* respectively from right to left) (see Chapter 6).

While the class's focus was on Manding grammar, the insights about tone stretched far beyond it. *Kánmasere* are not unique to Manding varieties, Sékù instructed the class; they are simply a quality of African languages in general. He carried on: Asian languages are also tonal, as evidenced by the fact that they adopted characters that could more accurately represent their speech than the Latin system. Students embraced these ideas whole-heartedly and one student remarked to his neighbor "If you don't put *kánmasere* on, you can't read a book"; a fact attributable to "our language" not being of the same "type" (*súgu*). Sékù was in agreement: "All languages have their truth, but you adapt to the language [when writing]" (*Kán béε n'a tɛne, mais í bé táa kán' nǒfɛ*). N'ko in this sense was more appropriately adapted to African languages. More specifically, in the case of Manding, *kánmasere* was one of the reasons that "N'ko has run *bálikukalan* ragged" (*N'ko yé bálikukalan' sègen*).

On one hand, Sékù's conclusion is incorrect: the official Latin-based Manding orthographies do not typically mark tone, but Western linguists have long insisted on marking tone in both their technical works as well as publications made for a broader audience (for discussion see amongst others: Balenghien, 1987; Diallo, 2001; Diarra, 1984; Galtier, 2006; Keita, 2001; Traoré, 1991; Vydrin & Konta, 2014). The idea that the Latin (or Arabic) script simply *cannot* represent tone is, strictly speaking, incorrect, even if it is true that Latin-based orthographies do not have a single convention for marking Manding lexical and grammatical tone.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Note for instance that none of three major Latin-script Manding dictionaries (Bailleul, 2007; Dumestre, 2011; Vydrine, 1999b) use the same system for marking tone and only Vydrin's systematically marks grammatical tone.

On the other hand, Sékù's claim is exactly right. N'ko has succeeded in being more compelling to many students in part because of its representation of linguistic tones. In and of itself, of course, such accuracy has little to do with an orthography's success. Yet in putting a linguistically accurate system for marking Manding and other African languages' tonal system at the center of their pedagogical system, Kantè and N'ko activists today have created a powerful metalinguistic device. As demonstrated above, Manding tone lays in part beyond the "limits of awareness" (Silverstein, 1981). It involves *unavoidable referentiality* (i.e., by distinguishing minimal pairs etc.), but it is rarely *continuously segmentable*—that is, tone is superimposed across vowels and thus cannot be perceived in isolation. As such, despite being essential to the denotational machinery of Manding and perceived as so by the language's speakers, its use is not easily reportable. Moreover, in instances where the floating L tone (what Kantè labels "fullness" and "abruptness") is in play, tone's role in the denotational machinery of Manding is one that can only be determined by contextual extraction from the variable realization of different syllables' fundamental frequencies.

N'ko therefore has not "run *bálikukalan* ragged" because of a unique *capacity* over the Latin script, but rather because of the *kánmaseere* tonal system's unique *function*. In N'ko classrooms such as Sékù's, Kantè's named diacritics of length and tone operate as a powerful metalinguistic device to convince students of both the richness and unique nature of both their language, as well as those of the African continent; languages, which, in the popular imagination, remain at best dialects, and at worst languages without grammar. Moreover, the fact that *kánmaseere* lend themselves to marking lengthening, two-tone register distinction and floating L—features common to many African

languages—means that they also are a powerful mechanism for solidifying the read of N’ko as a uniquely suited “African phonetic alphabet”.

“The Path to Motherland Liberation”

As I demonstrated in the previous section, linguistic facts of tone and N’ko’s orthographic set of diacritics for them bolsters the idea of N’ko being an alphabet designed to serve not just Manding speakers but African languages more broadly. This fact combined with N’ko activists’ awareness of the sensitivity of ethnicity in politics, means that many activists both understand and uphold /ŋko/ as primarily referring to Kantè’s “phonetic alphabet”. Nonetheless, to conclude that activists’ stance on N’ko’s reference prototype stems primarily from these two factors—tone and the downplaying of ethno-nationalism—is to ignore ample evidence that N’koisants promote and understand N’ko as a script contributing to Black Africa in a larger sense.

For instance, during the summer of 2016 I met and attended a series of events where the N’ko writer, Rás Kùlibàlí, was also present. A soft- and slow-speaking man with one protruding tooth, I never saw him without his *rastacap* covering his dreadlocks. Running into *rastas* is a common experience for many people, and in particular Westerners in West Africa, but not something I had experienced in N’ko circles. I officially met him for the first-time when I visited the N.Fa.Ya center to begin my observation of afternoon classes (767:2). Walking into the compound shortly before the 2pm start-time, I found him seated amongst a group of N.Fa.Ya members with whom I was already acquainted. Despite his atypical profile amongst N’ko students, I got no sense of his presence being awkward or unique in any way. In fact, N.Fa.Ya had already published an N’ko book by Rás, which I had purchased and read the week before. A tiny

book printed and bound by cheap stapling, *N'ko' ni ànglé'* ('N'ko and English'; Kùlibàlí, 2016) is essentially a list of Manding words from Kantè's (2011) primer, *Háte*, accompanied with phonetic transcription of English words using the N'ko script. The introduction however touches upon Ras's motivation to put pen to paper and to study N'ko in general:

<p> Ἰ'ἡ ἧ Ἀἰῶν ὑποῦσιν ὁσῖ Ἰῶ ἡλῆκῶ ἄφ Ἰ ἡ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ Ἰῶ </p>	<p> <i>Àlé' sébesun' yénen' n' k'à fāamun kó à bé jèdekán' ní kán gbéde lù sébe, làten sébeli' dòn té, n' nà d'à fāamun kó N'ko yé Màlí ní gbòlofin sébesun' nè dí fàsó' kánnabila' síla' kàn</i> </p>	<p> After having grasped the alphabet, I understood that it writes [our] mother-tongue [<i>jèdekan</i>] and other languages [<i>kán gbéde lù</i>] as well, whereas the Latin alphabet doesn't. I then understood that N'ko is Mali and Africa's alphabet [<i>gbòlofin sébesun</i>] on the path to motherland liberation </p> <p>(Kùlibàlí, 2016, p. 1)</p>
--	--	--

For Ras, as for many of the actors described above, N'ko's *kánmaseere* are the concrete linguistic notation tool that convinced him of the script's value for both his country and Black Africans [*gbòlofin*] in general. However, his embracing of N'ko is not purely about linguistic fidelity; it is rather a tool “on the path to motherland liberation”. Indeed, he uses this point to bring up his own religious practice, Rastafarianism, which he sees as intimately linked to N'ko; both of their “meaning” [*kódó*] is “work for the liberation of the African” [*gbòlofin' mùumé' kánnabila'*] (pp. 1-2). The interpretation of N'ko as a pan-African script therefore is not purely linguistic. No matter how accurate, useful and typologically unifying *kánmaseere* may be, the script is oftentimes more important as the centerpiece of a common struggle of Black Africans for their continent. In what follows

in this section, I draw on similar ethnographic data collected online and in-person to demonstrate that N’ko activists earnestly understand N’ko as a script at the center of both a struggle for the subjugated post-colonial languages across sub-Saharan Africa and Black causes more broadly.

Fàdafinná’s Alphabet

N’ko students regularly uphold N’ko as an alphabet meant to serve all of Africa (most typically referred to using $\bar{\text{I}}\bar{\text{Y}}\bar{\text{e}}\bar{\text{I}}\bar{\text{m}}\bar{\text{e}}$ *fàdafinná* ‘Africa’, lit. ‘black.person-LOC’; but also occasionally *gbòlofinná* or *áfiriki*) with little or no appeal to tone or *kánmaseere*. See for the instance, in Figure 26, another Facebook post from the same poster as the one seen earlier in the chapter (1243). The written Manding of this post reads “The N’ko Alphabet is ready to become the African [*Fàdafinná*] continent’s alphabet”. While the post did not generate lively discussion to provide any further clues on the way in which N’ko is ready, it does gesture towards the shared aspiration of many N’ko activists to see the alphabet be adopted across other non-Manding-speaking parts of Africa.

Figure 26: Facebook post on N’ko as the African continent’s alphabet



For instance, in a July 2016 posting on the popular N’ko website *kanjamadi.com*, Màmúdu Sánkare wrote to publicly thank Bàkərɔbá Kàkóro Fófana, the owner of the largest N’ko bookstore in Bamako, for rewarding (*jànsa*) the students of his association with so many books over the years. As one would expect, he finished with a series of benedictions. One in particular however sticks out (1229):

<p>ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲḲḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ ḲḲ</p>	<p><i>Álama Mànden N’ko</i> <i>fòdoba lérada’ yiriwa dá</i> <i>k’ à ké Áfirik fòdoba N’ko</i> <i>lérada’ dí lón’ dó</i></p>	<p>‘May God make the Mànden Public N’ko Bookstore into the Africa [Áfirik] Public N’ko Bookstore one day’</p>
--	--	---

This exhortation of God signals a true desire for N’ko as an alphabet to spread across the continent. It is rooted however not in a desire to dominate Africa, but in a desire to variously help, develop, save or liberate it. Just as Rás Kùlibàlí embraced N’ko as part of his Rastafarian struggle to free Africa, so other N’ko students see the script’s role. Again an online post illustrates the point as seen in Figure 27 (1230):

Figure 27: ‘Africa had fallen, N’ko picked it back up’ Facebook post



Fàdafinná tède báda bè, N’ko lè nò à lówilí lá
 'Africa had fallen, N’ko picked it back up'

With its words painted over the image of Black men manually laboring to raise up the African continent, the post make explicit the idea that N’ko is not simply a tool of writing but also the foundation for a popular movement to revive Africa.

Not only do N'ko activists express such pan-Africanist wishes; N'ko books and texts explicitly appeal to a pan-Africanist sensibility in pitches to potential readers. The historical work *Wànkara díu jàmanabá'* (Kàba, 2003, 'The great country and lands of the Wànkara') focuses on the Wànkara, the supposed ancestors of Manding, and Mande peoples more broadly, prior to the later rise of the Ghana and Mali empires (Levtzion, 1973). The book itself is marketed to readers however not with any appeal to ethnic Manding-ness but rather with comments from one of Sulemaana Kantè's sons, Búrama, who notes that the work is not simply one of history before concluding:

ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ ḂḂḂ	<i>N'i yé fàdafinná dóbě́n fě,</i> <i>̀̀ba kàfá' nìn kàran wé</i>	'[i]f you want the mending of Africa, then read this book!'
---	--	---

Indeed, in the many calls for people to embrace N'ko, the addressee is almost always Black Africans as a whole. For instance, in 2016 the following post popped up in an N'ko Facebook group of which I am a member (Figure 28, 1227):

Figure 28: ‘Our dear writing system’ Facebook post



Je lance un appel à tous les patriotes Africains, de faire face à notre chère écriture “N’ko” qui est aujourd’hui la seule solution de faire avancée [sic] l’afrique face à la révolution scientifique. Je direz [sic] que, elle est la seule écriture qui oblige son apprenant a adopté des bons moeurs [sic] comme (la religion) avoir la foie en Dieu. Et elle nous apprendent aussi des sciences (techniques, technologie), et de la cultures [sic] sans exception. Vive l’écriture Africaine “N’ko”!

I send a call out to all African patriots to face up to our dear writing system “N’ko”, which today is the only solution to move Africa forward in the face of the scientific revolution. I’d add that it is the only writing system that requires its student to adopt good morals, like (religion-wise) having faith in God. And it also teaches about technical and technological sciences as well as culture without exception. Long live the African writing system “N’ko”!

In this post, N’ko is described not for its ability to properly mark tone but rather for its ability to engender moral behavior and faith in God while also relaying scientific and

written tradition, N’ko is the alphabetic center-piece of an envisioned movement that uses mother-tongue literacy and education as a solution for Africa’s “languishment”. The speaker’s call to action is explicitly not one that targets Manding speakers, but rather the youth of—once again—Black Africa as a whole.

Global Blackness

While older activists also frame N’ko as an African script, the sentiment that it could or should be the writing system of Africa is perhaps most pronounced amongst a younger generation of Western-educated university students. At the university in Kankan where the interlude to this chapter began, for instance, one of the main students involved with N’ko was eager for his colleagues in linguistics to be trained in the script so that they could use it to document and create orthographies to promote literacy in *all* their respective mother-tongues (348). While this particular initiative focused on Guinea’s languages for obvious reasons, these students’ and others activists’ ultimate goal is for N’ko to become the iconic script of an entire continent or civilization (𞤅𞤆𞤇𞤈 *sómɔɔya* in N’ko circles) — that is, Black Africa. Note, for instance, the way that a flyer of one N’ko Student Association in Kankan addresses students and scholars: “Welcome in [sic] Africa” with an image of the entire Continent (Figure 29; 43).

Figure 29: Pan-Africanist flyer of an N'ko association at the University de Julius Nyérére in 2013



This focus on the African continent does not preclude N'ko activists from also being interested in Blackness as a transnational phenomenon. One US-based N'ko teacher for instance tweeted (see Figure 30 below) Manding-language support for ongoing protests in Baltimore over the death of Freddie Gray while in custody of the Baltimore Police Department (118).

Figure 30: #blacklivesmatter Facebook post



Báltimor: Ni' telen' má' ké jómin' té' ké [sic throughout]
 'Baltimore: No Justice, No Peace'

The West African immigrant community of the United States regularly makes a distinction between themselves and Black Americans through the use of, on one hand, *fàrafìn* ('African', lit 'black skin') in Manding or *africain* in French, and on the other *américain noir* (Fr. 'Black American'). In this tweet, though, this distinction is collapsed by the use of the, as it were, "Black skin" N'ko script alongside an attached photo of the deceased Freddie Gray bearing the hashtag of the eponymous social movement #blacklivesmatter.

Similarly, the N'ko script being primarily used as a Manding-language orthography has not precluded other transnational Black and also Afrocentric movements from gravitating towards it¹¹⁰. For instance in 2015 while Googling something related to

¹¹⁰ At the same time, it has arguably given rise to a plethora of other script initiatives, in particular in Guinea where there is an active community of Fulani-speakers that promote

N’ko, I stumbled upon the website of the Ganlodo Kingdom

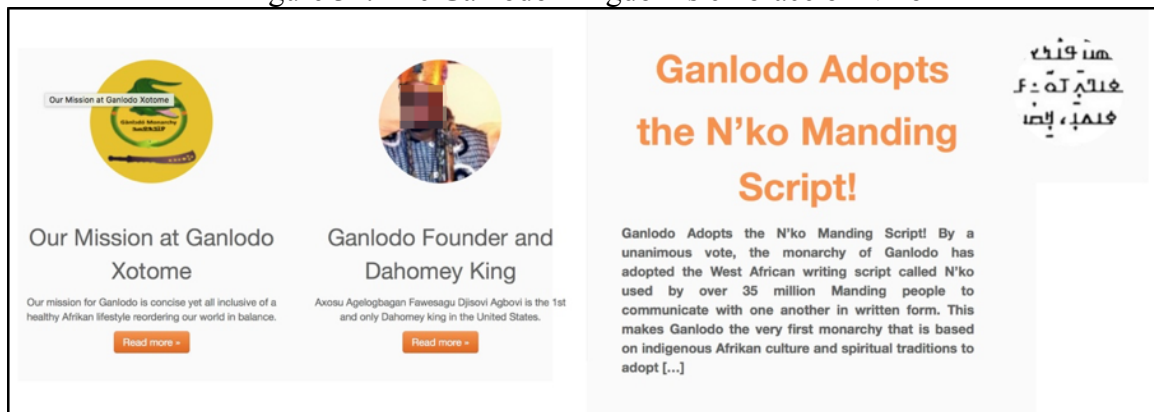
(www.ganlodokingdom.com), a self-declared monarchy reportedly founded in 2012 in the United States by a Gbe-language speaker of southern Benin (see Figure 31 below).

One section of the now defunct website read as follows (1296):

The script we use on this page is the official script of Ganlodo and it is borrowed from the Bambara script created by Solomana Kante in 1949 as a writing system for the Manding languages of West Afrika. After careful examination, and seeing a dire need for a functional script in our culture, we adopted N’ko as our functional everyday language script. The languages we use are Fongbe and Yoruba but the script is N’ko. It is time for those that are ReAfrikanizing to make a truly revolutionary step and use an Afrikan script when writing.

Linguistically, the Mission section of the monarchy’s site does feature a lot of N’ko script followed by what appears to be English language translations. As it turns out the N’ko sections are simply screen grabs of random N’ko book excerpts in Manding followed by unrelated English-language statements.

Figure 31: The Ganlodo Kingdom’s embrace of N’ko



Regardless of the unorthodox deployment and token embrace of N’ko, the Ganlodo website does show the way that—marginality of the kingdom aside—the pan-African

their own orthography using a script called Adlam (Juffermans, Asfaha, & Abdelhay, 2014b, p. 7; Waddell, 2016).

vision attached to the script by its actual users is a valorization that is relevant and allows it to circulate.

In this section, I have demonstrated the ways in which many activists clearly embrace N’ko as a script and not a language. Earlier I suggested that at times such a stance on /ŋko/’s referent was clearly connected to a desire to allay concern that their movement is engaged in a project that favors the cause of Manding people over the other ethnic groups of their countries and the region. While this dynamic is real, the examples reviewed here demonstrate that many students and activists of N’ko also uphold it as primarily a script because of deep motivation to work to improve the fate of Africans, or even Black people writ large.

Conclusion

N’ko activists regularly engage in interactional work that either explicitly or implicitly suggests that the reference prototype of the word /ŋko/ is ‘the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949’. This notwithstanding the fact that that very man argued that the same word denoted the Manding language. Other students of N’ko, as we will see in the following chapter, make the same case today. Understanding this divergence in referential practice requires attending to sociological factors as well as intervening linguistic ones.

As I have made clear in this chapter, N’koïsans often insist that N’ko is primarily a writing system designed and ideal for all of Africa. On one hand, this seems to stem from the desire to mitigate the sense that N’ko students are concerned primarily with advancing their own ethnic group’s cause. On the other however, N’ko users believe that the writing system is the “phonetic African alphabet” because of facts of linguistic tone.

Kantè's script's system of diacritics succinctly mark length and a two-register tone distinction despite the complicating factors of downdrift and downstep that Western linguists labored to theorize in the mid-twentieth century. Other scripts can of course be used to mark such distinctions, but rarely are they put to use by the general public in West Africa. Kantè's *kánmasere* conversely are central to both the script, and the classrooms and public discussions of N'ko today. In short, in accurately mapping the tones of Manding, his system provides a powerful metalanguage that is applicable to many African languages and thereby illuminates parallels between them that typically lie beyond traditional "limits of awareness" or reportability (Silverstein, 1981). For its champions, this fact casts a unique pan-African light on the N'ko script—one that seems to stem not just from aspiration but also linguistic facts of tone.

To focus on the issue of ethnicity or tone as driving the pan-African impulse of N'ko however is to misconstrue and ignore the actions and interpretations of the N'ko activists themselves. While N'ko activists are most typically Manding speakers (though they are frequently not ethnically Manding and speak additional languages) and while they believe that N'ko is a particularly adapted alphabet for African languages, they also ultimately view their work to promote Manding-language literacy and education as part of a larger struggle that most if not all of Africa is facing.

One final moment and artifact of my fieldwork neatly encapsulates all of these points. During the summer of 2016 I spent a large amount of time hanging out, chatting and studying with a range of N'ko students and teachers in two book shops. One day while visiting with the owner of one, we received an afternoon visit from an N'ko student, Ísa Sàmaké, who I had met in 2013 but had not engaged with extensively (763). I

had actually tried to leave earlier but my host, the shop owner, said he wanted me to wait because he knew that Ísa would like to have me do something on his weekly radio show, *Fàkán' ní yèrèkán'* (lit. 'father-language and self-language'), on Radio "La Voix du Citoyen" (95.7 FM). In the days to come I would appear as a guest on both his show on the radio and take a long moto ride with him to the outskirts of Bamako to appear on his collaborator's television show. At the moment, however, I was mostly curious why I had been waiting for this guy so long. When he did finally arrive, dusty and tired from his journey, I immediately noticed the rather large mudflap on his motorcycle (see Figure 32 below; 906):

Figure 32: Ísa Sàmaké's Motorcycle Mudflap



Originally so dirty it was hard to decipher, Ísa eagerly wiped it clean when I asked him if could take a picture of the words:

نِ نِ سَبَلِي مَآ كَرَانْ فَرَا فِينَا بِي تُو أَ دُو بَاوْ مَوُ تِي هُورُونْيا كِي لَآ كَانْ		<i>Ni N. sébeli má' kàrán'</i> <i>Fàrafinna bé tó à dó báo,</i> <i>mòò té hórónya k'i lá kán</i>		If the N[‘ko] writing [system] isn't studied, Africa will perish because
---	--	--	--	--

𐎂 𐎆 𐎎𐎍 𐎎𐎏𐎓𐎕 𐎎𐎑 𐎎𐎓 | *to jònyá' dó*
 𐎎𐎕 𐎎𐎓𐎕 𐎎𐎓

| a person doesn't become
 | free while leaving their
 | language in slavery

This mudflap as in the many moments throughout this chapter explicitly typifies N'ko as a writing system and not a language. The flap's overall message depends on two other key ideas. First, it suggests that the alphabet is crucial in a literal life-or-death battle to free the languages of the continent. The fight for N'ko, in this sense, is rooted in the belief that decolonizing African society will pass primarily through embracing reading, writing and education in African languages. Second, and more implicitly, Sàmaké's message also relies on the assumption that the N'ko alphabet is properly or even uniquely adapted for writing African languages. For it is not through the use of any writing system that the Continent will be saved, but rather through the right one—presumably the one with a unique system for marking tone.

Chapter 6: *Kángbɛ*: Clear Language, Clear Citizenship

During the summer of 2012, I encountered N’ko in Burkina Faso for the first time. Over the course of a few intermittent weeks in Bobo-Dioulasso, I was able to attend a number of midday and evening lessons offered by a man, and now, friend, named Sáliya Tárawele. Prior to my departure I visited Sáliya at his meager home in a shared urban courtyard, akin to a small apartment building in the United States. His two wives were both back in Djibasso, the family’s hometown, because of the high cost of living in the city. Inside his small house, I marveled at his personal library of somewhere around twenty or thirty N’ko books and I asked him if he had done any writing himself. Alas, he hadn’t yet authored any book of his own. A few days later, however, he provided me with a small piece of notebook paper, which was covered in his own handwritten words. The document came from a radio segment that he had prepared and it was mine to keep, he said. Scrawled across the paper was the following (15):

ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́	<i>Í'y'à lón án bé kà kúma'</i> <i>dó lù fò ni fili' fàna. An</i> <i>b'à fò ò lù lè mà kó fòroba</i> <i>fili'. Ó té mòó' kèlen kó di,</i> <i>bée lè ò fò á n'à fili' yé</i> <i>tan. [...]</i> <i>Nba án d'à fàmú</i> <i>ò dó à bé tèn. Ní kán'</i> <i>sébeda à ná' jèdè' mà à dí</i> <i>sébe ní à sàriyá lù lè yé.</i> <i>Nka mén' fòla bólón' ná</i> <i>sá, òlè à baa nòyà mén là</i> <i>ná' mén', ò y'à fò lá tèn nè</i> <i>jònsa jònfnáamù dí ké.</i> <i>N'ko d'òron té nìn dí dè</i> <i>kán béè lè tàn. Í baa</i> <i>tùbabukán' tà ò tèn, í baa</i> <i>àrabukán tà ò fàna yé tàn</i>	You know that we say certain things with mistakes. We call these “public mistakes ¹¹¹ ” [fòroba fili]. We’re not singling out one person; everyone speaks with some mistakes [...] But this is how we understand things. If a language is written in its true form, then it is written with its rules. In the street though, one simply says that which is makes mutual comprehension easier. It’s not just N’ko, all
--	--	--

¹¹¹ This notion of “public mistakes” can be traced back to Kantè’s writings (2009, p. 26) on the issue of “public shortcomings” (ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ ɔ́ɔ́ Fòdoba tánbon’ nù).

<p> ،ō̃m̄ ȳm̄ ȳ̄ŋ̄ āb̄ q̄t̄ōm̄ ɔ̄ɣ̄ɣ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ : q̄b̄ ō̄ɣ̄ λ̄f̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ،q̄b̄ ɔ̄ : ȳ̄ ȳ̄ q̄b̄ ō̄ɣ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ !...ō̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ ȳ̄ : ȳ̄ ȳ̄ λ̄f̄ ȳ̄ </p>	<p> <i>nè...án yé beé lè kílila ǎ</i> <i>kàrán mà, kàran báa ní</i> <i>kàranbáli beé.</i> </p>	<p> languages are this way. Take French, it's like that. Take Arabic, it's like that too. We [therefore] are calling all people— schooled or unschooled— to come study it. </p>
--	--	---

Sáliya's words neatly encapsulate a central way of understanding the phonemic string /ŋko/. In Chapter 5, we saw that N'ko activists frequently insist on upholding N'ko as the proper name of the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. Here, however, we see that N'ko is also used to refer to what linguists and myself call *Manding*. What is the nature of this entity? Sáliya's remarks, comparing it with French and Arabic, make it clear that, in his mind, it is a "language" (*kán*). This does not mean a single homogeneous code; Sáliya acknowledges that it has various forms that likely result from a desire to facilitate mutual intelligibility. Nonetheless, as he puts it, N'ko, like any other language, has rules that must be dutifully applied when writing.

For Sáliya, his own mother-tongue can clearly be labeled N'ko. When he writes however, he strives to write a register distinct from his own speech. While the majority of Manding-speakers have not yet followed suit, the fact is that thousands of people across West Africa today recognize and embrace Sáliya's usage. My goal in this chapter is two-fold. First, I seek to establish from whence did the referential pairing of N'ko and Manding emerge. As such, I begin with an investigation of the original linguistic writings and formulations of N'ko's founder, Sulemaana Kantè. For as we shall see, despite having passed away thirty years ago, his books about Manding linguistics and dialectology continue to form the basis of a metalinguistic framework that is ever so

slightly remaking objects known by many as *Bámanankan*, *Mànkakán* or Manding. Second, I take us into the classrooms, bookshops and circles of N'ko students today to explore why Kantè's metalinguistic framework continues to spread. In part, it can be attributed to his sound (historical-)linguistic analysis of Manding phonemes and lexemes, which serve as the basis for a prescriptive grammar register known as *kángbe*. What makes Kantè's metalinguistic framework compelling, however, are not simply facts of semantics or etymology, but also *kángbe*'s role as the discursive component of an ethos of discipline, logic and savviness, which students believe their countries and Continent currently lack, but desperately need.

First, though, let us begin with some preliminaries regarding Manding and N'ko.

Who speaks Manding?

In the strictest sense, N'ko refers to the non-Latin-, non-Arabic-based script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. As we have seen though, in many instances, Kantè and other N'ko activists use it as a proper name equivalent to Manding. Who speaks Manding? From one perspective, no one:

Il est à noter que les locuteurs eux-mêmes ne disposent pas de terme pour désigner la langue manding dans son ensemble ; par contre ils dénomment chaque variante locale de cette langue par un mot spécifique: mandinka en Gambie, bambara au Mali, dioula au Burkina Faso et en Côte d'Ivoire, etc.

It should be noted that no one term is available for speakers themselves to refer to the Manding language in its entirety; rather, they name each local variant of the language by a specific word: Mandinka in Gambia, Bamanan in Mali, Jula in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, etc. (M.-J. Derive, 1990, pp. 15–16)

Despite this fact, speakers of Bamanan, Jula, Maninka (and to a lesser extent, Mandinka¹¹²) understand one another:

¹¹² Mandinka is distinct amongst the four major varieties by virtue of it being the only one classified as Western instead of Eastern Manding. While there are a number of diverging

[...] *c'est un fait bien connu, que l'intercompréhension est très largement attestée entre tous les parlers manding : malinké, bambara, dioula. Intercompréhension, mais non similitude : les Bambara de Ségou, les Malinké d'Odienné ou de Séguéla ne reconnaissent pas dans le dioula de Côte d'Ivoire leurs propres parlers*

[...] it's a well-recognized fact that mutual-intelligibility is widely attested between the Manding varieties of Maninka, Bamanan, Jula. Mutual-intelligibility, but not sameness: Bamanan of Segou, Maninka of Odienné and Seguela do not recognize their own varieties in the Jula of Côte d'Ivoire (Dumestre & Retord, 1981, p. 3)

Thus, no one speaks Manding, but many people speak some form of it. As Vydrin (1999b, p. 7) puts it:

Manding is, from the genetic point of view, a small sub-branch within the Western (in some classifications, Northern) group of the Mande language family. It is a linguistic continuum with linguistic distance between its extreme representatives slightly overpassing the limit of mutual intelligibility of around 90 common words in the 100-word list of Swadesh. There are no clear-cut limits within this continuum, so the traditionally distinguished languages (or dialects) “*Bambara, Malinke, Dioula*” [viz. Bamanan, Maninka, Jula], etc. are in fact subcontinua smoothly flowing into each other. In the contact areas of these subcontinua, linguonyms and ethnonyms often lack stability and are sometimes interchangeable

In both usages, Manding¹¹³ is a technical hypernym used to refer to a single entity—a “language” or a “linguistic continuum”—with its own internal variation.

As Derive points out, speakers themselves label their speech with a range of distinct proper names such as *Bámanankan, Máninkakán, Jùlakán* and *Màndinkakán*. Each of these names is derived from a process of compounding using the word *kán*. Most frequently glossed as ‘language’, the actual semantic range of the lexeme is much

features that can strain mutual comprehension, the traditional metric for the classification is the split between five and seven vowel inventories for Western and Eastern varieties (Bird, 1981; see Creissels, 2009, 2013 for grammars of two Western Manding varieties).

¹¹³ See footnote 7 for references regarding the emergence of the terms Manding (*mandingue*) and Mande (*Mandé*) in Western research circles.

larger¹¹⁴. The lexicographer Bailleul (2007, p. 203), for instance, gives it the following senses in his Bamanan-French dictionary:

1. neck, throat
2. edge, sill, rim
3. voice, talk
4. spoken language
5. noise, sound

Three of these senses are echoed by Kantè (1992, p. 240) in his own monolingual dictionary:

𞤎𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 : 𞤎𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 / 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 / 𞤎𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵 𞤎𞤵𞤵𞤵	<i>kán</i> : <i>kǎn' tũun yila' fàdi'</i> <i>tš lá / kúma' mànkán' /</i> <i>síya kélen' kúma kán'</i> <i>súuya'</i>	<i>kán'</i> : the closure area of the head on the rest of the body / the sound of speech / the type of language of one ethnic group
--	--	---

Regardless, the formula *X + kán* is traditionally recognized as the primary lexical procedure for distinguishing languages:

- (1) a. *bámanan.kan* ‘Bamanan (language)’
 Bamanan.language
- b. *tùbabu.kán* ‘French (language)’
 White-person.language

This same procedure however can also be used to generate an infinite number of metapragmatic labels. In this case, *kán* can be glossed as ‘talk’ or the equivalent of the English suffix ‘-ese’ (e.g., Chinese, lawyer-ese, etc.)

- (2) a. *mànamana.kán* ‘trivial talk’
 banal.language
- b. *bàmako.kán* ‘Bamako-ese’
 Bamako.language

¹¹⁴ This is a cross-linguistically common phenomenon; take, for instance, the Greek word *logos* which can be variously glossed as ‘word, speech, language, talk, discourse, conversation, argument, reason, rationality, logic, etc.’ (Liddell, 1889).

- c. *màli.kán* 'Mali-ese'
Mali.language

Discussing the Manding dialectology of Côte d'Ivoire for instance, Derive (1990, pp. 15-16) writes as follows:

Quant au terme qu'un Manding emploie pour désigner sa langue, d'après les observations que nous avons pu faire, il variera selon l'interlocuteur :
- *si celui-ci n'est pas "manding" il répondra, "julakan" ;*
- *si celui-ci est aussi manding, il précisera "bɔdugukakan" ou "maukakan", etc., c'est-à-dire il emploiera le nom du parler de la région dont il est originaire.*

As far as the term that a Manding [person] uses to designate their language, based off of our observations, it varies according to their interlocutor:
- if they are not Manding, they'll answer "julakan"
- if they are also Manding, they'll specify "bɔdugukan" or "maukakan", etc., that is, they use the name of the variety of the region from where they are from

In short, not all expressions using X-kan can be interpreted as the proper names of languages.

Moreover, as Vydrin's description makes clear, the major Manding ethnonyms and glottonyms laid out above are not deployed uniformly; they are often unstable or interchangeable in so-called "contact areas". Speaking of the role of Jula as a *lingua franca* in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s, for instance, Dumestre & Retord (1981) note that:

En règle générale, le dioula est tout de même, pour la plupart des locuteurs, une deuxième langue. Le cas des personnes parlant un parler manding est évidemment différent: le dioula, pour eux, n'est pas véritablement une deuxième langue, mais plutôt une deuxième façon de parler (p. 3)

As a general rule [in Côte d'Ivoire], Jula is [...] for most speakers, a second language. The case of people that speak a Manding variety [*parler*] is, of course, different: Jula, for them, is not truly a second language, but rather a second way of speaking (p. 3)

The solution of both Sulemaana Kantè and linguists to this issue has been to use a single hypernym to refer to a range of interconnected and most often mutually intelligible

phono-lexical grammatical systems: *N'ko* for the former and *Manding* for the latter. Their goals in doing so must be understood as distinct though. For linguists, *Manding* is a convenience meant to gesture towards lexical and grammatical congruence of what they understand as free-standing grammatical systems or varieties. The ambitions of *N'ko*'s inventor were much larger and are explored in the following section.

“*N'ko fɔ́baa' bée lè tɔ́ dɔ́*” ‘In the name of those who say *N'kó*’

Sulemaana Kantè used the label *N'ko* not only to capture linguistic congruence, but also to provide the necessary metalinguistic framework to both discipline and bring together what he envisioned as one single African people behind a single language. How did this work proceed? From where did the name *N'ko* emerge and how did it come to be paired with an entity commonly referred to as *Manding* by linguists today?

“*N'kó*” means I say

Ask the majority of *Manding* speakers what *N'ko* means and they'll respond with a metasemantic gloss of ‘I say’. In fact, <*N'ko*> is a conventional Latin-alphabet transliteration¹¹⁵ of what is rendered as 𞤅𞤆𞤇 in the script itself. This proper name stems from the following clause¹¹⁶:

- (1) *n' kó* ... ‘I say...’
I QUO

While ‘I say’ is a convenient gloss, it misleadingly suggests that the word *kó* is simply a regular verb. Commonly referred to as the *quotative* (Creissels, 2009, 2013; Vydrin, 2016a), *kó* is in fact a unique grammatical category that can be usefully analyzed as three

¹¹⁵ The apostrophe following <*N*> arises from a occasionally adopted convention for marking the syllabic nasal phoneme /ŋ/

¹¹⁶ For this discussion I use so-called standard Bamanan in examples (2-9).

distinct *lexemes*¹¹⁷, all with relatively important functions in Manding grammar: a copula, particle or complementizer. To build ourselves a solid foundation for understanding the origins of the name <N'ko>, let us focus on the particular lexeme in question: *kó* as a copula (viz. *kó*₁).

Basic Manding syntax is S (O) V with an auxiliary (often called a *predicative marker* in the Mande linguistics tradition) appearing in the post-subject position:

- (2) a. *Á* *bé* *dén-* *kò* 'S/he washes the child'
 3SG IPVF.AFF child-ART wash
- b. *Á* *bé* *táa* 'S/he goes'
 3SG IPVF.AFF go
- c. *Á* *má* *táa* 'S/he didn't go'
 3SG PFV.NEG go

The one exception is for affirmative intransitive constructions where the perfective marker appears as a suffix *-ra/-la/-na* of the verb instead of as an auxiliary inserted between the subject and verb:

- (3) *Á* *táa-ra* 'S/he went'
 3SG go-PFV.INTR

From a syntactic point of view therefore *kó*₁ is clearly verb-like because, like an intransitive verb, it follows the subject. That said, it does not have full verbal morphology. Indeed, it cannot take a perfective suffix or a perfective auxiliary marker, as shown in (4) and (5).

- (4) a. *Á* *fɔ-ra* ... 'It was said...'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ By *lexeme* I mean an underlying abstraction that covers various word-forms (viz. phonological shapes) and has a unique morphosyntactic distribution (Agha, 2007a, p. 109; Lyons, 1995, pp. 18–25; Sapir, 1921)

¹¹⁸ (4a) is passive because of a common grammatical phenomenon in Manding known as “the passive alternation” (Creissels, 2007, p. 14) or “Passive P(atient)-lability” (Vydrin, 2016a, p. 103), in which the use of a prototypically transitive verb, such as *fɔ* ‘say’, in an

3SG say-PFV.INTR

b. **À* *kó-ra* ...

(5) a. *Sékù* *yé* *à* *fǒ* ‘Seku said it’
 Seku PFV.TR 3SG say

b. **Sékù* *yé* *à* *kó*

Nor can it be put into the negative like the verb *fǒ* ‘say’, as in (6).

(6) a. *Ñ* *má* *à* *fǒ*... ‘I didn’t say (it)...’
 1SG PFV.NEG 3SG say

b. **Ñ* *má* *kó*...

*Kó*₁ therefore is not a transitive verb that can have a simple noun phrase as a direct object argument. Yet, *kó*₁ is also not an intransitive verb; it cannot stand alone with a subject as an independent clause.

*Kó*₁ introduces either direct or indirect reported speech where the reported utterance is a nominalized complement clause understood as direct object; since no segmentally distinct complementizer occurs in such cases, *kó*₁ seems to mark clause union as well. I demonstrate this in (7) where I have marked the person being referenced by the pronouns *à* 3SG and *ń* 1SG by the use of the subscript *i* and *k*. In both (7a) and (7b), the utterance is produced by the individual *k*.

(7) a. *k: À_i kó “n_i té tága”*
 3SG QUO 1SG IPVF.NEG go
k: ‘He_i said “I_i’m not going”’

b. *k: À_i kó n_k té tága*
 intransitive construction encodes a passive voice.

3SG QUO 1SG IPFV.NEG go
 k: 'He_i says I_k'm not going'

(7a) is an instance of direct speech. The individual *k* is telling us what the individual *i* said while also quoting them directly. *Á* and *ń* therefore have the same referent as marked by the subscript *i*. In (7b) on the other hand, we have an example of indirect speech. The individual *k* reports what *i* said, but without directly quoting them. Thus, *à* refers to *i* and *ń* refers to *k* as marked by the subscripts. Grammatically then *ń kó*—just as in its English gloss—is a matrix clause that must be conjoined with a subordinate clause understood as an instance of reported speech.

Next, semantically, as revealed above in (8), the gloss of *ń kó* as 'I say', while accurate, is only one possible interpretation. *Kó*₁ as a reported speech copula does not encode for aspect and is deictically non-selective for tense; using the standard Praguean convention where a preceding dash (-) marks absence of specificity (Agha, 2007a, p. 113), it can be regarded as simply categorially [-past]. That is, *ń kó* can be glossed as 'I say', but depending on prior discourse or the contextual array containing it, it may also be construed as denoting a narrated event prior to the speech event, yielding a past tense English gloss as appropriate. These possibilities are summarized in (8):

- (8) *ń kó* ...
 I QUO
 'I say...'
 'I said...'

Finally, even in this particular function, the quotative *kó* cannot necessarily be glossed as 'say'. As Creissels (2013, p. 123) notes there is possible "drift [*dérive*]" where

the quotative introduces a thought as opposed to reported speech. This is demonstrated in (9).

- (9) *ń sé-ra yèn dórɔn ń kó ń té sé kà tó yàn*
 I arrive-
 PFV.INTR there only I QUO I IPVF.NEG can INF stay here
 ‘As soon as I got there I was like I can’t stay here.’

In these instances, the quotative in Manding reveals itself as being similar to the English quotative *be + like* (see Jones & Schieffelin, 2009) or *be + all*. Strictly speaking, *kó*₁ does have referential meaning, one of the primary criterion for identifying a copula (Dixon, 2010, p. 100); it can be glossed as ‘think’, or ‘said’. However, given that *kó* does not have typical verbal morphology and that it cannot form an independent clause, it is best treated generically as a copula of speaking or cognition with biclausal syntax. That is, it serves to express a relational meaning of cognition or speaking between the referent of the subject NP of the matrix clause and some form of represented speech or thought denoted by the subordinate clause.

As highlighted earlier, the so-called quotative *kó* also appears as different grammaticalized elements such as a complementizer (*kó*₂) and a mediative discourse particle or a represented speech evidential (*kó*₃). For our purposes here, I will not review these other lexemes (for an overview of the quotative in various Manding varieties see Creissels, 2009, 2013; Vydrin, 2016). Suffice it to say that the word-form *kó* stands out as unique given this range of grammatical functions.

“*ń’ko-fɔbaa béɛ*”: All those who say *ń kó*

Why did Kantè baptize the Manding continuum with a matrix clause made up of the unique quotative? This name for his creation is not simply a linguistic curiosity; it

also has apparent historical roots. Dieterlen (1957, pp. 127–128) for instance relates that the clause “*n kó*” figures prominently as the first words spoken on earth in the Manding creation myth that she observed in 1954. This myth is told as part of a ceremony that occurs every seven years in which the roof of a building first erected by a descendent of the *Màndén* [Mali] empire’s founder—Sunjata Keïta—is replaced. Dieterlen additionally claims these first words are “recall[ed]” in family ceremonies before annual sowing begins when the head of the household starts the ceremony with the words *n kó* (p. 128, footnote 1). While this intertextual connection is not referenced by N’ko activists or authors today, it does suggest that the clause *n kó* may have already been circulating as a near mystical set of words. Moreover, such a usage of a notion of reported speech and discourse to form the basis of a cosmological scheme parallels other classic cases such as the Christian myth that the “the Word” (< Greek *logos*) preceded the creation of the world (see John 1:1)¹¹⁹.

Regardless, for Kantè, the name “is not an affair of today. Since the olden days, the meaning of N’ko and the Manding language [*màndén kán*] has been the same”

($\text{ⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵉⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ : ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ , ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ⵏⵓⵎⵎⵉⵏ ; Sísèn kó té dè. Kàyii$

fóló, N’ko ní màndén kán’ bée kódo kélen) (Kántè, 2007/1958, p. 7). Specifically, Kantè

¹¹⁹ Intriguingly, Ngom (2016, p. 64) also mentions a Wolof Ajami text of Muusaa Ka that draws on similar ‘I say’ expressions as stands-in for Fulani and Wolof when discussing the role of language and translation in Islam:

To make his message more meaningful to his local audiences, he engages in a brief comparative linguistic analysis with theological implications. He chants that God made, for example, the Pulaar to say *mbiimi* and the Wolof to say *dama ne* to mean “I say.” Yet, God fulfills their prayers regardless of the language in which they are formulated

attributes the name *N'ko* to a history of past usage during assemblies bringing together the various people(s) of *Màndén*:

<p>ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ</p>	<p><i>Màndén kánbolon' síyaya mén' kénéen, N'ko ké dá à bée fòdoba tóo' dí kúma dónso' lù boló, à kèlenkelenná' mádan' jésilanje' mà gbàrá' lù dós</i></p>	<p>For word hunters, in lieu of listing them one by one during gatherings, <i>N'ko</i> became the common name for the vast number of Manding dialects that¹²⁰ exist (Kántè, 2007, p. 7)</p>
---	--	---

However, this historical grounding of the name is attributed not just to general usage. In *N'ko* circles, in fact, the name *N'ko* is most often attributed to the founder of the *Màndén* [Mali] empire, Sunjata Keíta:¹²¹

<p>ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (ᐱᐱᐱᐱ) ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ" ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ "ᐱᐱ</p>	<p><i>Halì kùrukanfúwa' kùngbára' dós káaba, Sònjadá kà "N'ko" fǒ yèn màdanni' ò lè màtànka mà. Kó "n yé kúma lá yàn bì, N'ko fǒbaa' bée lè tóo dós"</i></p>	<p>Even at the assembly of Kurukanfuwa at Kaaba, Sunjata said "<i>N'ko</i>" to avoid this enumeration [of Manding glottonyms]. He said "I am speaking to you here today in the name of all those who <i>N'ko</i>" (p. 7)</p>
---	--	---

For Kantè this reported speech quotation dates back to 1235. Interestingly, this use of *N'ko* in Sunjata's represented speech also appears in Niane's¹²² (1960, pp. 105–106) interpretation & translation of the oral epic which recounts Sunjata's life and rise to power. Even more crucially however this origin tale pairing the name *N'ko* with the

¹²⁰ Literally 'dialects of *Màndén* [the place]'
¹²¹ See Austen (1999) for a collection of essays on the sociological and historical dynamics of Sunjata and the oral epic that continues to make him relevant today.
¹²² See Simonis (2010, 2015) for comments on Niane's sympathies regarding the *N'ko* movement.

Manding language circulates widely in N'ko circles and texts today, though I will not explore them here (18; 457).

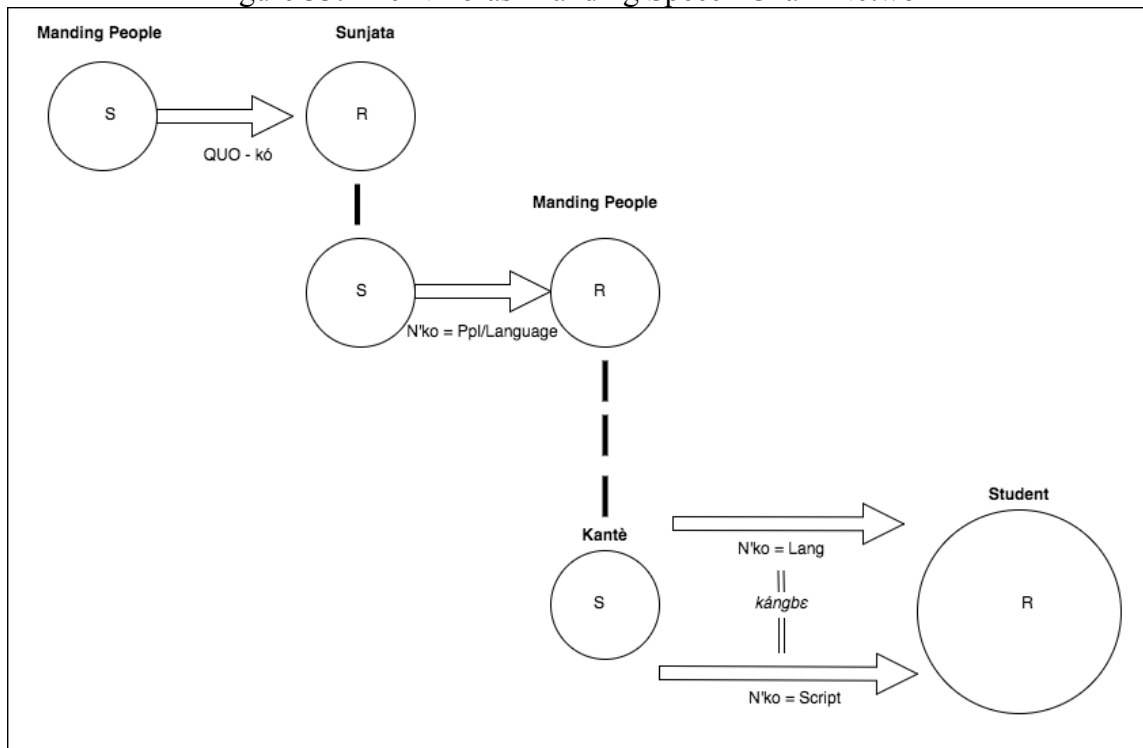
As outlined above, we have already seen that given its range of functions as a *verbum dicendi/sentiendi*, cross-clausal complementizer and grammatical particle, the quotative *kó* stands out as a unique collection of lexemes. This fact is essential to understanding Kantè's account of the origin of the name *N'ko*. First, for Sunjata, the quotative *kó* stands out as a cross-dialectal *index*, a unifying emblem, of the thing called Manding. Divergences in lexicon, phonology or grammar notwithstanding, one can identify speakers of Manding by their use of the unique grammatical category *kó*. Second, Sunjata paired the word with the first person singular pronoun *ń*. The first *Màndén* emperor thereby created a proper name that as a clause functions as a *nominal* construction (Agha, 2007a, p. 73; Silverstein, 1993). That is, *ń kó* metapragmatically identifies the narrated event that it denotes, 'I say', with speech event of utterance itself. This implies that in using the common represented speech construction *ń kó*, the referent of *ń*—that is, the utterer—is self-identifying as a speaker of the trans-local speech variety, Manding, as indexically recalled by *kó*.

Prior to his speech, Manding speakers' use of the construction could serve to perform any kind of social action (i.e., to report, to insult, to explain etc.). Following Sunjata's address however, any speech act involving *ń kó* became a hybrid "performative" (Austin, 1975/1962). Any utterance, in any situation, using the first-person quotative clause necessarily had the *perlocution* of establishing one's belonging to the Manding nation, in addition to any other possible social actions. Per Kantè, Sunjata, in his rise to power and quest to unite the disparate but related kingdoms of West Africa,

transforms the quotative from an index to a naturalized *icon* (see Irvine & Gal, 2000); the very use of the quotative *kó* in the first person is enough, not only to point to someone potentially speaking Manding, but to know, in fact, that they are Manding. Here the iconicity of the quotative is extended beyond Manding as a language all the way to the nation of Manding people.

Critically, in representing Sunjata Keiita’s utterance that day in 1235, Kantè roots his baptismal hypernym for the Manding language, N’ko, in a *speech-chain network* (Agha, 2007a, p. 67) that ultimately connects any student of his script, across the centuries, back to the preeminent Manding hero and ruler himself. This is sketched out below in Figure 33 using S to represent the role of “sender” and R to represent “receiver” in a single network stretching from Manding speakers, through Sunjata, the Manding people, and Sulemaana Kantè to the N’ko student of today.

Figure 33: The N’ko-as-Manding Speech Chain Network



Note that the initial speech event itself is not Sunjata's speech to the gathered Manding people. It is rather an innumerable number of individuals' use of the Manding quotative *kó* in discursive messages that Sunjata encountered across his lifetime. One permutation down Sunjata then extracts “*n kó*” from his life of discursive encounters and uses it as a stand-in for both the Manding language and nation. Centuries of speech events ultimately lead to Sulemaana Kantè and an N'ko student who through his or her studies is granted co-membership to this great speech chain network harking back to the mythical Sunjata himself. More importantly for our purposes, this also introduces them to the referential pairing of /*nko*/ and the entity that I am calling the Manding language.

Kantè on Manding Dialectology

Kantè's firm belief in the fundamental socio-historical unity of N'ko (viz. Manding) as a language-nation-culture hybrid did not prevent him from probing at the dialectal diversity within it, nor the conjenctural history of its speakers. Indeed, *Fóde* was, in many regards, an astute scholar of Manding dialectology and etymology (see Condé, 2008). In addition to his grammars (Kántè, 2008a, 2008b), various pedagogical primers, and monolingual dictionary reportedly completed in 1968 (Kántè, 1992; see Vydrine, 1996, 2010 for analysis), Kantè also produced two other linguistic works.

The first, *'The common language of Manden: an abridged history'* (*Màndén fòdòbà kán': dǎfǎ' ládesenen*) (Kántè, 2007¹²³), offers a historical account of the language as originating from the historical region of *Màndén*. This zone's people came to control a swath of neighboring provinces (*kàfó*) and territories and thereby formed what is now commonly called the Mali empire. According to Kantè, as part of this process, Manding

¹²³ Originally published in 1968 per Condé (2008).

spread through both emigration as well the language's progressive adoption by other ethnic groups (*sí* or *síya*). Additionally in this work, he outlines the history of Arabic influence¹²⁴ on Manding before enumerating a vast list (pp. 10-19) of common loanwords and expressions accompanied by Manding glosses that are often either archaic synonyms or the author's own neologisms. A few of them are listed below in Figure 34:

Figure 34: Common Arabic loanwords in Manding and proposed N'ko alternatives
(Kántè, 2007)

Common Arabic Loanword	Transliteration	N'ko Alternative	Gloss
لَمْ يَلَمْ	<i>ábadan</i>	<i>fěsekudu</i>	'never'
لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ	<i>ála</i>	<i>màari'</i>	'God'
فِكْرٌ	<i>hánkili'</i>	<i>yili'</i>	'idea, thought'
عَادَةٌ	<i>làndá'</i>	<i>námun'</i>	'custom'

Such words, incorporated into Kantè's dictionary and other works, are an important source for the lexical material used in the N'ko register today. Finally, in prose form he outlines the four major dialects (*kánbolon*) of Manding as well their regions, a number of their basic features, and their component varieties. This work is summarized on the following page in Figure 35.

¹²⁴ For Kantè, the numerous Arabic loanwords in the language stem from three major influences: a descendant of the prophet Muhammad's companion Bilāl 'ibn Rabāḥ, Làwálo, who settled in *Màndén*; the arrival of Arab settlers in West Africa in 734; and the Moroccan Almoravids ("Sanhanja Mirabutu") of the 10th century who reportedly sacked the Ghana empire that preceded that of Mali.

Figure 35: Manding dialectology according to Kantè's "The common language of Manden" (Kántè, 2007, pp. 5-7)¹²⁵

History	Place / Speakers				Features
	Guinea	Mali	Côte d'Ivoire	Other	
<p>M</p> <p><i>Màndén'</i> = people in <i>Màndén</i>. <i>Màndenká'</i> = <i>Màndén'</i> in provinces. Distinction lost when province people adopt <i>Màndén kán'</i> and when capital of <i>Màndén</i> moved to provinces from <i>pàñibá'</i>. All became <i>Màndenkan'</i>. <i>Màndenkan'</i> jamana is divided b/w Mali, Guinea and CI</p>	<p>Sigiuri, Kankan, Kouroussa, Farana, Bela, Kerouane prefectures and others: Dinkirai, Dabola, Kisiduu, Macenta</p> <p>Kùrankó, Kòninyá, Wásolon, Jòmá, Tòrón, Sànkaran, Bâte, a Nfáyi, Síbi, Ójéne, Máuú</p>	<p>Kaba, Wasolon</p>	<p>Odienné, Touba, Séguéla</p>	<p>Sierra Leone & Liberia, a little</p>	
<p>B</p> <p><i>Màndenkan'</i> spoken by other <i>sí</i> ('ethnic groups')</p>		<p>Bèredúu, Bùnín, Sikaso, Sàn, Kùcalá, Ségu, Jòyilá.</p>			<p>l → d, initial; d → l, internal; prenasalization; -lù → -w (should be lù)</p>
<p>J</p> <p>Jula meaning = <i>jàwola</i>. (They are the <i>Màndén mirindí'</i> that is abroad, trading amongst other races. But their strength overpowered their hosts and made them <i>Màndén'</i> in religion, customs, language and everything else. Footnote: their strength Manding-nized [<i>lámàndenya</i>] other races in religion and everything else.</p>			<p>Jùlabá', Jùlaningbé', Tágba, Jíminin Jula, Kónka', Gbòtooká', Kòró', Jùla fàranfaran', and all the mixed Jula in Abidjan, Bouaké, the south and the coast.</p>	<p>Ghana: Wànkára', Lìgbí'</p> <p>Burkina Faso: Dáfin, Lòbi Júla, Bòbo Júla, Yárisé (changed Mossis)</p>	
<p>Mko</p> <p><i>Màndén mirindi</i> in West. The glottonym comes from the fact that so many words end in -o. (for instance, -ka 'resident of' is -ko in Mandenko)</p>	<p>Jàgan Túba</p>	<p>Kàsón, Kitá, Báfilaben</p>		<p>Senegal: Casamance</p> <p>Also some in Guinea Bissau and the Gambia</p>	<p>-o suffix</p> <p>d → t (hence the name Sunjata)</p>

¹²⁵ Language abbreviations for the table are as follows: M = Maninka; B = Bamanan; J = Jula; Mko = Mandinka

The second, ‘*The rules of the language: or the rules of N’ko: N’ko’s third book*’ (Kántè, 2009, *Kán’ kùrundu’: wála N’ko kùrundu’: N’ko kàfà sábanan’*), treats general rules of phonological assimilation, phonemic instability, and phonotactics, as well as Manding dialectology more broadly. The heart of this work is a detailed account of twenty-two different phonological isoglosses (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: Manding dialectology according to Kantè’s ‘*The Rules of the Language*’ (2009, pp. 15-24)

	Name	Proper Form	Variant	Variety/Place/Speakers
1	<i>Dádòbòyònkòné</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>y</i>	Manden
2	<i>Dádòkùranen</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>r</i>	Jula, Bamanan
3	<i>Dádòlaaji</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>l</i>	Bamanan
4	<i>Dádòbàdínén</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	Mandinka, Kasonka
5	<i>Dádòdínén</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	
6	<i>Dádòhàfanén</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>h</i>	Mandinka, Kaso, Kuru, Manenka, Jakha
7	<i>Dádòdàronné</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>r</i>	Bamanan, Jula
8	<i>Dádòfòsòné</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>f</i>	Bamanan, Bugunin
9	<i>Dádòsidínén</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>s</i>	Maninka, Dafin
10	<i>Dádòyòronen</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>y</i>	Kuranko
11	<i>Dádòjòsò</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>j</i>	Kuranko
12	<i>Dádòfòdonen</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>d</i>	Bamanan
13	<i>Dájòlòné</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>j</i>	Bamanan
14	<i>Dádòtòkulanén</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>k</i>	Bamanan, Bugunin
15	<i>Dádòcònen</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>c</i>	Bamanan
16	<i>Dádòkònen</i>		Prenasalization	Bamanan
17	<i>Dádòkòrónen</i>		Reverse Tones	Koninya, Mawu, Koya, Maninga
18	<i>Dádògbòlònnén</i>	<i>gb</i>	<i>p, b, w, g, j</i>	
19	<i>Dádòtòyònnén</i>		Intervocalic velar drop; <i>s</i> and <i>j</i> palatalization	Bamanan
20	<i>Dádòtòntinnen</i>		Intervocalic velar adding	Bamanan, southern Manding
21	<i>Dádòmàayanen</i>		Intervocalic velar dropping	Maninkamori
22	<i>Dádòfununen</i>		Adding <i>-o</i>	Maninka, Kasonka, Jakhanke, Kurukan Maninka

Kantè's approach to Manding and orthography development was thus radically distinct from that embraced by UNESCO and state governments for Latin-based orthographies in the 1960s (Donaldson, In Press). Linguist-experts were interested primarily in creating graphemic inventories that could take synchronic snapshots of any Manding dialect¹²⁶. From the perspective of many indigenous language activists, such an approach “seek[s] to calque pronunciation” and neglects “the fact that codification presupposes the development of alternative registers for the language, aside from or parallel to the oral system” (Cerrón-Palomino, 1991 as cited in Sebba, 2011, p. 112). Indeed, official efforts to harmonize Latin-based Manding orthography beginning in 1966 have codified local pronunciations and led to varying conventions at the expense of a unified transnational orthography (Calvet, 1987, p. 220). Kantè, on the other hand, was not interested in capturing whatever anyone realized orally. He both believed in the true forms of the language and wished to unify a “language community” (Silverstein, 1998) through his work. His interest in dialectology therefore went beyond his sincere curiosity about etymology and possible proto-forms—he investigated them because he wished to develop conventions for writing what he held to be one language.

***Kángbe* grammar**

Given this documented variation, how could Kantè's N'ko, as an orthography, be all of Manding at once? Some scholars have suggested that through their so-called “cultural fundamentalism,” N'ko students aggressively take only Maninka to be correct in spelling and pronunciation (Amselle, 1996, p. 825). Indeed, the forms metadiscursively

¹²⁶ The position beyond the scholarship of Gérard Galtier (1980, 2006) is an important exception to this general trend.

prescribed in N’ko documents show evidence of being primarily congruent with Maninka (Davydov, 2008, 2012, Vydrine, 1996, 2010). But Kantè did not clumsily claim that only Maninka was appropriate for writing Manding. Just as he historically rooted the baptismal name of Manding and its script, he also sought to call into being a register that, through his pedagogical language works, would act as a mediating standard between the dialects.

The learning of N’ko-based literacy proceeds linearly in the works of Kantè¹²⁷. In fact, he also developed a series of N’ko degrees that could be earned based off of the mastery of different subject matter (Vydrin, 2012, p. 73, footnote 16). Of these, one of the most important is N’ko grammar, or what Kantè terms *kángbe*:

<p> ƆƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ Ɔ : ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆƆ ƆƆ : ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ Ɔ : ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆ ƆƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ : ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ Ɔ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ ƆƆƆƆ Ɔ ƆƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆ ƆƆƆ </p>	<p> <i>Bàò, kán' sébeli' nàlɔn' gbèlenman kósebe. Lónin' k'à yé, kán' beé n'à sàriya lè. À sàriyá' ò náye' lè kán' sébeli' lón' nòɔya lá. Ó ké', àlú k'ò náfo' kàfá' lù ládan, Kàfá' lù lè kán' gbé lá pérere kà bùdún' béé bó à dó kà kán' lón' nòɔyà tólé! Kan sàriyá' ládanen' ò lù kàfá' lè tóɔ kó "kángbe"</i> </p>	<p> Because mastering a language in writing is very hard, experience has shown that every language has its rules. Grasping a language's rules facilitates knowing its writing. As such, they [experts?] created explanatory books. These books clarify the language properly, remove blemishes from it, and make knowing the language much easier! The name of the book of established rules of a language is “<i>kángbe</i>” (2008a, pp. 4–5) </p>
--	--	---

¹²⁷ The most frequent sequence of books that I encountered during my fieldwork was: 1) *Háte* (Kantè, 2011); 2) *Bála' ní bálá'* (Jaané, 2014); 3) *Kángbe' kùnfólo'* (Kantè, 2008b) (see 1271).

Here Kantè is clearly developing a term for a technical register in which *kángbè* is best glossed as ‘grammar’. Nonetheless, given its recent coinage, it is useful to explore its etymology and what images it may conjure for those newly introduced to it. *Kángbè* is a tonally compact compound noun made up of the noun *kán* ‘language’ and the polysemous adjective *gbé*¹²⁸ which can variably be glossed as ‘white’, ‘clean’, ‘clear’ (Bailleul, 2007). While Kantè makes his vision of grammar explicit in the above quote, his term itself also serves to naturalize it through its contributing lexemes as something that serves to clarify and order a language.

In this light, it is important to see that for N’ko’s founder, the Manding language, for which he was developing an orthography, could never be reduced to a single isolatable phonolexical grammatical code that a linguist elicits from an informant. On one hand, Kantè’s theorization clashes with modern linguistic theories of language; he relies heavily on the idea that a language has a true or correct form. On the other, while this position is antithetical to modern linguistic approaches to grammar, within it is a sophisticated understanding of languages as inevitably composed of distinct sociolinguistic registers. Indeed, just as with the proper name, N’ko, Kantè’s term does not seem to have been chosen randomly. The term *kángbè* figures prominently in the monograph dictionary and grammar of French colonial linguist Delafosse (1929):

En dehors de tous ces dialectes plus ou moins localisés, il s'est constitué une sorte de "mandingue commun", auquel les indigènes ont donné le nom de Kangbe (langue blanche, langue claire, langue facile) et qui est compris et parlé par la grande majorité de la population, en plus du dialecte spécial à chaque région. C'est sous la forme de ce parler commun que se fait l'expansion de langue mandingue. C'est lui principalement qu'adoptent les étrangers et qui tend de plus en plus à devenir langue internationale, si l'on peut dire ainsi, de l'Afrique Occidentale. Il a ceci de particulier qu'il répudie toutes les formes et les locutions

¹²⁸ Normally *jé* in spoken Bamanan.

proprement dialectales et n'use que des expressions ou tout au moins usitées dans le plus grand nombre des dialectes. Un jour viendra, vraisemblablement, où ce Kangbe sera le parler, sinon unique, du moins habituel de toutes les fractions de la langue mandingue ; ce fait se produira d'autant plus rapidement que les facilités de communication et des échanges se multiplient avec la construction de routes de voies ferrées.

These more or less localized dialects aside, a sort of “common Manding” has formed that the indigenous have given the name *kangbe* (white language, clear language, easy language) and which is understood and spoken by the great majority of the population in addition to the special dialect of each region. It is in the form of this common variety that the expansion of the Manding language is happening. It is this one that foreigners typically adopt and is tending to become the international language, if one can put it that way, of West Africa. It has the particularity of rejecting all the truly dialectal forms and locutions and uses only the expressions of or commonly used in the largest number of dialects. One day will come, in a likelihood, where this *Kangbe* will be the sole or at least habitual variety of all the fractions of the Manding language; this fact will produce itself even faster as the means of communication and exchange multiply with the construction of roads and railroads.

(Delafosse, 1929, pp. 22–23)

This description of *kángbe* is confirmed in Sanogo’s (2003) sociolinguistic account of the genesis of Jula as an ethnic category in Burkina Faso. In fact, Sanogo, an ethnic Jula himself, asserts that “[e]thnic Jula continue to designate the linguistic forms that they use at home as *kangbè* or *kangè*” (p. 373).

Kantè’s selection then of the compound noun *kángbe* serves to tie his prescriptive grammar and its standard language register to an already circulating historically named lingua franca register. What counts as *kángbe* may be largely congruent with a particular Manding dialect (the *Mànkamóri* variety of Kankan, see Vydrine, 1996), but it is nowhere near a *Mànkamóri* orthography. It is rather the basis for a written standard language register that Kantè sought to anchor for his envisioned Manding public. In addition, the name allows for the link between N’ko as a language and N’ko as a script to be solidified (see the final speech chain of Figure 33 above). The learning of N’ko as an

orthography entails the mastery of *kángbɛ*. Kantè's script, though, is iconically designed as the Manding language itself and indeed carries the same name: N'ko! Thus, learning *kángbɛ* is not just learning writing conventions; it is also learning the 'clear' form of the language itself. Most importantly, therefore, the *kángbɛ* register serves to bring and hold together the named Manding varieties of Maninka, Bamanan, Jula and Mandinka under a single baptismal hypernym: N'ko.

“An bé kán' dè nòfě, à píyɔpiyɔ”: ‘We are going for the language, in its pure form’

In this section, I explore how Kantè's formulation of N'ko as a single language united by *kángbɛ* circulates amongst students and activists today. To this end, I draw on select ethnographic data collected in classrooms, bookshops and online. Focusing on salient metadiscourse, I investigate two distinct dynamics of N'ko and its *kángbɛ* register. First, I look at how they are linguistically compelling in the classroom for Manding-speakers of diverse dialectal backgrounds. Second, I turn to the ways in which teachers' and activists' talk about talk tie the learning and use of N'ko and its standard language register to notions of logic, discipline and cultivation. Connecting such discourse with wider complaints about African post-colonial governments and citizens, I argue that N'ko's *kángbɛ* register is compelling as a discursive means by which Manding-speakers can hone themselves into the kind of people that so many of them feel their society is desperately lacking.

Learning Letters, Learning *kángbɛ*

In practice, despite the claims investigated in Chapter 5, it is often difficult to separate the learning of N'ko as a script from that of learning the proper way to write and potentially speak Manding writ large. In the N'ko classroom, students right off the bat are

given tools of “metalinguistic awareness” (Cummins, 1978; Nagy & Anderson, 1995). Their education however is not one of being shown how to perform structural linguistic analysis on their own speech. Instead, N’ko lessons introduce them to a metalinguistic framework—diachronically-informed—that socializes them into ways of interpreting Manding sounds, sequences and patterns as dialectal, *kángbɛ*, or foreign.

Proto-phonemes.

First, the very act of learning the grapheme-phoneme pairings of N’ko is itself a step towards learning *kángbɛ*. From the perspective of his own native variety of Maninka, Kantè’s alphabet is regarded as a perfect phonological analysis (Vydrine, 2001b). Kantè, however, did not aim to create an alphabet for Maninka, but rather an entire language. Like any good sociolinguist, he recognized his language as replete with various “sub-codes” (Gumperz, 1962). As such, even at the level of letters, Kantè engaged with etymology and variation across the sprawling Manding speech community. For instance, in a letter to French linguist and Manding specialist Maurice Houis he wrote as follows:

It must be noted that the letter <g> no longer exists in Manding [*mandé*], it is only used by races—assimilated at the height of the Manding empire [*empire mandé*]—that can no longer pronounce the typically Manding [*mandén*] group <gb> and that they replace by <j> or <g>, for example: *jeman* ‘white’, *gon* ‘gorilla’ which in Manding [*mandé*] are *gbeman* and *gbon* (Vydrine, 2001a, p. 138¹²⁹)

Not only did Kantè see phonemes (viz. “letters” in his usage here) as historically constituted but he also delved into accounting for the socio-historical process that gave rise to such a divergence (that is, the conquering of later assimilated races [viz. ethnic groups] during the spread of the Manding/Mali empire).

¹²⁹ My translation from the French.

While not all of Manding phonological variation can be conveniently or easily captured within theorized proto-phonemes or *diaphonemes* (Weinreich, 1954; see Galtier, 1980 for an attempt), today, students of N’ko typically embrace and use Kantè’s grapheme ▽ <gb> in writing, even when in their own native variety one finds /g/, /j/ or /w/ in its place¹³⁰. A few examples using Bamanan illustrate this dynamic below in Figure 40.

Figure 37: Application of *kángbe* at the phonemic level to Bamanan lexemes

Bamanan example	N’ko <i>kángbe</i> form	Transliteration	Gloss
<i>jé</i>	▯▽	<i>gbé</i>	'white'
<i>gèlen</i>	▯▽▯▽	<i>gbèlen</i>	'hard'
<i>wòló</i>	▯▽▯▽	<i>gbòló</i>	'skin'

Regardless, the N’ko alphabet is itself a codification of canonical Manding phonemes. I have witnessed this regularly in N’ko classrooms, but one of the most evocative instances of this dynamic took place during the same lesson that we visited in Chapter 5. During this session, the teacher, Sékù Jàkité, lectured at length about the various phonemes of Manding. According to him, all of the necessary Manding sound-categories are captured in the letters of N’ko. This did not mean that speakers of Manding do not make or use other sounds. He picked out /v/ and /z/, two sounds stemming in large part from French loanwords. Vydrin (2016, p. 11, my translation) analyzes them in Bamanan as follows:

z is a phoneme borrowed from French ; French /z/ > Bamanan /z/. *zùlùyé* ‘July’ [< *juillet*], *zańdármú* ‘police officer’ [< *gendarme*]. In addition, *z* optionally appears as a variant of *ns*: *zòn* ~ *nsòn* ‘thief’, *nsíirin* ~ *zíirin* ~ *nzíirin* ‘tale’

¹³⁰ See Creissels (2004) for a discussion of the voiced velar (g), labio-velar stops and related sounds today (viz. *w*, *gw*, *kw*, *gb*, *kp*) in Manding.

v is an extremely marginal phoneme that only appears in non-adapted borrowings: *véri* ‘glass’ [< *verre*], *vítri* ‘pane’ [< *vitre*], etc. Speakers who do not master French regularly replace it with *w*

Sékù was more blunt regarding the two phonemes though he spoke in terms of letters:

“*Án ná kán’ màkó’ té ù lá*”—our language doesn’t need them (770). Nonetheless, given that “we” might occasionally want them for writing other languages, he introduced the N’ko convention of adding superposed dots to consonants and vowels to represent the sounds or letters of other languages (e.g., $\Upsilon\text{t}\text{A}\text{P}$ *véri*).

While /*v*/ and /*z*/ are clearly marginal phonemes emerging from French, Sékù also addressed the case of a nascent Bamanan phoneme, /*ʃ*/ that likely emerges not from a foreign source, but from an in-progress sound change (more precisely, a phonemic split). Today, one can identify a number of minimal pairs between /*s*/ and /*ʃ*/ in Bamanan, but there are also cases of [ʃ] that are contextual realizations of /*s*/. Again, according to Vydrin (2016, p. 11):

/*ʃ*/ is a nascent phoneme, ignored in official [Latin-based] orthography (where it is assimilated with /*s*/): /*ʃ*ɔ/ ‘haricot’, /*ʃ*ɛ/ ‘poulet’, /*ʃ*ù/ ‘chou’. In the dialects (especially to the East), /*s*/ is regularly realized as [ʃ] when preceding *u*, *i* and often *o*, *ɔ*. Since standard Bamanan is not sealed off from local dialects, the existence of palatalized /*s*/ [that is, [ʃ]] weakens the opposition between /*s*/ and /*ʃ*/

Sékù, again, concluded in more definitive terms: “*Nìn té N’ko lá*”—this isn’t in N’ko.

While seemingly harsh, such a statement usefully demonstrates how the very learning of N’ko is the first-step in both introducing students to etymology and sound-change, and opening the door to a disciplining of their written language into *kángbɛ*. N’ko students, for instance, do not reject the existence of Vydrin’s examples, but they recognize them as dialectal deviations (1a-b) or loanwords (1c) as demonstrated below:

(10) a. β < *sòsɔ* ‘beans’

- b. *fê* < *sîsɛ* ‘chicken’
 c. *fû* < Fr. *chou* ‘cabbage’

Note that in the Bamanan examples, the etymologies are not blind folk accounts. Instead, they are viable linguistic reconstructions. The Bamanan forms of (1a-b) therefore are not rejected simply because they are Bamanan, but rather because they are transparently grasped as instances of linguistic change from forms that still predominate in Maninka and Jula today.

Put briefly, Sékù Jàkité’s introductory lesson about letters and sounds demonstrates the ways in which learning N’ko is inseparable from learning Manding (that is, a standard register of it). Of course, no speaker of a Manding variety needs to learn to speak Manding *per se*. The N’ko classroom’s function in this sense is not to teach people how to speak Manding varieties, but rather how to speak a specific register: *kángbɛ*. Critically, this, in turn, introduces students to a metalinguistic framework that allows them to explicitly understand their own variety of Bamanan, Jula or Maninka as but component varieties of one single language—N’ko.

Logographic unity.

In addition to the proto-phonemic¹³¹ ∇ <gb>, Kantè also developed at least one logographic convention which serves as another means for his orthography to transcend the sociological limitations of a purely phonemic orthography. This convention revolves around the notation of intervocalic velars. As Vydrin (2016a, p. 11) notes regarding Bamanan, “In the intervocalic position, velar phonemes are not contrastive: [-g-], [-k-], [-

¹³¹ The question of whether /gb/ is in fact a phoneme of proto-Manding is still an open one. My point is to suggest that the ∇ is understood proto-phonemically by some users. /gb/ is of course a full-fledged phoneme in certain Manding varieties such as Guinean Maninka and vehicular Jula of Côte d’Ivoire.

γ-], [-x-] and even a zero consonant, -ø-, are allophones of a single phoneme.” To represent this, Latin-based orthographies vary widely in their preferred grapheme. One may often choose freely between <g>, <k> or simply dropping the intervocalic velar (e.g., *tága, táka* vs. *táa* ‘go’). In N’ko, however, Kantè calls for the use of a single graphemic representation that allows for multiple dialectal realizations to be grouped logographically under one convention (Kántè, 2011, p. 15). This phenomenon is outlined in Figure 36.

Figure 36: Intervocalic velar representation in N’ko orthography

N’ko Graphic Representation	Latin Transliteration	Possible Realizations
̀̀b	<i>táa</i>	<i>táa, táka, tága, táxa, táya</i>

While this sort of convention may not seem to be very unique or distinct from the *de facto* and proposed orthographic standard of always marking intervocalic velars with *g* in Malian Bamanan (see most recently Vydrin & Konta, 2014, p. 24), it circulates as an important feature of N’ko’s pan-Manding iconicity. Take for instance this excerpt from an N’ko website that echoes similar comments that I have encountered in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and the United States regarding this logographic convention:

When Mandens from different sub-groups talk to each other, it is common practice for them to switch, consciously or sub-consciously, from one's own dialect to a conventional dialect known as N’ko or Kangbe (the clear language). This is even true, sometimes, during conversations between the Bamanans of Mali, the Maninka-Moris of Guinea, and the Maninkos of Gambia or Senegal although pronunciations are practically the same. As an example, the word “Name” in Bamanan is “Toko” and in Maninka it is “Toh”. In written communications each will write it as Tô (̀̀b) in N’Ko, and yet read and pronounce it differently
 (“N’ko for Beginners: Introduction,” n.d.)

Here we see that one of the central appeals of Kantè's convention is how it allows for the N'ko orthography to ostensibly embrace cross-dialectal variation without neutralizing it or overtly regarding certain dialects as non-standard. Phonemic orthography is seemingly transcended in a way that allows for pan-Manding unity all while retaining the ability to locate yourself geographically through dialectal realization.

A shallow orthography.

Finally, learning the N'ko script is a lesson in Manding phonology. This stems in part from the fact that it is, in many ways, a more “shallow” (Klima, 1972) orthography than any of the official Latin-based ones. In Figure 38 I outline four different linguistic phenomena of Manding, which are typically marked by <n> in Latin-based orthographies.

Figure 37: Phenomena represented by <n> in Latin-based Manding orthography versus N'ko

Phenomenon	Latin	N'ko
Syllabic Nasal Phoneme	n	᠋
Nasalization	n	.
Allophonic Variation		
• /l/ following a nasal	n	᠋
• /y/ following a nasal	ny	᠋
Palatal Nasal Phoneme	ny / ɲ ¹³²	᠋

¹³² In general, the official orthographies promote the use of <ɲ> for the palatal nasal consonant but notable authors, such Dumestre (2011), eschew this convention in favor of the digraph <ny>.

As demonstrated in the table, in the case of N’ko, each one of these phenomena is represented by a distinct grapheme or diacritic, thereby reducing *orthographic depth* (Frost & Katz, 1992) where one convention is involved in representing multiple features of a language. N’ko is thus semiotically iconic as an alphabet because it appears to be a diagram of Manding itself through its mapping of the language’s sound system. This interpretation is critically solidified by Kantè’s distinct *kánmaseere* diacritics for marking the linguistic phenomena of vowel length, nasalization and most critically tone (see Chapter 5). Coupling these markings with his unique and (seemingly proto-)phonemic (and logographic) alphabet, Kantè laid the groundwork for a perfect iconic link; N’ko is not just a diagram of Manding, it *is* Manding.

In sum, studying N’ko as script is itself a first step in learning N’ko as a proper name synonymous with Manding. Moreover, the very act of learning to read and write Manding through the N’ko alphabet introduces students to the concept of *kángbɛ* or ‘clear language’—a standard language register meant to serve and unite Manding speakers regardless of their own native variety. By learning the letters and diacritics of N’ko, students take their first step towards not only developing synchronic metalinguistic awareness, but also, in the case of ▽ /gb/, a diachronic phonemic lens for understanding the interrelations and history between Manding varieties. This combined with Kantè’s logographic or “diaphonemic” (Weinreich, 1954) convention for marking non-contrastive intervocalic velars allows for the orthography to be powerfully perceived as capable of inclusively housing—without necessarily standardizing—distinct varieties of Manding. As a cross-dialectal photograph of Manding phonology, the study of N’ko is simply the study of the clear form of the Manding language itself: *kángbɛ*.

"Kán yèrè logique nǎfè": 'In pursuit of the language's true logic'

Being socialized into the *kángbɛ* register, of course, also operates at the higher linguistic level of words. N'ko teachers today make compelling appeals to notions of what Cameron (1995) might call Manding “verbal hygiene”, which serve to both harness and solidify a positive metapragmatic stereotype for the *kángbɛ* register.

Today, this most often proceeds through the tacit or overt idiom of “logic¹³³”. Two online comments that I received are telling in this regard. In late 2015, I published an esoteric blog post on the website Speech Events (www.speechevents.wordpress.com). Investigating the divergences between Bamanan and Jula progressive constructions, I ultimately concluded that the two varieties diverge and that the difference is primarily one of linguistic tone. A few months later in May of 2016, the post received two online comments from a previously unknown reader named “Aminata”.

Her first post weighed in on my use of the term Manding as a convenient hypernym to refer to Bamanan and Jula etc. See it below in Figure 38. Aminata objected to the use of Manding for multiple reasons. It is an inaccurate adaptation, stemming from French, of the indigenous term “Manden” (viz. *Màndén*) that has been “stucked” [sic], or unjustly applied for too long. Moreover, it is partially congruent with another word in French, *dingue*, meaning ‘crazy’.

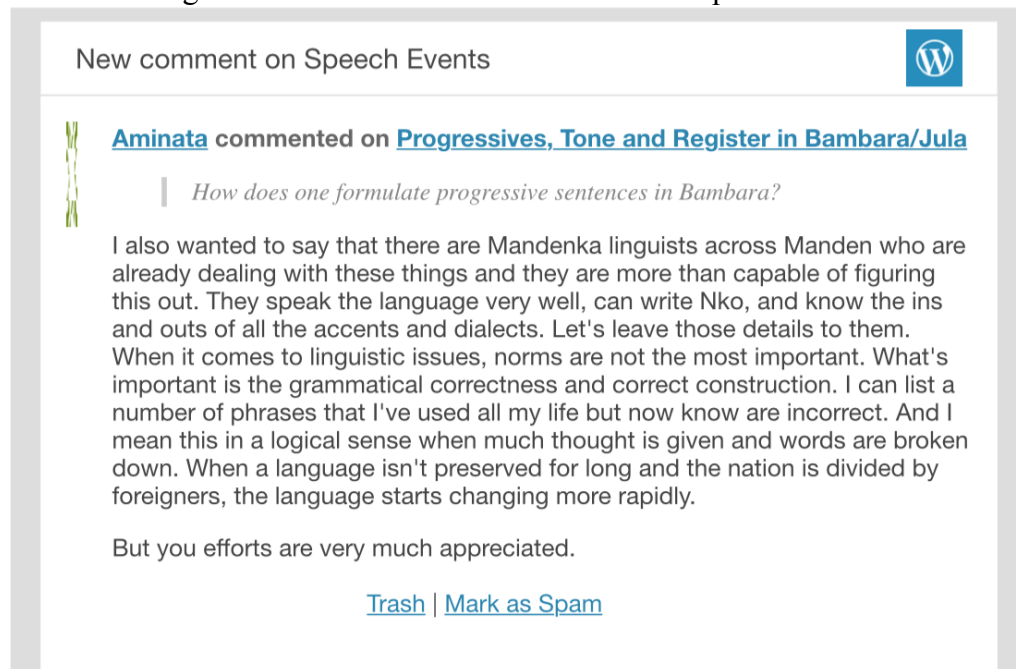
¹³³ The source of this is traceable to the original writings of Sulemaana Kantè. For instance, in his Manding dialectology treatise, “The Language’s Rules: or the Rules of N’ko” (2009, p. 26), he dedicates a series of pages to what he calls “public shortcomings” where in a table of 51 common expressions he lays out what he labels as “improper speech” (*fɔkojuu*) alongside what he prescribes as their “proper speech” (*fɔkojiman*) equivalent. It is clear then that N’ko’s inventor knows how people speak in daily life, but he simply views these norms as flawed and not appropriate for this “age of writing” (p. 26).

Figure 38: Aminata's first comment on Speech Events



Even more telling, however, was her second comment, seen below in Figure 39.

Figure 39: Aminata's second comment on Speech Events



Here Aminata paints a more explicit picture. While my question was perhaps worthwhile, she suggests that it was not something appropriate for me—a White Westerner—to pursue, given that there are many "Mandenka" (*Màndenká* 'Manding' [lit.

'people of *Màndén*]) linguists that can investigate these issues without any need for assistance from an outsider. Given her previous comment about the French-imposed label, "*mandingue*", this second posting establishes a potential parallelism between myself, French colonialists and our respective activities. What I want to focus on, however, are her statements regarding Manding language variation today. First, from her perspective, Manding is one language: "they speak *the* language very well" (my emphasis), she says using the deictic definite article. Second, she rejects my investigation's focus on typical usage (what she calls "norms") in lingua franca Jula and Bamanan. For her, what is truly important is not the descriptive study of linguistic forms, but rather working to establish "grammatical correctness" in a "logical sense". She concludes by painting a picture of foreigners dividing a people and thereby provoking language change. This proposition both offers an account of why Manding varies today and implicitly establishes another parallelism between my own endeavor and that of French or Western colonialism. While I am not personally engaged in "dividing" the [Manding] nation, I am, in a sense, doing linguistic work that descriptively divides various forms of the language from one another. For the purposes of this dissertation, I would like to leave aside N'ko's role as a linguistic unifier of the Manding nation and instead focus solely on specifically how the *kángbɛ* register of N'ko is established as a more "logical" form of Manding. Let us explore this point by heading back to Bamako.

On a Tuesday in July 2016, I headed to a regularly scheduled one-hour adult class as part of my regular observation schedule at an association most commonly known by its acronym, N.Fa.Ya, which stands for *N'kó' ní Fàsokán nù Yiriwa*—'The Strengthening of N'ko and Fatherland Languages'. Hopping in a cab, the driver and I took the circuitous

route to the recently constructed *troisième pont* or ‘third bridge’, that, while out of the way, would allow us to avoid downtown’s standstill traffic that at midday becomes near lethal without air-conditioning. Exiting at the end of the *goudron* (Fr. ‘paved road’), I approached the group’s impressive facility on foot. Upon my entrance, various prints, emblazoned across the concrete walls using N’ko stencils, welcomed me (*i ni séne* ‘welcome’), indicated departments (*lásinda* ‘management’) and provided inspiration (*júu’ká sà* ‘May enemies perish’) (885).

Figure 40: N.Fa.Ya's courtyard with view from left to right of radio station, sewing training center and *Wànkáran' Kàrantá* (882)



As per usual, I found a small group of N.Fa.Ya officers, staff and members gathered underneath the impressively tall convex metal hangar that extended back behind them, covering the association’s two open-air classrooms. Passing the building that houses the management office, the bookstore and a poultry incubator, I greeted them and sat to chat for a bit while they waited for their communal meal to emerge from the attached residential courtyard next door. Already full from a plate of rice at home, I

passed on the food and—as was typical of students who arrived early—headed to the classroom known as *Wànkáran' Kàrantá*¹³⁴ ('the Wànkáran school'); a name derived from the ethnic group¹³⁵ from which the *Màndén* people are reported to have descended in the works of Kantè (2003) and other N'ko scholars (e.g., Kàba, 2003).

Inside, there were four rows of half-rickety wooden bench-desk combos that students typically occupied according to their progress with the first three primer books. *Bágabaga* ('termites') worked diligently in the thatch *kàratá* divider that separated our classroom from the adjacent one typically used for an afternoon sewing class. Students slowly filled in as I sat at my desk working on a translation of one of Kantè's texts. The classroom was soon abuzz with happy greetings and exchanges. One man, a journalist of around 40 or 50 with a Manding patronym, conversed fluently in Dogon with a woman of around 20 after he discovered her to be Dogon. Another man, a Fulani, took a seat next to me after warmly saying hello to everyone. His reading glasses—held together by an elastic band in the back and a strip of *pagne* cloth across the bridge—pressed tightly against his forehead as he greeted and attempted to exchange with me in Fulani (785). Despite my West African *nom de guerre* being Fulani (Ádama Jáló¹³⁶), I was able to only muster a word or two in response as he tried to teach me. We both laughed.

“*Áw ní j'ó'!*”, the instructor, Màhamúud Sánkare, greeted us. The group of not more than ten students diligently took out their respective books and flipped to wherever

¹³⁴ Presumably, mistakenly spelled *Wànkáran' Kàrantá* on a wall inside of it.

¹³⁵ This name and related forms appear in medieval Arabic chronicles. See Massing (2000) for a review of the historical debate regarding the name and people behind the name *Wànkára* and its variants.

¹³⁶ In a common practice, this name was bestowed upon me by my first West African host-family during the three-month training phase of my Peace Corps service outside of Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso.

they individually left off from the last time. Sánkare, a prolific N'ko author and the head of N.Fa.Ya, generally proceeds from the front to the back of the class, row-by-row or student-by-student as need be depending on their progress. This time, the beginners, for instance, were working through the alphabet itself with *Háte* (Kántè, 2011). Another row was focusing on tone through the book, *Bála' ní Bálá'* (Jàané, 2014). Sánkare, however, began with the front row, occupied by three men working on the parts of the speech (*kúmaden' súuya'*) of Manding as elaborated in Kantè's grammar book, *N'kó' Kángbe' Kúnfólo'* (Kántè, 2008b). Their lesson focused in particular on “*tóonòdɔbila*” (ᠲᠣᠨᠣᠳᠣᠪᠢᠯᠠ) which Màmamúud readily glossed in French as ‘(personal) pronouns’.

Figure 41: Màmamúud Sánkare leads a lesson in N.Fa.Ya's *Wànkáran' Kàrantá* (964)



Drawing on their grammar book, the teacher presented pronouns as being sortable by singularity/plurality (*kèlenyá* ‘singular’ and *jàmayá* ‘plural’) and by person (*kúmala* ‘first person’, *kúmanɔɔn* ‘second person’ and *gbéde* ‘third person’). He did not hesitate to partially explain the terms using French for metalinguistic glosses. Following the book,

Màhamúud then introduced the different paradigms of Manding pronouns that exist for Maninka, Jula and Bamanan as distinct dialects. None of them, however, was selected or upheld as “correct” (*núman*); rather, they were all explained as “broken” (*tíñenen*) forms of *kángbɛ* (785; 1290). The students remained attentive. To make his case, Màhamúud appealed to the plural marker <lu> (ũŋ)¹³⁷, a suffix which, he argued, one should simply be able to “attach” (*nórcɔ*) to singular nouns. “That’s coherent” (*Àle tilennen*) or “logical” (*sàriyama*), he posited.

This argument relied not only on the students’ familiarity with the Maninka form (*lu* PL) but also their implicit recognition of it as a fuller (as it were) and thereby older form from which Bamanan had deviated. In the moment, no students spoke up in this regard, but Màhamúud addressed the point directly nonetheless. Specifically, he drew on the example of pluralizing the word *cě* ‘man’. Today the Bamanan plural marker is the suffix¹³⁸ /-ù/ (though it is represented orthographically as a word final <w>):

- (11) <*cě-w*> ‘men’
/cě-ù/
man-PL

Logically however, “if you respected the rules” (*n’i táara ní sàriyá’yé*) one would use the form *lù*:

- (12) *cě lù* ‘men’
man PL

¹³⁷ Strictly speaking, the plural suffix *lu* does not carry its own lexical tone (V. Vydrin, personal communication, May 11, 2017).

¹³⁸ Actually, in some regards it is arguably an intermediate form or *clitic* that exists between freestanding morphemes and bound morphemes.

Today, this proposed etymology seems evident in Bamanan's emphatic form of the third person plural *òlú*, as well as in Jula's variability between *ánw* and *ánnù*, the emphatic form of the third person plural. Regardless, the “fuller” form circulates as implicit common knowledge thanks to Manding speakers from Maninka areas as well as popular songs and oratorical registers that I regularly encountered in Bamako. One student, a *tantie* (lit. ‘auntie’)-like figure, for instance, spoke up at the end of the lesson and stated that *cěw* was simply a faster version of *cě lù*. Màmamúud thus did not need to explain the etymological process which has led to *lù* being the Maninka equivalent of Bamanan *-w* today; he simply metapragmatically commented on one form as being in line with logic or the “rules” (*sàriyá*).

Màmamúud nonetheless conceded that in Bamako people often do not understand things unless they are Bamanan. Putting himself in that category, he acknowledged that “we” will say that certain forms are “*màninka girin*” (‘heavy Maninka’) (785). Ultimately, however, the language (*kán*) they all speak is “*màninkakán*”. Switching to French, he elaborated, “*C’est la langue mandingue*,” (‘It’s the Manding language’) before adding that the language came from “there” (viz. Mándén) to “here” (viz. Bamako). In Bamako today, he carried on, people all come with their language. For some it is influenced by “Soninke” (*Màrakakán*), the language of another major ethnic group in Mali. For others it is influenced by something else. “*À bé tilen cógo di?*” he asked – how can this be correct or, more literally, straight? Màmamúud supported his implicit argument for written standards with international examples. Other languages are not spoken and written in the same way; take, for instance, the French of Paris and that of Marseille.

Moreover, he continued on, even the historic Bamanan high form emanating from the pre-colonial kingdom and modern-day town of Ségou is not one thing.

His takeaway for the students therefore was that they are going “after the language’s true logic” (*kán yère logique nǎfê*). Applying this reasoning to the various dialectal forms of plural pronouns that Kantè listed as well as his own knowledge of Bamanan, Mâhamúud came to the conclusion that the class’s own third person plural (*òlú*) and the second person plural emphatic (*ánw*) were not sound. The presumed reasoning behind these points, outlined in Figure 42, is that neither form was a straightforward derivation from the base singular pronouns (*ń, í* and *à*) as seen above.

Figure 42: Mâhamúud Sánkare’s analysis of Bamanan pronouns

		Bamanan form	<i>Kángbè</i> form	Comment
1	Third Person Plural Emphatic; 'they'	<i>òlú</i>	<i>àlú</i>	<i>ò</i> diverges from the 3SG base form <i>à</i>
2	First Person Plural Emphatic; 'we'	<i>ánw</i>	<i>ánnù</i>	<i>w</i> is the truncated form of the pluralizer <i>lù/nù</i>

Sánkare's lesson was far from the only time that myself or others in N’ko circles engaged in a discussion of pronouns. Also in 2016, I interviewed author and bookshop owner Úsman Kùlúbàli (UK in the transcripts that follow) who is known for his fiery rhetoric and books about the history of anti-Black racism and slavery such as *Ḡḡḡḡ ḡḡḡḡ* (*Gbòré dǎfǎ*, 'History of Gorée Island', 2008) and *ḡḡḡḡ ḡḡ ḡḡ ḡḡ* (*Í ná' lákà*, 'Open your eyes', n.d.). One of the striking features of his writings is the use of a particular pronoun form, *ḡḡḡḡḡḡ* (*nnelu* 'we'), which I had never seen in print or encountered orally before reading one of his books. When I asked him about the usage, he told me that it is "Màndenkó" and reasoned about it as follows (A82):

	Transcript	Translation
1256 UK	<i>né nàna kà nà uh fɛn' kàlan kángbɛ tùmá' mín' ná</i>	When I eventually studied <i>Kangbɛ</i>
1257	<i>Kàramɔɔ Sulemaana nàna tógɔnɔɔbilaw lè fɔ</i>	Karamɔɔ Sulemaana stated the pronouns
1258	<i>à nàna tógɔnɔɔbila' fɔ</i>	He said the pronouns
1259	<i>à kó bámanan, màninká, màndenkó</i>	He said Bamanan, Maninka, Mandenko
1260	<i>jùlá, ù bée jèlen dòn tógɔnɔɔbilaw lá</i>	Jula, they all come together around pronouns
1261	<i>nká tógɔnɔɔbila-lakelenya i ben'à yé k'à fɔ</i>	but with singular pronouns you'll see that
1262	<i>ù bé</i>	they
1263	<i>ù bée bé n' fɔ</i>	they all say "n"
1264	<i>ù bée bé í fɔ</i>	they all say "i"
1265	<i>ù bé</i>	they
1266	<i>uh à fɔ</i>	say "à"
[...] ¹³⁹		[...]
1285	<i>à nàna sé</i>	When he [Sulemaana] came to
1286	<i>jàmayá mà mínke</i>	the plurals
1287	<i>sìgidáw ká tógɔnɔɔbila' bé b'ó j'ógɔn mà</i>	the [different] groups' pronouns are distinct from one another
1288	<i>kà bèn ù ká sìgiy'óɔ' mà</i>	depending on their zone
[...] ¹⁴⁰		[...]
1318	<i>án bée bé jè kélenya' tá lá. N'à kéra jàmayá' yé</i>	We all come together around the singular. When it becomes plural
1319	<i>Màndenko b'à tá fɔ dàma</i>	The Mandenko say it their way
1320	<i>Bámanan b'à tá fɔ à dàma</i>	The Bamanan say it their way
1321	<i>Màninka b'à tá fɔ à dàma</i>	The Maninka say it their way
1322	<i>Kòni n'í nàna s'ì k'à láje</i>	But if you sit and look at it
1323	<i>n'í y'à tà s'ísàn</i>	If you take
1324	<i>kélenya' tá mà</i>	the singular ones now
1325	<i>ù má fára ò lá féwu</i>	They aren't divided at all

¹³⁹ Skipped his detailed explanatory lines for clarity.

¹⁴⁰ Skipped his detailed explanatory lines for clarity.

Kúlùbáli's understanding of Manding pronouns is an echo of Kantè's first grammar book (2008b, p. 9). First, he observes that the singular pronouns of Manding are identical across Bamanan, Maninka and Jula: *ń, í, à*. Second—though absent from the transcript above—each one of these also has an emphatic counterpart that is derived from the focalization marker *lè/nè*: *ńne, íle* and *àle*, respectively. In terms of plurals though, their forms vary widely across the dialects.

Kantè's (2008b, p. 9) account of the different pronouns paradigms is outlined below in Figure 43:

Figure 43: Manding pronouns according to Kantè¹⁴¹ (2008b, p. 9)

	Singular			Plural	
	Non-emphatic	Emphatic		Non-emphatic	Emphatic
First Person	<i>ń</i>	<i>ńne'</i>	M	<i>án'</i> <i>ń</i>	<i>ánnù</i> <i>ńnù</i>
			B	<i>án'</i> <i>ń</i>	<i>ánù</i> <i>ńnù</i>
			J	<i>án'</i> <i>ń</i>	<i>ánrù</i> <i>ńnù</i>
Second Person	<i>í'</i>	<i>íle'</i>	M	<i>álu</i> <i>áyí</i> <i>ílu</i>	<i>álu'</i> <i>áyí'</i> <i>ílu'</i>
			B	<i>áu</i> <i>á</i>	<i>áu'</i> <i>á'</i>
			J	<i>áru</i>	<i>áru'</i>
Third Person	<i>à</i>	<i>àle'</i>	M	<i>àlú</i> <i>àlu</i> <i>àyi</i>	<i>àlú'</i> <i>àyi'</i>
			B	<i>àú</i> <i>àu</i>	<i>àú'</i>
			J	<i>àru</i> <i>áru</i> <i>áyí</i>	<i>àrú'</i>

¹⁴¹ M = Maninka; B = Bamanan; J = Jula

Missing from Kantè's work however are the Mandinka or "Mandenko" forms. For

Kùlùbáli, however, they were key:

		Transcript	Translation
1349	UK	<i>n'í kó í b'à à à míri tígitigiya bólo' mà</i>	if you think about it logically
1350		<i>í bèn'à yé k'à fǝ màndenkó' ká</i>	you will see that the Mandenko's
1351		<i>tógɔnrɔbila'</i>	pronoun [system]
1352		<i>ò cé' ká nì</i>	is better looking
1353		<i>ò bènén dòn tujá' mà ká tème bámanan' ní mànká' [tá] kàn</i>	it agrees with truth more than those of the Bamanan and Maninka
1354		<i>cógo' jùmen?</i>	How so?

He methodically laid out the emphatic and plural pronoun paradigms of Maninka,

Bamanan and Jula before moving on:

		Transcript	Translation
1394	UK	<i>Mais màndenkó' kó</i>	But Mandenko say
1395		<i>kó nê</i>	<i>nê</i>
1396		<i>íle</i>	<i>íle</i>
1397		<i>àle</i>	<i>àle</i>
1398		<i>̀̀nelu</i>	<i>̀̀nelu</i>
1399		<i>ílù</i>	<i>ílù</i>
1400		<i>àlu</i>	<i>àlu</i>

This seemingly perfect system of derived forms is summarized below in Figure 44:

Figure 44: "Mandenko" pronouns according to Úsman Kùlùbàli in an interview

	Singular	Singular Emphatic	Plural	Plural Emphatic
		(+ <i>lè/nè</i>)		(+ <i>lù/nù</i>)
First person	<i>ń</i>	<i>ń-ne</i>	<i>ń</i>	<i>ń-ne-lu</i>
Second person	<i>í</i>	<i>í-le</i>		<i>í-lù</i>
Third person	<i>à</i>	<i>à-lé</i>		<i>à-lú</i>

Seizing on the role of *lù* as the pluralizer (*jàmayalán*), he concluded as follows about the

"Mandenko" system and his decision to use the form *nnelu*:

	Transcript	Translation
1429 UK	<i>ò bènne dòn</i>	That is more proper
1430	<i>né bólo</i>	in my mind
1431	<i>ká tème màninká' tá kàn</i>	than that of the Maninka
1432	<i>kà tème ń yèrè, bámanan tógò tá fène kàn, bávò</i>	than the form[s] of my own Bamanan, because
1433	<i>bávò án bé kánbolon' dè nòfě [sic¹⁴²], án bé kán' dè nòfě, à píyɔpíyɔ'</i>	we are[n't] going for dialects, we are going for the language, in its pure form
1434	<i>án té kánbolon' nòfě</i>	We aren't going for dialects
1435 CD	<i>á mais</i>	but
1436	<i>ò lá ònhɔn</i>	so, yeah
1437 UK	<i>í y'à fàamu?</i>	You understand?
1438 CD	<i>ón mais, mais kà fénke</i>	yeah, but whatchamacallit
1439 UK	<i>ò dè kòsòn, né ká kán' ná</i>	For that reason, in my speech
1440 CD	<i>ón</i>	uh-huh
1441 UK	<i>ń ká sébeli' lù lá</i>	in my writings
1442 CD	<i>ón</i>	yeah
1443 UK	<i>ní né bé</i>	if I

¹⁴² Here UK clearly misspeaks, saying "we are going for dialects" instead of "we are not going for dialects".

1444	<i>kúmala</i>	pronounce a second person
1445	<i>tógɔnɔɔɔbali-tugumbali</i>	emphatic plural pronoun
1446	<i>-jamaya' fɔ</i>	
1447	<i>ń b'à fɔ kó "ánnù"</i>	I say "ánnù"
1448	<i>mais fɛn' cáman lá ń b'à fɔ kó "̀nnelu"</i>	but in many instances I say "̀nnelu"

As he makes clear in lines 1429-1434, he, along with others, is not interested in writing one single dialect Manding. They are working in pursuit of the language (*kán*)—in its “pure” (*piyɔpiyɔ*) form—not a dialect (*kánbolon*).

Sánkare’s lesson and Úsman Kúlúbáli’s reasoning about pronouns suggests that the concept of *kángbe* (‘grammar’ lit. ‘clear language’)—predicated on an ideal of logic and cleanliness—is explicitly not meant to be congruent with any one dialect (*kánbolon*). Rather, regardless of one’s own native variety of Manding, the language’s *kángbe* register must be cultivated and mastered through study, dedication, and perhaps most importantly sound reasoning.

Good Speech, Good Citizenship

Kángbe is nonetheless cultivated as a denotationally and etymologically logical register for reasons that go beyond compelling linguistic analysis. It is the discursive means by which N’ko students can hone themselves into the kinds of savvy, hard-working and just citizens they aspire to be—and that they believe their countries desperately lack.

Kólɔn, báara, télen.

N’ko activists actively cultivate an ethos of personhood that is conveniently captured by a widely invoked *hendiatris*¹⁴³ that circulates in their circles today: *kà kólɔn, kà báara, kà télen* ('to be savvy', 'to work', 'to be just', respectively). This tripartite slogan is canonically attributed to the foundation of *Màndén*. See for instance the following typeset excerpt of a speech reproduced in an N’ko instructional textbook (Màle, n.d., p. 37):

<p> 𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 , 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 , 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 . 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 ? 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 ? 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎𞤎 : 𞤎𞤎𞤎 ? 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 𞤎𞤎 </p>	<p> <i>Án Bénba Màan Sònjada</i> <i>Kétà kà mén'fɔ</i> <i>Kùrukanfúka 'gbàrà' fê</i> <i>káabi 1236, Màan</i> <i>Sònjáda k'à yìda kó:</i> <i>"dákun' báda sé' báara'</i> <i>kó' mén' mà nìn, bá', án</i> <i>bée yé mén' jínin ná' dúna</i> <i>dótée' dɔ́, ò lè méndiya',</i> <i>bálo jínma' n'à fádiyabɔ</i> <i>jínma' ní jànkáro' lù bási</i> <i>díman' dí. Ò dòn sí té</i> <i>sòdɔn báara sèbemá' kó,</i> <i>kàyii kòdɔmán' dòn,</i> <i>Màndén sìikán' báju' yé</i> <i>dáɲa' sàbá' nìn nè dí: kà</i> <i>kólɔn, kà báara, kà télen.</i> <i>Kònin ònhón! Ní kólɔn' ní</i> <i>kùsanyá' té m̀ò' mén' ná,</i> <i>ò séto báara jínma' ké lá</i> <i>dì, nàfa dí sòdɔn mén' ná?</i> <i>Ní mén' dòn télenen té,</i> <i>m̀òyá' kó' lù yé búnbun</i> <i>n'ò mà dì? Ní m̀òyá' kó'</i> <i>lù t'sé búnbun ná mén'</i> <i>mà, ò bálo kún' ké dá mùn</i> <i>dí? Nba! Níninkalí' nìn nù</i> <i>bée jèbí' y'à yìda lá lè, kó</i> <i>fó án bée y'àn d̀j̀à lè</i> </p>	<p> In 1236 at the Kùrukanfúka assembly our ancestor Màan Sònjada Kétà [viz. Sunjata Keíta] attested that "Our obligation [now] is work, because that which we are all seeking life—happiness [méndiya], proper nourishment, clothes, and treatment of ailments—none of them can be had without hard work. Since long ago, Màndén's foundational slogan [sìikán' báju] are the following three words: know-how, work, justice [kà kólɔn, kà báara, kà télen]. Indeed! If someone is not savvy and capable, how will they accomplish the kind of work that is beneficial? If someone isn't just, how will civility [m̀òyá] spread to them? If someone cannot be reached by the affairs of human decency [m̀òyá' </p>
--	---	---

¹⁴³ E.g., “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*” (Fr.), or the Incan *Ama suwa, ama llulla, ama qilla* etc.

ƳƼǾɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ! ɔɔ ɔɔ : ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ : ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ : ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ
 ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ ɔɔ

*díyagbòyá' lá kà kólón'
 náninin, kà báará'
 sèbemá' ké kùsanyá' lá,
 k'án télen kó bée dó yó
 bìjé'. Ò dó, án báda tón'
 sù jáfóyá' lá, kà bée
 kádama kùseyá' ní báara'
 lá. An jèdè' kánà fáwó*

*kó], what is the point of
 them living? Well! The
 answer to all of these
 questions show that we all
 must necessarily strive to
 obtain know-how, to work
 hard and proficiently, and
 to be tried and true in all
 matters. As such, we have
 outlawed languishment
 and require dedication
 [kùseyá] and work from
 all. We mustn't whither*

(Màle, n.d., p. 37)

For the purposes of my analysis in this chapter, I will not investigate this slogan's ties to the historical polity of *Màndén* or the mythical Manding figure of Sunjata Keïta. Instead, I would like to focus on the importance of the phrase as a means of understanding the N'ko movement of today and in particular their stance regarding N'ko's *kángbe* register and the Manding language.

The N'ko hendiatrix circulates not only as a historical artifact of a bygone era, but also a rallying call for the kinds of people that N'ko students wish to be. During my fieldwork, I encountered it regularly. For instance, it can be seen below in Figure 45 where it appears in blue letters on a white background above the closed door of an N'ko bookstore (𞤎𞤵𞤴𞤳 𞤵𞤴𞤳).

Figure 45: N’ko Bookshop in Bamako adorned with the slogan *kólon, báara, télen*.



In the summer of 2016, the phrase also figured prominently on a commissioned truck used to transport a delegation of Bamakois¹⁴⁴ to the town of Banamba for a multi-day conference and celebration dedicated to N’ko (see Figure 46 below).

¹⁴⁴ *Bamakois* is the French language demonym for ‘residents of Bamako’.

Figure 46: Truck emblazoned with *kà kólɔn*, *kà báara*, *kà télen* in Banamba (930)



In this case, the purpose of slogan was much clearer because it was preceded with an introductory clause:

ሻጋጋጋ ሻ ፡ ሻጋጋ ሻ ፡ ሻጋጋጋ ሻ ፡ ሻጋ ሻጋ ጋጋ ሻጋጋጋ ሻጋጋጋ
Jàmaná' nétaa, kó' sàba lè, kà kólɔn, kà báara, kà télen
 'The advance of a country is [based on] three things: know-how, work and justice'

Leaving aside the question of which country, this usage is of interest because it transparently frames N'ko's hendiatis as one designed to work in service of developing, advancing or moving forward a society or polity.

The sub-text behind this slogan is that N'ko activists regularly question the efficacy and work of those that currently staff and lead West African post-colonial states. During the summer of 2013, for example, I visited a small Quranic school, that operated in N'ko. After the lesson, during which students recited Classical Arabic verses of the

Quran transliterated into the N'ko script, we were visited by another N'ko activist whom I had been introduced to a few days prior, Yáyà Jàabí. Ethnically Soninke, he had spent eight years working in Angola. His good fortune during this time was manifested by the immaculate and A/C'ed vehicle that we eventually climbed into to run a few errands around town. Driving between his brother's business compound and our next destination, I commented on the poor state of roads (*síra*). In response, he insisted that “the government doesn't work” (*té báara' ké*) (331) and that the parliamentary representatives don't do their jobs. From the back of the car, the Quranic school teacher chimed in that N'ko, “*òle yé síra kuda' yé*”—that's the new path.

This was not the first time that issues on the road led to disparaging comment about the Malian government. Another day in 2013, I accompanied another N'ko activist, Màmadí Kétà, on his series of errands around Bamako. Attempting to cross downtown in the middle of the day, Kétà was frustrated by the insufficient size of the roads. I responded that there were perhaps simply too many people. Referencing his own large progeny, he remarked that “we [Africans] want lots of children” (*án bé dén cáman fê*), before adding “[t]here aren't a lot of Africans” (*fàrafìn' mán cá*). *I ma chinois nùnu yé? Ù ká cá!*—haven't you seen all the Chinese, there are so many of them, he asked rhetorically (332). When I responded that perhaps this stemmed from the fact that China is bigger with more fertile land, he quickly retorted that this would not be an issue “*ní gouvernement tòn bé báara' ké*”—if the government worked—but, “*ù té báara' ké*”—they don't work.

In other cases, though N'ko activists question the work-ethic of not only their government but also their fellow compatriots both nationally and continentally. For

instance, in an extended interview I conducted with Bábá Mámádi Jàané (BMJ) in 2015, he recounted the following (A18):

	Transcript	Translation
1	BMJ <i>N'í táara Afrique, í yé só' dó kónɔ</i>	You go to Africa and you are in some city
2	<i>í b'à màfèle, í té- só sí té, japonais bólofen té yórw' mén'</i>	You can't find a town without a Japanese product
3	<i>Í té só sí yé, fò í y'à sòrw japonais bólofen' dó bé yàn</i>	There is no town where you won't find a Japanese product
4	<i>ou bien chinois bólofen' dó bé yàn.</i>	or there is a Chinese product
5	<i>Hámante français bólofen dó bé yàn.</i>	or there is French product
6	<i>Ou bien américain bólofen' dó bé yàn.</i>	or there's an American product.
7	<i>Í té Laguinée bólofen yé.</i>	You don't see any product of Guinea
8	CD <i>Í t'à yé.</i>	You don't see it.
9	BMJ <i>Í té Màlí bólofen yé, k'à sòrw í yé Laguinée àní Màlí lè kónɔ.</i>	You don't see any product of Mali even though you are in Guinea and Mali!
10	<i>Í té fóyi-fóyi yé! Múnna?</i>	You don't see anything at all? Why?
11	CD <i>Í t'à yé</i>	You don't see it.
12	BMJ <i>Kà mäsòdɔn</i>	Because
13	CD <i>Á!</i>	Ah!
14	BMJ <i>ɔn?</i>	Mm
15	<i>ça fait àlé yèré lè lájafoya' lè</i>	It's languishment of the self.
16	<i>k'àlú yèrè láfagoya</i>	It's languor.

In lines 1-9, Bábá paints the picture of the African continent devoid of its own products or consumer goods. His critique of this in lines 10-16, however, is not one of government or international trade policy; instead, he sees it as a problem of self-imposed African “languor”. Thus the problem with African post-colonial society lies not only in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats, but in those of the general populus as well.

A few minutes later in the interview, Bàbá applied this same logic to language practices.

	Transcript	Translation
42	BMJ <i>Í kánà tó í yèré mà.</i>	Don't rest on your laurels.
43	CD <i>Ònhòn</i>	Yeah
44	BMJ <i>Mais n'án tóra kélen mà, à kórɔ' lè k'à fɔ́ kó</i>	If we rest on them, that means that
45	<i>Án bé án yèrè paralyser</i>	we paralyze ourselves
46	<i>À kònin, án mòó' ménnu bé</i>	Our people that
47	<i>wálikan' nù kàn</i>	do foreign languages
48	<i>sèbeyá' bólo' mà, comme à ká kán ná' mén' kàn</i>	seriously in the way that it must be done
49	<i>n'í bé français fɔ́, français fɔ́ ká nà.</i>	If you speak French, speak it well.
50	<i>ní í bé anglais fɔ́, anglais fɔ́ kà nà</i>	If you speak English, speak it well.
51	<i>Wà í d'à fèlè, án ná kán' sísàn</i>	But look at it, our language now
52	<i>à kéra uh</i>	it's become
53	<i>uh</i>	uh
54	<i>tùbabukán' dialecte lè dí</i>	a dialect of French

In line 42 Bàbá uses an imperative, "Don't rest on your laurels", which presupposes an interlocutor who deserves such an admonishment. Given the earlier remarks about African society, it is clear that this refers to the kinds of lazy citizens who have become so numerous that Africa does not even produce its own goods for its own markets. In lines 46-54, we get some information on who these kinds of people might be; they are people, presumably Manding-speakers, who wield languages willy-nilly. They do not speak French correctly (line 49). They do not speak English correctly (line 50). In fact, they speak Manding with such little care that they essentially have made it “a dialect of

French” (line 54). The converse to this kind of practice, of course, would be the use of *kángbɛ*, even if not made explicit here.

Thus far, Bàbá has painted a picture of two potentially distinct situations and groups of people: discursive misfits that mix French, English and Manding, and Africans that carelessly do not contribute to their society. A bit later, however, he made the link between them more explicit:

		Transcript	Translation
71	BMJ	<i>Í y'à lón, à mán kán!</i>	You know, that's not right!
72		<i>N'i bé français-kan fɔ</i>	If you speak French
73		<i>Í y'à jénama' lè fɔla</i>	Speak it well
74		<i>N'i bé anglais-kan fɔ, í b'à jénama' fɔ</i>	If you speak English, speak it well
75		<i>Kónɔ, à yé cógo' mén' ná</i>	But as things are now
76		<i>í bé ké, é té français dí</i>	You aren't French
77		<i>é té fàrafín dí</i>	You aren't African.
78		<i>Ò cè ká jì?</i>	Is that good?
79	CD	<Laughs>	<Laughs>
80	BMJ	<i>On?</i>	Hmm
81	CD	<i>Á! Á kòni, ñ má</i>	Ah! Well, you know
82	BMJ	<i>Ò kósòn, án bé jáfoya- án békà jáfoya lè.</i>	For this reason, we are languishing
83		<i>Mùn kósòn? Án yèrɛ bé ké, án bé dòní' túbabú' yèrɛ kàn.</i>	Why? We, we've become a burden for the White man
84	CD	<i>Mm</i>	Mm
85	BMJ	<i>K'án ké dòní' dí túbabú' yèrɛ [kàn], est-ce qu'ò ká dí túbabú' jé?</i>	To be a burden for the White man, does he like that?
[... ¹⁴⁵]			
94	CD	<Laughs>	<Laughs>
95		<i>Á! Á kòni mògɔ sí té dòní fě</i>	Ah! Nobody wants an extra load [<i>dòní</i>]

¹⁴⁵ I have skipped lines 86-93 for clarity's sake since they were entirely metasemantic regarding my misunderstanding of the expression *dòní* 'charge, burden'.

		<i>dé!</i>	
96	BMJ	<i>Ó bon! Tùbabú' té dònì fê, ò kósòn fò án yé án jǐjà</i>	Ah OK! So the White man doesn't want a charge. For this reason, we need to make an effort
97		<i>án yé tùbabú' fána kǔn' dǒfēya.</i>	let's take a load off the White man
98	CD	<i>Mmm</i>	Mmm
99	BMJ	<i>Tùbabú' lè bé báara' ké, m̀n kósòn ê té báara ké?</i>	The White man does all the work, why don't you work?

In line 82, Bábá directly links together the two situations that he has presented: “for this reason, we are languishing”. Those that are careless in speech are equally so in life in general. Finally, in line 99, he makes it clear that his critique of his fellow West Africans is similar to that which other N’ko activists made of their government leaders above; they don't work (*kà báara' ké*). In this interview segment therefore Bábá implicitly elucidates how the *kángbɛ* register, beyond compelling etymology, functions as a potential discursive index of a different kind of West African citizen.

Not understanding vs. not working.

When N’koisants engage with those less convinced by *kángbɛ*, this dynamic becomes quite explicit. One day in 2016, while passing time at an N’ko bookshop that I regularly visited in Bamako, I was privy to such an event. Myself and the shopkeeper (who I will call SK in what follows) had spent the morning politely chatting, discussing and arguing politics for a bit before we got to work reading the introduction of one of his own books. In the afternoon, after a delicious meal brought to us by his second wife, a corpulent Tuareg¹⁴⁶ woman originally from Niger, we received a number of visitors. One of them, Ísa Sàmaké, was a fellow N’koisant and a regular visitor discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁶ A Berber group (known as *bùrudámɛ* in Manding) that resides primarily in the desert regions of northern Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger as well as southern Algeria and Libya.

Two of them, who arrived a bit later, were younger men who arrived on a single moto. They seemed like first-time visitors. One of them had a beard and was a government functionary working in Water and Forestry (*Eaux et Forêts*) in western Mali, near Kayes, although he had grown up around Maninka-speaking Kita. His speech lacked the French code-switching and loanwords that typically betray the identity of West African civil servants. His companion and friend had just finished his studies in Geography at the University of Bamako, but originally hailed from a Maninka village in Mali along the road between Bamako and Kankan. Unfamiliar with the visitors, I tuned out most of the conversation initially until their conversation turned to N'ko and what one of the two young men labeled “*kán kɔrɔman*”¹⁴⁷ or the ‘old language’ found in texts. Presumably this referred to the N'ko register’s inventory of specialized lexemes derived from archaic forms or neologisms that are often used for technical terms in place of Arabic or French loanwords.

Their support and knowledge of N'ko notwithstanding, their remarks about “*kán kɔrɔman*” at the bookshop sparked a discussion, which I noted down as follows in my field notes (763):

When the man from Kita mentions that these terms are a big issue for N'ko because it leads to a lot of people saying it is too hard and giving up, SK reacts strongly saying that he is Bamanan from Segou but that there is no word in an N'ko book that he doesn't know.

The shopkeeper's reaction did not stem from the fact that someone simply did not understand an N'ko text or vocabulary word. This happens regularly enough in N'ko classrooms and people in such situations are given metasemantic glosses in French or

¹⁴⁷ Strictly speaking the derived adjective *kɔrɔman* is tonally compact with *kán* (viz. *kán-kɔrɔman*'), but by common orthographic convention I have written it out as a separate word (Vydrin & Konta, 2014, p. 42).

Manding to help them along. Rather, he responded forcefully because the metapragmatic label “*kán kɔrɔman*” paired with comments of not understanding is akin to stating that N’ko is Maninka—the subtext being that it is not the democratic lingua franca Bamanan of Mali. Our initial visitor, the fellow N’koisant, Ísa, chimed in: this “difficulty” (*gèleya*) is in fact N’ko’s “knowledge” (*lónni*). Both he and the shopkeeper argued that people actually just say that N’ko is too hard to understand because *kàlán' mán dí án yé*—we don’t like studying. Using the deictic *we*, the two of them painted the picture of an underspecified, but, surely, large category of people (Maliens, Black Africans, Manding-speakers?) who were in fact the real problem. For them, written N’ko may not be exactly how people speak at all times, but any Manding-speaker’s claim to be unable to understand the register was first and foremost a sign of laziness and lack of focus. The shopkeeper carried on: “*áw bé wáriko' kàlámà, áw té yèrelón' kàlámà*”—you are aware of money, you are not aware of yourself.

Such comments jived with earlier remarks that our first visitor had made when we all discussed the shopkeeper and the visitors’ opinion on N’ko’s progress thus far as a movement. Speaking metaphorically, Sámaké commented that, born in 1949, N’ko is a full-blown adult and should have already accomplished many things that it has not. Both he and the shopkeeper agreed that this is because “Africans do not want knowledge” (*fàrafìn té lónni fê*). On the contrary, they argued that “Africans” are interested in “money” (*wári*) over “work” (*báara*). Within the general population, maybe one out of 500 truly want knowledge and even within N’ko the percentage remains low, perhaps one out of 300. People do N’ko because they know that people will associate them with the “*fàrafìn-lónni*” (‘African knowledge’) that is accessible through N’ko. Ultimately, they

concluded, there is a lot of idle chatter or "noise about N'ko" (*N'ko-mankan*), but it has not translated into a lot of work: "*mànkán' ká cá, báara mán cá*"—there's a lot of noise, not a lot of work.

For the shopkeeper and Sàmaké, people's difficulty with the N'ko register is indicative not of unintelligibility, but rather the general languor that they see around them in their society. They are frustrated with people's enthusiastic lip-service for N'ko that is not backed up by actions or "work" (*báara*). This same word and framing however also pops up in a distinct lament about Black Africans in general—they want money over knowledge and work. Laid side by side, the debate about N'ko's standard language register is also connected to a larger discussion of proper citizenship in post-colonial Africa. One's effort in studying and cultivating *kángbɛ*, or not, thus becomes indexical of different kinds of people: those who pursue money through shortcuts, and those who strive for enlightening knowledge through hard-work.

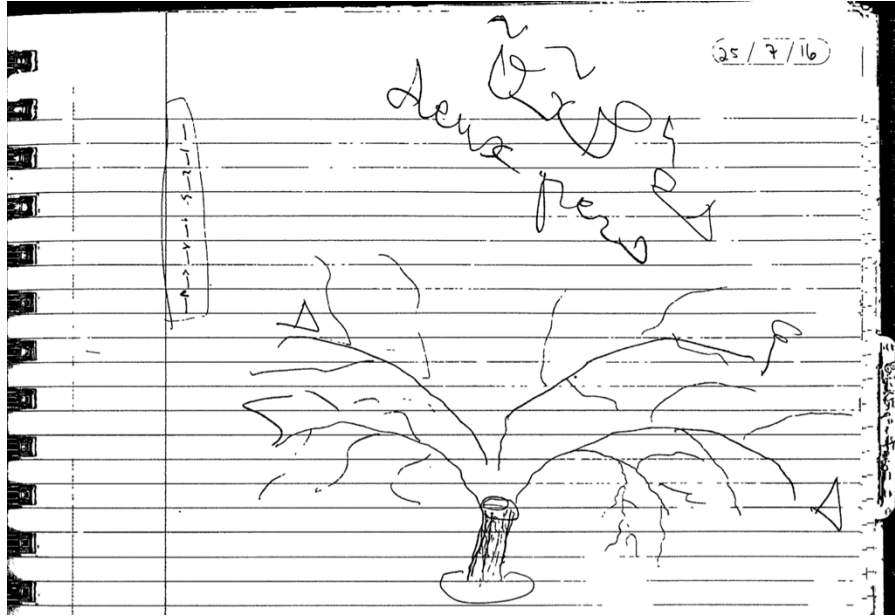
Curious how this worked in practice, later I asked the shopkeeper how he and others identify *kángbɛ* or the "pure" (*píyɔpíyɔ*) form of the language. He reacted incredulously—he aspired for it to be a perfect system of denotation like it must have started out originally (A82, 1709-1714). Next, I asked him why people should write the language and not their own dialect. He replied with a metaphor while also drawing in my notebook that I handed him (See Figure 47 below):

	Transcription	Translation
2000 SK	<i>Né bólo</i>	In my mind
2001	<i>kán' bé kómin</i>	language is like
2002 CD	<i>Í t'à ké yàn wà?</i>	Why don't you do it here? <handing notebook to SK>
2003	<i>Comme yórwò nìn ká bòn</i>	Since this area is big

2004	SK	<i>̀nhɔn</i>	Alright
2005		<i>Né bólo</i>	In my mind
2006		<i>kán' bé kómin yírisun'</i>	A language is a like a tree <draws a tree in notebook>
2007		<i>í y'à fàamu? Kó bé dàmìnɛ kèlen ná</i>	You understand? It starts from one <points to trunk>
2008		<i>íkomin à kó' dàmìnɛna m̀g̀ kèlen ná c̀go' mín ná</i>	in the way that things today started with one person
2009		<i>kó dàmìnɛna</i>	Things started
2010		<i>m̀sá kèlen dè bé yàn</i>	There is one lord
2011		<i>n'à nàna ní cáman yé</i>	who came with much
2012		<i>n'ò yé Ála yé</i>	that is God
2013		<i>donc maintenant</i>	So now
2014		<i>a- ò kèlen yé- kó bée bé dàmìnɛ ò dè lá</i>	In the same way, everything started like that
2015		<i>ò yírisun', n'ò</i>	The tree, if it
2016		<i>ò tóra kà taa jéfè</i>	if continues going forward
2017		<i>à mána sé ỳr̀' d̀ lá</i>	eventually it gets to a point
2018		<i>à bé</i>	where
2019		<i>bólon b́</i>	it sprouts a branch <draws a branch>
2020		<i>̀n?</i>	ok?

Making a case similar to those of historical and genetic linguists, he envisions language as being like a tree in the ways that it starts as single entity and then develops individual diverging branches as it moves forward through time.

Figure 47: Shopkeeper's drawing of the Manding language tree in my notebook (1286)



His argument for writing in *the* language--that is, Manding (or N'ko as Sulemaana Kantè would put it)—was one that went beyond etymology:

	Transcription	Translation
2088	SK <i>Ní í yé yírisun' bila kà táa bólon mìnè, n'ò fàrala [í lá]- í yé</i>	If you abandon the trunk and you grab the branch, if it breaks
2089	<i>í màkó' sàra</i>	you've put yourself at a disadvantage
2090	<i>Kánko' lá.</i>	in affairs of languages.
2091	<i>Í y'à fàamuya?</i>	You understand?
2092	<i>Donc</i>	So
2093	<i>N'í bé fèn barikaman' fê</i>	If you want something powerful
2094	<i>fèn fangamán' fê, í bé nìn nè mìnè</i>	something strong, you grab this
2095	<i>ní í yé nìn mìnè</i>	If you grab this <points to branch>
2096	<i>ní</i>	
2097	<i>nìn békà táa síra' mín' fê, nìn békà táa síra' mín' fê, nìn békà táa síra' mín' fê, nìn békà táa síra' mín' fê</i>	the direction this one goes, the direction this one goes, the direction this one goes, the direction this one goes <drawing branches rapidly>
2098	<i>ní í y'ù ká síra dá jógòn mà, ní mín' sáníyara, í b'ò tà!</i>	if you compare them with one another, that which cleanest, you take that one!

2099	<i>ní í y'ò tà, í b'í bólo ké ò lá, í bé kán jénama' sòrò. Nénama!</i>	If you take it, you put your arm upon it, you get proper language! Proper [language]!
2100	<i>Mògò té sé kà mín' sòsò, kán' mín' té sé kà dése kó' lá</i>	Language which can't be contested, language which can't fail in endeavors
2101	<i>Í yèrè b'à dón, anglais bé dése</i>	You yourself know, English can fail
2102	CD <i>français bé dése</i>	French can fail
2103	SK <i>uh chinois bé dése</i>	Uh Chinese can fail
2104	<i>mais N'ko té dése!</i>	But, N'ko does not fail!
2105	CD <i>Mùnna?</i>	Why?
2106	SK <i>Mùnna?</i>	Why?
2107	<i>Báwò</i>	Because
2108	<i>N'ko bé báara' ké ní kùnkólo' yé</i>	N'ko uses its head
2109	<i>N'ko bé sé ké dàn-n-yèrè-lá' mána k'à ké tème-n-yèrè-lá' k'à ké ké-n-yèrè-lá' yé</i>	N'ko can make intransitive into transitives into reflexives
2110	<i>í y'ò fàamu?</i>	You understand?

In these lines, he paints a picture of the true forms of a language being the strongest.

Language is comparable to a material good that is available in different grades of quality.

While he does not specify the activities for which it is ideal to have the highest one, his

publications, books and N'ko activism in general suggest that this form is particularly

important when it comes to writing. In other situations, N'ko activists emphasize the

kángbe register as a means of unifying Manding-speakers across state and dialectal

boundaries. Here though, SK paints a picture of it as serving in a different capacity. The

study of the N'ko orthography and its body of knowledge allows one to pursue a more

pure form of the Manding language that if wielded correctly cannot be "contested" or

"fail" (lines 2099-2100). In the lines that follow, SK outlines other major world languages

like French and Chinese and suggests that, while they may fail, N'ko (viz. Manding) does

not. On one hand, this "narrated event" (Wortham & Reyes, 2016) is interesting because

it clearly demonstrates that, despite the claims of N’ko activists in public settings (see Chapter 5), /ŋko/ *is*, on occasion, used as a proper name for the Manding language. On the other, it powerfully shows the stakes of reading and writing in *kángbɛ*—it is the linguistic means by which West Africans can put themselves on equal footing and work to match the accomplishments (and development levels) of other major countries or even civilizations of the world. From this perspective, N’ko and *kángbɛ* together become a tool to discipline the various earthly forms of Manding that have—like all dialects—deviated from the proper and powerful form that one cultivates in a continual pursuit of *kángbɛ*.

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how particular kinds of people in particular kinds of situations use the proper name N’ko to refer to Sulemaana Kantè’s unique script. In this Chapter I have explored the other half of this debate. For both N’ko’s founder and many students today, N’ko refers first and foremost to the Manding language in its entirety.

The name N’ko is strongly tied to Sulemaana Kantè, but its apparent roots go back much further. Emerging from a unique dependent clause, it is purported to have been baptismally applied by the mythic Sunjata Keïta as a convenient hypernym for all the various mutually intelligible, yet distinct, varieties of the Manding language. Driven to create a single writing system and literary tradition for this language and its people, Sulemaana Kantè did not insist on writing one Manding dialect over the others. Instead, through the concept of prescriptive grammar, he gave birth to a distinct standard language register that he called *kángbɛ*.

Today, this conceptualization of Manding as one single language (under the name N’ko)—united by the primarily written register of *kángbɛ*—continues to spread across

areas where people have post-colonially understood themselves as speakers of distinct, albeit related, varieties such as Bamanan, Maninka or Jula. This can be attributed to at least two factors explored in the ethnographic half of this chapter. First, the *kángbɛ* register—in part, codified into the N’ko orthography itself—is a linguistically compelling analysis of Manding phonology and etymology, as demonstrated by the current words of N’ko teachers and students. Second, the *kángbɛ* register—independent of linguistic facts—is upheld and embraced as a component of a larger N’ko ethos of know-how, work and discipline (*kólon, báara, télen*). Cultivating themselves to be able to read, write and potentially speak the clear form of Manding is the means by which students and activists can hone themselves discursively into the opposite of people they see as responsible for the disorganized and poorly developed state of the countries and region in which they reside. Unsurprisingly then, even *kángbɛ* is not a fixed entity or permanent set of linguistic features. It too is subject to scrutiny, improvements and repair. As one N’ko teacher commented following a heated disagreement about some of the conventions of written N’ko or *kángbɛ*: “*fɛn béɛ bé dílan*”—all things can be fixed (770). Indeed, in the eyes of N’ko activists in post-colonial West Africa, they must be.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In 1949, a young citizen of then French West Africa laid pen to paper and completed his first draft of his own alphabet. Today we know this script as N'ko. Nearly seventy years later, Kantè's most enduring contribution is not his script nor any one of the many books that he authored using it. Instead, it is the thousands of West Africans that have dedicated themselves to the study and promotion of his creation as either a pan-African script or a Manding orthography. Lurking behind their support for Kantè's inventory of graphemes is a more fundamental belief: that indigenous African languages such as Manding have not assumed their proper place in societies across the Continent.

Neither Sulemaana Kantè nor N'ko activists of today reject the idea that Africans learn French, English, Arabic etc. Instead, they ask: how can their own West African countries ever advance without properly utilizing the major languages of their citizens? In this dissertation, I have not attempted to address this question directly. In part, this is because N'ko activists themselves only ask it rhetorically. For them, the answer is clear: they cannot. Having groped towards a similar conclusion during my time in the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso, and fascinated by their commitment to this position, my dissertation instead focuses on the socio-political forces behind N'ko's creation as an alphabet and its continued spread as a social movement today. Most directly then, this dissertation sheds light on the N'ko movement itself. Through this, it also affords us an opportunity to evaluate a series of theoretical concepts—that is, the ideas and understandings that guided this project through conceptualization, data collection, analysis and writing. Finally, indirectly, but perhaps most importantly, this dissertation

provides potential insights about what the place of African languages could or should be in state-backed education programs. In what follows, I conclude this dissertation by exploring its relevance in these regards: directly, in terms of the N'ko movement as well as the theories and concepts of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, and indirectly, in terms of African language and education policy.

A Linguistic Anthropological Investigation of N'ko

Linguistic anthropologists investigate the role of language as a tool for social action that establishes the regularities that we call culture and society. The N'ko movement is, of course, a rather transparent case of this—activists literally promote language and literacy as a tool for social change. Nonetheless, this dissertation has illustrated the ways that a single word, *N'ko*, can serve as a tool for remaking the social world. For while Kantè is best known for his script, his enduring contributions are other entities that, for some, can now be successfully referred to using the phonemic string /ŋko/: a) the Manding language; and b) a movement of individuals dedicated to the promotion of mother-tongue education for Manding-speakers and Africans using his script.

How did this come to be? In Chapter 4, I investigated how the life and times of Sulemaana Kantè led to this reality. Drawing on his own words as well as secondary accounts of his life in connection with other historical events, I argued that Sulemaana Kantè functions as a *kàramóo* ('[Quranic] teacher') today in part because of his connections to a longer tradition of vernacular language literacy that emerged out of the West African Quranic schooling network. At the same time though, his intellectual interventions went beyond the religious sphere. As others such as Wyrod (2003, 2008)

and Oyler (1995, 2005) have suggested, he was also an anti-colonial thinker in a pan-Africanist tradition. He understood his script as a potential tool for what he conceptualized as all of (Black) Africa. In addition, he did ethno-nationalist intellectual work in an attempt to consolidate Manding-speakers and various other groups that he understood as the descendants of the *Màndén* empire now spread out and divided by colonial borders.

Next I moved on to the N'ko movement of today, taking the phonemic string /ŋko/ as my central focus. The debate about the reference prototype of this word, as explored in the ethnographic interlude and Chapters 5 and 6, both shows the stakes of Kantè's intervention and the power of language and proper names to call non-material entities into the social world and thereby change it. To do so I applied the classic tools of linguistic anthropological discourse analysis in ways that go "beyond the speech event" (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Drawing on books, interviews, fieldnotes and artifacts, I illustrated how individuals' sign-making behavior and associated artifacts serve to facilitate not only face-to-face social action but also larger societal changes. Focusing on recurring types of discourse and events, but also implicit connections—what Wortham & Reyes (2015) call "pathways"—between ostensibly trivial encounters, linguistic utterances and seemingly distinct moments that clearly invoke or appeal to larger sociopolitical issues.

In Chapter 5, I explored how N'ko activists work to establish /ŋko/'s reference standard as first and foremost the script invented by Sulemaana Kantè in 1949. Such a position emerges from a variety of factors. In truth, Kantè *did* invent a unique orthography that needed a name. That said, he himself often argued that /ŋko/ was the

name of the Manding language. Today, many N'koisans contest this interpretation. This position does not emerge willy-nilly, but in particular “participation frameworks” (Goffman, 1981). Speaking in public promotional events or governmental lobbying sessions, activists insist that N'ko is first and foremost, if not only, a script because it mitigates the sense that the promotion of N'ko is meant primarily to serve ethnically Manding citizens. Put differently, if N'ko is simply a script then it is a tool that can serve any and all African citizens.

At the same time, this position is not simply one of political palatability. It also emerges from a deep-seated pan-Africanism as revealed by my exploration of the role of linguistic tone in both Sulemaana Kantè's script and the N'ko classroom today. The accurate and parsimonious marking of Manding's two-level tone system across contexts of *downstep* and *downdrift* serves not only as means of helping Manding-speakers write their own language, but also as a resource for a pan-African discourse of African languages being of a certain unified type. In this light, the actors of the N'ko movement explicitly view their script as not simply an orthography designed for Manding speakers, but instead a script that can serve Black Africans in general. This fact dovetails with a broader way of typifying their struggle as a pan-African linguistic struggle. From N'ko activists' perspective, African languages have still not been properly embraced by their governments, education systems and society, and this is partially a result of them not being written. The N'ko script is of course an iconic and indigenous African script that they argue could serve the many African communities, and more importantly governments, that do not read, write nor operate in their own languages. Through the logic of linguistic tone and Kantè's system of *kánmasere* they are able to argue that this is

a pan-African struggle for which they have a unique technical solution: a properly adapted tonal writing system.

In Chapter 6, I investigated the referential pairing of /ɲko/ and the Manding language and how—despite the insinuations of activists explored in the preceding chapter—it circulates through N’ko classrooms and circles in West Africa today. Many N’ko activists, like Kantè during his lifetime, labor to socially establish Bamanan, Maninka, Jula and Mandinka—once and for all—as one language that they call N’ko. From a traditional linguistic perspective, such claims would be extraneous remarks standing in the way of objective linguistic description. In this dissertation, however, they are central. Situating myself within the philosophical school of critical realism, I approached these and other comments about language as important data for interpreting the social forces that define the sociological entities known as languages, dialects, etc. To enact this analytically I applied a linguistic anthropological understanding of *register* that is designed to make language variation sociologically relevant and analytically tractable through a focus on *metapragmatics* or “talk about talk”¹⁴⁸.

The chapter begins with an outline of Kantè’s conceptualization of Manding as a single albeit heterogeneous language. Central in this regard is his historical account of the phonemic string /ɲko/, which he argues was long ago used by refined speakers and even the mythical Sunjata Keita as a single glottonym in place of regional dialectal names such as Bamanan, Maninka, Jula or Mandinka. Equally important is his concept of prescriptive

¹⁴⁸ In this sense my dissertation explicitly applies the “registers & repertoires” perspective recently advocated for by Africanist field linguists (e.g., Lüpke & Storch, 2013, p. 2).

grammar or *kángbɛ* which serves as the basis of the standard language register of the N'ko movement today.

Moving from Kantè's own writings, I subsequently took us into the N'ko movement's classrooms and bookshops to investigate how and why students and teachers are willing to embrace the *kángbɛ* register even when it is distinct from their own native varieties or the dominant registers of their country. Through this, I revealed that the learning of the N'ko script and *kángbɛ* are inherently intertwined. Simply learning the letters of N'ko already introduces students to the idea of what sounds count as valid Manding phonemes or not. Through such lectures and other related linguistic topics such as pronouns, N'ko activists are socialized into a linguistic register and metalinguistic framework that serves to both hold Manding dialects like Bamanan, Maninka and Jula together and remake them as variants of a single object: the language (and not script) of N'ko. This line of reasoning is upheld, however, not simply because of linguistic facts of etymology or perfectly transparent *sense compositionality* (Agha, 2007a, pp. 110–112). As I showed, Kantè's framework as a single language united by *kángbɛ* is embraced and disseminated by N'ko activists in part because it is the discursive means by which they can work themselves into the kind of citizen that they understand post-colonial West Africa as desperately lacking: one that is savvy, hard-working and logical. Taking /ŋko/ as the proper name of a single language therefore is also connected to N'ko activists' desire to be the kind of individuals that can make up for what they see as the languor and self-serving nature of their governmental elites and the population more broadly. Framing *kángbɛ* as a shifting model of cultural action instead of cloaked dialect, I therefore illustrated a new way of interpreting Manding written in N'ko, one that accounts for the

perspective of Kantè, teachers and students today and the register's expansion: namely that N'ko is not necessarily written Maninka (though currently it may be by and large congruent with it). Instead, it is an aspirational and evolving standard language register for Manding as a whole.

Taken together, my dissertation chapters reveal how /ŋko/, as a proper name with potentially distinct referents, emerged and has served as the vehicle for both pan-Africanism and a popular desire for civil and governmental reform (though it is hardly limited to these two phenomena). More broadly, this dissertation illustrates how a fashion of speaking—be it a register, a single word or a floating tone—can serve as a tool for social action. Speech therefore is not simply key for understanding seemingly banal acts such as encouraging a student but also for larger and presumably more consequential ones such as defining a language, reforming a state, or uniting a continent. In this way, my work reaffirms the linguistic anthropological position that language is fundamentally a tool for not just face-to-face communication or social action but also our most sophisticated tool for making and re-making the world around us.

African Language and Education Policy

Whether understood as a script or a language, N'ko and the actors in this dissertation illuminate the continued salience of local African languages and literacies as a means of championing various causes in quests for social change¹⁴⁹. From one perspective, this seems perplexing. Why should there be an N'ko movement, or other similar grassroots local language movements in West Africa (e.g., Hames, 2017), given that regional governments and international donors have long been involved in efforts at promoting literacy and education in the very same languages (Juffermans & Abdelhay, 2016)? Some have suggested that many African citizens are simply not interested in African language education even if they are not necessarily opposed to it (Albaugh, 2007)¹⁵⁰. From this perspective, one is led to believe that African citizens see both opportunity and modernity as most easily reached through world languages such as French, English and to a lesser extent Arabic¹⁵¹. This idea is further supported by the fact that more than fifty years of experimentation and millions of dollars have not led to robust literary traditions for many major West African languages¹⁵². While this is a plausible explanation in many cases, the N'ko movement's very existence, not to mention its continued expansion in Manding-speaking West Africa, suggests that the minimal impact of government-backed literacy programs does not result from an inherent lack of

¹⁴⁹ For other historical and contemporary cases see the overviews of Juffermans, Asfaha, Abdelhay (2014b) and Unseth (Unseth, 2011)

¹⁵⁰ Vydrin (2011, pp. 195–196) also relates this as widely reported sentiment in Mali and Guinea regarding the state-backed efforts to promote Manding literacy.

¹⁵¹ See this notion interrogated by Juffermans & Van Camp (2013) in Mandinka-speaking Gambia.

¹⁵² There are important exceptions such as some Fulani- (Hames, 2017; Humery, 2012, 2013) and Hausa-speaking areas (Philips, 2004). Regardless, these literary cultures are often divorced from the formal education systems and certainly mainstream Western considerations (Juffermans & Abdelhay, 2016).

enthusiasm for mother-tongue literacy or education, but rather from its own provenance and lack of ties to any compelling socio-political cause. And of course, the vast majority of Africans continue to grow up and live their day-to-day speaking African languages instead of French, English or Portuguese (Logan, 2017).

As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, the N’ko movement has flourished and continues to grow as a champion of Manding and, more broadly, African mother-tongue education for a number of reasons. Linguistically, the orthography is completely distinct from the approaches adopted by the various Latin-based systems devised in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire in at least two ways. Both of them in turn illuminate larger sociological points that continue to fuel the N’ko movement today.

First, as N’ko activists are apt to point out, the orthography explicitly marks tone. While a number of Latin-based works emanating from linguists have been published over the years, none of the actual government programs in adult literacy or bilingual education have ever integrated tone into their orthography or instructional practices. In contrast, in Chapter 5, we saw that tone takes center stage in the case of the N’ko classroom. Indeed, as Sékù Jàkité put it: *kánmasere* are the language’s “motor”. Of course, the marking of tone is important because it serves to distinguish tonal minimal pairs as well as grammatical phenomena. In a larger sense, the chapter demonstrates how Kantè’s system of diacritics functions as a powerful means of raising meta-tonal linguistic awareness. By elucidating the role of linguistic tone in students’ native tongue, N’ko teachers provide students with a tool that allows them to see their own language as rich, worthy of study, and requiring special written conventions. For linguists, convinced of the denotational equality of languages, such points ring as merely a nicety for an orthography. Perhaps this

explains tone's early exclusion from practical Manding orthography. William Welmers, an early modern Africanist linguist, for instance, stated the following in an article that emerged from a conference with Christian missionary linguists¹⁵³ in Kankan in 1948:

For the purposes of a practical orthography of Maninka, it is not expected that a strictly phonemic and tonemic orthography transcription will be used. Nor is such a transcription necessarily the most useful (Welmers, 1949, p. 14)

After laying out a number of linguistic features of Maninka, he posited as follows:

These [preceding] statements considerably reduce the amount of tone marking necessary in an orthography for Maninka literature. There is, of course, some element of probability and uncertainty involved in setting up orthographic conventions such as these. This can be eliminated only by a practical test. To the degree that native speakers learning to read and write read without stumbling and write without making mistakes in tone marking, to that degree the conventions are useful (Welmers, 1949, p. 16)

Chapter 5 demonstrates that this judgement of the utility of orthographic conventions, and specifically ones related to tone, is wildly inadequate in sociological terms. This is similarly the case in modern experimental work on the question of African language tone-marking (S. Bird, 1999; Hoover, 2012; D. Roberts, 2008). Tone's salience in the N'ko movement stretches out beyond simply marking contrastive features or demonstrating a denigrated language's complexity. Cross-linguistically important for African languages, tone also serves as a means of tapping into an underlying pan-Africanism and the belief that something is holding back Black Africa as a whole. N'ko as a script with a system of unique diacritics therefore becomes a tool in the broader struggle of decolonization that they believe can best proceed through education and literacy using African languages.

¹⁵³ Welmers' data and analysis emerged from a conference organized by the missionary linguist Dr. Eugene A. Nida, an original charter member of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, which like SIL International (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics) was founded by the missionary William Cameron Townsend (see Stoll, 1981).

Second, the N'ko orthography is not used to read and write Maninka, Bamanan or an associated lect such as *mànikamorikán*. The modern Latin-based orthographies of the major Manding-speaking countries in large part can be understood as emerging from an UNESCO-sponsored meeting held in Bamako in 1966. While that conference focused on Manding, it gave rise not to a Manding orthography, but rather to a collection of letters that could be used to take snapshot transcriptions of what speakers realized orally, regardless of their own local variety. In this sense, conference participants did not seek to call into being a sociologically relevant concept of Manding as a single language. Subsequent national policies therefore approached Maninka, Bamanan, Jula and Mandinka as distinct, albeit related varieties that required their own distinct orthographic conventions.

In contrast, in Chapter 6, I laid out the ways in which Sulemaana Kantè used his orthography and subsequent linguistic works as the means of calling into being a distinct standard language register based on his concept of prescriptive grammar—*kángbe*. This resulted from both sound historical linguistic analysis as well as appeals to the aspirational ideal of a united Manding language and people. Today, both of these dynamics figure into the register's dissemination in N'ko classrooms, bookshops and radio broadcasts. Here, I have not explored the controversy of N'ko's standard language register, which is occasionally described as "Maninka" by both linguists and Manding-speakers outside of Guinea. Instead, I have focused on the fact that thousands of speakers of Bamanan and Jula embrace the study of N'ko as not that of Maninka, but rather mother-tongue education even when the written forms are not 100 percent congruent with their own default spoken register. One of the major achievements of the N'ko movement

therefore is having been able to create a pan-Manding register where international conferences, donors and state governments have failed. Understanding this success however necessitates moving beyond a notion of standard's being born of compromise or linguistic etymology and instead seeing how *kángbe*'s spread is also dependent on a desire for governmental and civil reform. N'ko activists do not read and write in the *kángbe* register simply because its forms mirror Kantè's own writings nor because they are understood as etymologically sound; they do so because reading and writing *kángbe* is the means by which they can hone their own speech into an icon of what they would like to see in their society: know-how, discipline and logic.

On one hand then, the success and continued growth of the N'ko movement therefore seems to suggest that African language planners have some concrete corpus planning tasks that they can pursue: they can create systems that mark tone and they can develop orthographies that are not based on linguistic ideals of accurate phonemic transcription, but rather etymologically compelling standard language registers¹⁵⁴. On the other hand, this dissertation has demonstrated that while these are both likely sound advice for many African languages, they are likely neither necessary nor sufficient. Investigating the metalinguistic commentary of N'ko students, teachers and activists as well as Sulemaana Kantè himself suggests that what makes the conventionalized notation of particular linguistic forms or features succeed is not their linguistic accuracy (though it may help), but rather their mobilization in service of other larger socio-political ideals and projects.

¹⁵⁴ One that users interpret as a “multidialectal orthography” akin to that which Unseth (2015) argues in favor of.

In this regard, numerous other facets of the N'ko movement's success have not been covered in this dissertation. N'ko discourse and texts, for instance, are rife with Islamic vocabulary, discussion and conventions. For example, nearly every single N'ko book that I have encountered begins with a Manding version of the Islamic invocation of the *basmala* (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ), regardless of the text's ultimate subject. This is hardly surprising considering that most serious face-to-face undertakings in Manding-speaking West Africa also begin as such. In contrast, Latin-based texts in Bamanan and Jula are, in essence, devoid of this practice¹⁵⁵.

Similarly, the pan-Manding aspect of N'ko texts and discourses is largely absent from government-backed programs which have historically been a tool of the post-colonial state's educational and industrial programs and therefore tended to produce documents meant to serve state-initiated development programs related to health, farming, small business development etc. These subjects are not absent from N'ko publications—far from it. Nonetheless, they play second fiddle to texts about West African history, language, Islam and culture. Not to mention more critical texts of recent years that seek to illuminate historical events and processes tied to the Atlantic Slave Trade or neocolonialism. Such subjects are by and large absent from Latin-based orthography texts.

These dynamics of the N'ko movement, coupled with those analyzed in this dissertation suggest that N'ko's success and the continued interest in African languages in

grassroots social movements¹⁵⁶ is intimately connected to a certain segment of the

¹⁵⁵ Zappa (2011) makes a similar point in discussing the absence of many commonly attested Arabic loanwords from Bamanan dictionaries.

¹⁵⁶ See, for instance recent work on different kinds of Fulani language activism across Senegal and Mauritania (Hames, 2017), and Guinea (Waddell, 2016).

population's desire to understand and potentially change the situation in which they live in ways that do not conform to the wishes of Quranic or government elites. In this sense, it is not that people reject government-backed literacy programs of *báliku* or bilingual education because they reject mother-tongue education or because tone is unmarked or because there is no transnational standard language register etc. Instead, they gravitate towards alternatives such as N'ko, which indirectly speak to them sociologically and politically. My dissertation thus supports scholarly work affirming that orthography development should not be considered primarily a technician's task because ultimate adoption of any particular orthography hinges on factors that go beyond facts of phonemic mapping or word boundaries (Donaldson, In Press, 2015; Lüpke, 2011).

Orthography is not just a particular writing system. It is instead a set of conventions for using a specific script to write a specific language. Visually distinct even for those who can read or identify, script—Latin, Arabic, or N'ko in the case of Manding—is the most overt way of aligning or dis-aligning one speech community to or from another (Unseth, 2008). The use of a script can also be wrapped up in the purpose of promoting a particular literacy. Many post-colonial governments, for example, promote local language literacy with an eye towards transitioning citizens to literacy in an official language (Sebba, 2011, pp. 76–79). This was also the case in the Soviet Union between 1935 and 1940 when most minority languages regardless of their written traditions in other scripts were transitioned to Cyrillic-based orthographies similar to that of Russian (Calvet, 1987, pp. 221–225).

The graphic conventions within a single script, however, can also be subject to such initiatives or debate. From a phonemicist perspective the development of an

orthography simply entails creating a one-to-one match between graphemes and phonemes. This approach therefore rests on the assumption that mapping the phonology of a language is a straight forward matter. Sociolinguists have long highlighted the presence of intralanguage variation where a code is composed of various sub-codes (Gumperz, 1962) akin to what I conceptualize as registers in this dissertation. Language policy and planning scholars have convincingly demonstrated the tension that arises when this reality meets orthographic standardization efforts. Hornberger (1995) and Hornberger & King (1998), for instance, recount the heated debates around how to mark vowels and codify a standard written register for Quechua and Quichua respectively.

Even in cases without such clear dialectal variation across a continuum, controversy can arise about the graphic conventions to use within a single script. Take, for instance, the 20th century debates around Haitian Creole orthography (Schieffelin & Doucet, 1994). Indeed, in Haiti the competing orthographic systems all used the Latin script , but each orthography was associated with specific ideological positions about the purpose of literacy, the status of and vision for Haitian Creole and ultimately Haiti as a nation-state. On one hand, there was the phonemicist orthography which was argued to be easier for monolingual speakers and was supported by the Ministry of Education, the Catholic Church and international literacy promoters. On the other, there was the pro-etymological camp of mainly the intelligentsia, teachers and the middle class which wanted an orthography as close to French's as possible in order to facilitate the later learning of French. And of course there are those that laid somewhere in between the two. Schieffelin and Doucet argue that ultimately it was not a debate about capturing graphically the sounds of Haitian creole. Instead,

[i]t is about the conception of kreyòl itself as a language and as element of Haitian national identity, about how Haitians situate themselves through languages at the national and international levels, and about the notions of Haitianness, authenticity, and legitimacy (p. 188)

Similarly during the British colonial rule of East Africa the question of orthographic conventions loomed large despite a clear preference for the Latin-script over the Arabic-script that had been widely in use for penning Swahili (Peterson, 2006). In the 19th and 20th century colonial period, the British and Germans proposed officially at least six different orthographies. They varied in their approaches: different sets of diacritics to distinguish phonemes, unique IPA-style characters, etymological spellings or a basic Latin-alphabet with English-style graphic conventions and less distinction of phonemes. Ultimately during British rule following World War I, the debate came to be between two orthographies. On one hand there was a simpler version that eliminated etymological spellings, evidence of Arabic origins in loanwords, and characters & diacritics not found on a typewriter. On the other there was an IPA predecessor from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IILC) that was proposed for all African languages including Swahili. Ultimately, Peterson (2006) sees these final competing orthographies as indicative of the differing visions of two kinds of colonial servants: supporters of the IILC orthography who "sought to create a continent-wide empire of letters" across which colonial officers could speak like natives; and those of the less phonemic orthography who sought efficient written command through Swahili in which they would "rarely need to speak directly to Africans" (pp. 196-197).

Taken together, these works and others (e.g., Aytürk, 2004; Blommaert, 1999; Clark, 2009) on the history of post-colonial orthography and literacy promotion for non-Western languages lay out clearly the ideological side of these projects, just like I have

done in this dissertation in the case of N'ko. Despite such scholarship, no one now decries the fact that there is now a robust tradition of written Swahili, Turkish or Japanese that is used by the masses. Indeed, in these cases, one measure of the success of these languages in terms of language policy and planning is the fact that the work of linguists is distinct from that of education and literary culture. That is to say, linguists pursue their academic interests related to various features of grammar and discourse independently from the other arbiters of written and spoken speech.

In the case of many languages with a written tradition, it is not academic linguists that play a central role in establishing conventions and norms, but rather publishers (Bernard, 1996). When it comes to many African languages, however, Western-trained academic linguists remain central arbiters of written forms (Lüpke, 2014). Manding brilliantly illustrates the tension that results from this dynamic. While professional academic linguists commonly use the label "Manding" and recognize the mutually intelligibility that exists between Maninka, Jula and Bamanan, their advising of state-backed language commissions and programs has never led to a standard written Manding register. This is hardly surprising; linguists are trained to identify and explicate phonological grammatical systems not sociological languages. In other words, to a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. The N'ko movement shows a sociological alternative of orthography development; one that is concerned with calling into being and disseminating a standard language register instead of accurately capturing all forms of speech. This, of course, is not without controversy, but is also not without affordances.

Final Thoughts

Despite these contributions, this dissertation is limited in scope. Due to time and resource constraints, I have inevitably been forced to offer but a partial account of the N'ko movement. In this sense, this dissertation is hopefully but a first step towards a more complete book project or series of scholarly articles that draw on a similar but changing conceptual framework to, in the context of the N'ko movement, both explain the ethnographic question of "what is going is here" and shed light on larger intellectual questions about the nature of language variation, speech as social action, and, finally, what role languages such as Manding should play in West African education, governance and society in the 21st century and beyond.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agar, M. (1980). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. New York: Academic Press.
- Agha, A. (2007a). *Language and social relations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Agha, A. (2007b). The object called “language” and the subject of linguistics. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 35(3), 217–235.
- Aikman, S. (1999). *Intercultural education and literacy: An ethnographic study of Indigenous knowledge and learning in the Peruvian Amazon*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Albaugh, E. A. (2007). Language choice in education: a politics of persuasion. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45(1), 1.
- Amselle, J.-L. (1996). Le N’ko au Mali. *Cahiers D’études Africaines*, 36(144), 823–826.
- Amselle, J.-L. (2001). *Branchements: Anthropologie de l’universalité des cultures*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Amselle, J.-L. (2003). Peut-on être musulman sans être arabe? : A propos du N’ko malinké d’Afrique de l’Ouest. In A. Piga & C. Ventura (Eds.), *Islam et villes en Afrique au sud du Sahara: entre soufisme et fondamentalisme*. Paris: Editions Karthala.
- Anderson, B. R. O. (2006). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London; New York: Verso.
- André, G. (2007). École, langues, cultures et développement: Une analyse des politiques éducatives, linguistiques et culturelles postcoloniales au Burkina Faso. *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 47(186), 221–247.
- Arsan, A. (2014). *Interlopers of empire : the Lebanese diaspora in colonial French West Africa*.
- Asad, T. (1986). *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies). Washington, DC: Georgetown University.
- Austen, R. A. (Ed.). (1999). *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature, and Performance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Austen, R. A. (2010a). The Medium of “Tradition”: Amadou Hampâté Bâ’s Confrontations with Languages, Literacy and Colonialism. *Islamic Africa*, 1(2), 217–228.
- Austen, R. A. (2010b). *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to Do Things With Words*. Harvard University Press.
- Aytürk, İ. (2004). Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk’s Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(6), 1–25.
- Babou, C. A. (2007). *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Bailleul, C. (2007). *Dictionnaire bambara-français*. Bamako: Editions Donniya.
- Baldi, S. (2008). *Dictionnaire des emprunts arabes dans les langues de l’Afrique de l’Ouest et en swahili*. Paris, France: Editions Karthala.

- Balenghien, E. (1987). A propos de l'alphabet du bambara au Mali. *Mandenkan*, 14–15, 13–26.
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Language and the nation: the language question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bazin, J. (1985). A chacun son bambara. In J.-L. Amselle & M'Bokolo (Eds.), *Au coeur de l'ethnie: ethnies, tribalisme et état en Afrique*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Benson, C., & Lynd, M. (2011). National languages in education in Guinea-Conakry: re-emancipation in progress? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2011(209).
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Bernard, H. R. (1996). Language Preservation and Publishing. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Indigenous literacies in the Americas: language planning from the bottom up* (pp. 139–156). Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Biber, D., & Finegan, E. (1993). *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Binger, L.-G. (1856-1936). (1892). *Du Niger au golfe de Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi: 1887-1889*. Paris: Librairie Hachette.
- Bird, C., Hutchison, J., & Kanté, M. (1977). *An Ka Bamanankan Kalan: Beginning Bambara*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University African Studies Center.
- Bird, C. S. (1966). Determination in Bambara. *Journal of West African Languages*, 3(1), 5–11.
- Bird, C. S. (1970). The development of Mandekan (Manding). In D. Dalby (Ed.), *Language and History in Africa* (pp. 146–159).
- Bird, C. S. (1981). *Dialects of Mandekan* (p. 449). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies.
- Bird, S. (1999). When marking tone reduces fluency: an orthography experiment in Cameroon. *Language and Speech*. Retrieved from <http://cogprints.org/2173/>
- Blommaert, J. (1999). *State ideology and language in Tanzania*. Köln: Köppe.
- Blommaert, J. (2004). *Discourse: a critical introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, J. (2006). Language policy and national identity. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: theory and method*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Blommaert, J. (2008). *Grassroots Literacy: Writing, Identity and Voice in Central Africa*. London: Routledge.
- Bloomfield, L. (1926). A set of postulates for the science of language. *Language*, 2(3), 153–164.
- Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- Boas, F. (1911). *Handbook of American Indian languages*. Washington, DC: Government Print Office (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology).
- Boone, D., Boling, M., Silué, L., & Augustin, M. (2007). *Enquête Sociolinguistique en Langues Manding*. SIL. Retrieved from <http://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/9120>

- Boutin, B. A., & N'Guessan, J. K. (2013). Citoyenneté et politique linguistique en Côte d'Ivoire. *Revue française de linguistique appliquée*, Vol. XVIII(2), 121–133.
- Brenner, L. (1991). Médersas au Mali: Transformation d'une institution islamique. In L. Brenner & B. Sanankoua (Eds.), *L'enseignement islamique au Mali* (pp. 63–85). Bamako, Mali: Editions Jamana.
- Brenner, L. (2001). *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Brenner, L., & Last, M. (1985). The Role of Language in West African Islam. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 55(4), 432–446.
- Brenner, L., & Sanankoua, B. (Eds.). (1991). *L'enseignement islamique au Mali*. Bamako, Mali: Editions Jamana.
- Briggs, C. L. (1986). *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999). "Why be normal?": Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in Society*, 28(2), 203–223.
- Bucholtz, M. (2000). The politics of transcription. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(10), 1439–1465.
- Bucholtz, M. (2007). Variation in transcription. *Discourse Studies*, 9(6), 784–808.
- Calvet, L.-J. (1981). *Les langues véhiculaires*. Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Calvet, L.-J. (1982). The Spread of Mandingo: Military, Commercial and Colonial Influence on a Linguistic Datum. In R. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Language spread: studies in diffusion and social change*. Bloomington, IN : Washington, DC: Indiana University Press ; Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Calvet, L.-J. (1987). *La Guerre des Langues: et Les Politiques Linguistiques*. Paris: Payot.
- Calvet, L.-J. (2010). *Histoire du français en Afrique: une langue en copropriété?* Paris: Ecriture.
- Camara, S. (1997). "A'jami" Literature in Senegal: The Example of Sëriñ Muusaa Ka, Poet and Biographer. *Research in African Literatures*, 28(3), 163–182.
- Cameron, D. (1995). *Verbal hygiene*. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, D., Frazer, E., Rampton, M. B. H., & Richardson, K. (1992). *Researching language : issues of power and method*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Canut, C. (1996). Instabilité des usages et non fermeté du système manding au Mali. *Mandenkan*, (31), 77–91.
- Canut, C. (2001). À la frontière des langues. Figures de la démarcation (On the Borderline of Languages: Figures of Demarcation). *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 41(163/164), 443–463.
- Canut, C. (2002). Langues et Filiations en Afrique. *Les Temps Modernes*, (20–21), 410–440.
- Canut, C. (2011). Discourse, community, identity: Processes of linguistic homogenization in Bamako. In F. M. Laughlin (Ed.), *Languages of Urban Africa*. Continuum International Publishing Group.

- Cazden, C. B. (1988). *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning* (1st ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Chalabi, T. (2006). *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation-State, 1918–1943*. Springer.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. A. (1975). On Cognitive Capacity. In *Reflections on Language*. Pantheon Books.
- Clark, P. H. (2009). *The kokugo revolution : education, identity, and language policy in imperial Japan*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California.
- Condé, I. (2008a). Soulemana Kanté entre Linguistique et Grammaire : Cas de la langue littéraire utilisée dans les textes en N'ko. Presented at the Deuxième congrès de la linguistique et des langues mandés, St. Petersburg, Russia.
- Condé, I. (2008b). The Emergence of N'kophone Literature: From Poetry to the Novel. *Mande Studies*, 10, 133–148.
- Condé, N. S. (2017). *Introduction au N'ko: Une alternative linguistique pour l'Afrique*. Paris, France: l'Harmattan.
- Conrad, D. (2001). Reconstructing Oral Tradition: Souleymane Kanté's Approach to Writing Mande History. *Mande Studies*, 3.
- Conrad, D., & Fisher, H. (1982). The Conquest That Never Was: Ghana and the Almoravids, 1076. I. The External Arabic Sources. *History in Africa*, 9, 21–59.
- Cooper, F. (2002). *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present*. Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooper, R. L. (1989). *Language Planning and Social Change*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Corson, D. (1997). Critical Realism: An Emancipatory Philosophy for Applied Linguistics? *Applied Linguistics*, 18(2), 166–188.
- Creese, A. (2008). Linguistic Ethnography. In N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp. 3424–3436). Springer US.
- Creissels, D. (In Press). A Sketch of Mandinka. In F. Lüpke (Ed.), *The Oxford guide to the Atlantic languages of West Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Creissels, D. (2004). L'occlusive vélaire sonore g et les labio-vélaires en mandingue. *Mandenkan*, 39, 1–22.
- Creissels, D. (2007). A sketch of Bambara argument structure. Presented at the Grammar and Processing of Verbal Agreement, Leipzig, Germany. Retrieved from http://www.dl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/fulltext/Creissels/Creissels_2007a.pdf
- Creissels, D. (2009). *Le malinké de Kita: un parler mandingue de l'ouest du Mali*. Cologne, Germany: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Creissels, D. (2013). Le maninka du Niokolo (Sénégal oriental): esquisse phonologique et morphosyntaxique, liste lexicale, textes glosés. *Mandenkan*, 49.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design : choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cummins, J. (1978). Bilingualism and the Development of Metalinguistic Awareness. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 9(2), 131–149.

- d'Avignon, R. (2012). Ethnopolitics in Glass Jars: N'ko literacy and the making of a Mande scientific territory in twentieth century Guinea. Presented at the Africa History and Anthropology Workshop, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Dalby, D. (1967). A survey of the indigenous scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa. *African Language Studies*, 8, 1–51.
- Dalby, D. (1968). The indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam: their inspiration and design. *African Language Studies*, 9, 156–197.
- Dalby, D. (1969). Further indigenous scripts of West Africa: Manding, Wolof, and Fula alphabets and Yoruba holy-writing. *African Language Studies*, 10, 161–191.
- Dalby, D. (1971). Introduction: Distribution and Nomenclature of the Manding People and Their Language. In C. Hodge (Ed.), *Papers on the Manding* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–13). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Publications.
- Davydov, A. (2008). On Souleyman Kante's "Nko Grammar." In V. Vydrin (Ed.), *Abstracts and Papers* (pp. 53–60). St. Petersburg, Russia.
- Davydov, A. (2012). On Souleymane Kanté's Translation of the Quran into the Maninka language. *Mandenkan*, 48, 3–20.
- Delafosse, M. (1901). *Essai de manuel pratique de la langue mandé ou mandingue : étude grammaticale du dialecte dyoula : vocabulaire français-dyoola - histoire de Samori en mandé : étude comparée des principaux dialectes mandé*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
- Delafosse, M. (1904). *Vocabulaires comparatifs de plus de 60 langues ou dialectes parlés à la Côte d'Ivoire et dans les régions limitrophes : avec une bibliographie et une carte*. E. Leroux (Paris).
- Delafosse, M. (1929). *La langue mandingue et ses dialectes (malinké, bambara, dioula)* (Vol. 1). Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- Delafosse, M. (1955). *La langue mandingue et ses dialectes (malinké, bambara, dioula)* (Vol. 2). Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.
- Derive, J. (1987). Parole et pouvoir chez les Dioula de Kong. *Journal des africanistes*, 57(1), 19–30.
- Derive, M.-J. (Ed.). (1978). *Table ronde sur les origines de Kong: les 1-2-3 novembre 1975 à Kong*. Abidjan, Côte-d'Ivoire: Université nationale de Côte-d'Ivoire, Institut d'histoire d'art et d'archéologie africains [et] Institut de linguistique appliquée.
- Derive, M.-J. (1990). *Etude dialectologique de l'aire manding de Côte-d'Ivoire* (Vol. 1). Paris: Editions Peeters.
- Diallo, I. (2012). Qur'anic and Ajami literacies in pre-colonial West Africa. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 13(2), 91–104.
- Diallo, M. (2001). Le noyau du code orthographique du dioula au Burkina Faso. *Mandenkan*, 37, 9–31.
- Diarra, B. (1984). Où en est l'orthographe des tons du bambara à la DNAFLA ? *Mandenkan*, 7, 75–83.
- Diarra, S. O. (1997). Pédagogie convergente. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 6(2).
- Dieterlen, G. (1957). The Mande Creation Myth. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 27(2), 124–138.

- Dixon, R. M. W. (2010). *Basic Linguistic Theory: Methodology* (Vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Djité, P. G. (1989). French in the Ivory Coast. *The French Review*, 62(3), 494–504.
- Djité, P. G. (2000). Language Planning in Cote d'Ivoire. Non scholea sed vitae discimus. We Do Not Study for Academia, but for Real Life. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 1(1), 11–46.
- Djité, P. G. (2008). *The sociolinguistics of development in Africa* (Vol. 139). Clevedon, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.
- Dombrowsky, K. (1994). La Situation Socio-Linguistique du Sud du Mali. In G. Dumestre (Ed.), *Stratégies communicatives au Mali: langues régionales, bambara, français* (pp. 13–88). Paris: Didier Erudition.
- Donaldson, C. (In Press). Orthography, Standardization and Register: The Case of Manding. In P. Lane, J. Costa, & H. De Korne (Eds.), *Standardizing Minority Languages: Competing Ideologies of Authority and Authenticity in the Global Periphery*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Donaldson, C. (2013). Jula Ajami in Burkina Faso : A Grassroots Literacy in the Former Kong Empire. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 28(2), 19–36.
- Donaldson, C. (2015). The Social Life of Orthography Development. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 30(2), 1–12.
- Donnellan, K. S. (1966). Reference and Definite Descriptions. *The Philosophical Review*, 75(3), 281.
- Doualamou, G. (1981). Situation et politique linguistique de la république populaire révolutionnaire de Guinée. In *La définition d'une stratégie relative à la promotion des langues africaines: Documents de la réunion d'experts qui a eu lieu à Conakry (Guinée) 21-25 septembre 1981* (pp. 173–191). UNESCO.
- Doumbia, A. T. (2000). L'enseignement du bambara selon la pédagogie convergente au Mali : théorie et pratiques. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9(3), 98–107.
- Dumestre, G. (1997). De l'école au Mali. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 6(2), 31–55.
- Dumestre, G. (2000). De la scolarité souffrante (compléments à « De l'école au Mali »). *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9(3), 172–186.
- Dumestre, G. (2003). *Grammaire fondamentale du bambara*. Paris, France: Karthala.
- Dumestre, G. (2011). *Dictionnaire bambara-français, suivi d'un index abrégé français-bambara*. Paris: Editions Karthala.
- Dumestre, G., & Retord, G. L. A. (1981). *Kó di? : Cours de dioula*. Université d'Abidjan : Nouvelles éditions africaines.
- Dumestre, G., & Vydrin, V. (2014). Manding Ajami Samples: Mandinka and Bamana. In M. Mumin & K. Versteegh (Eds.), *The Arabic script in Africa: studies in the use of a writing system* (pp. 225–260). Leiden ; Boston: Brill.
- Dumont, B. (1973). *Functional literacy in Mali: training for development*. Paris, France: Unesco.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, F. (1992). The Interface Between Ethnography and Microanalysis. In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Erickson, F., & Shultz, J. J. (1982). *The Counselor As Gatekeeper: Social Interaction in Interviews*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Errington, J. (2001). Colonial linguistics. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19–39.
- Errington, J. (2008). *Linguistics in a colonial world: a story of language, meaning, and power*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Feierman, S. (1990). *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1968). Language Development. In J. A. Fishman, C. A. Ferguson, & J. D. Gupta (Eds.), *Language problems of developing nations* (pp. 27–35). New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Fishman, J. A., Ferguson, C. A., & Dasgupta, J. (1968). *Language problems of developing nations*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Fofana, K. I. (1998). *L'Almami Samori Touré Empereur : récit historique*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Fófana, M. (2008). *ḤḤḤ ḤḤḤ ḤḤḤ ḤḤḤ (N'ko wàsá' dàlu kéndé)* [The true vindication of N'ko]. Bamako, Mali: Bakoroba.
- Freeman, R. D. (1998). *Bilingual Education and Social Change*. Clevedon, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.
- Freire, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Frost, R., & Katz, L. (1992). The reading process is different for different orthographies: The orthographic depth hypothesis. *Orthography, Phonology, Morphology and Meaning*, 94, 67.
- Galtier, G. (1980). *Problèmes dialectologiques et phonographématiques des parlers mandingues* (Thèse pour le doctorat de troisième cycle de linguistique). Université de Paris VII, Paris.
- Galtier, G. (2006). L'évolution de la transcription moderne du bambara: De la conférence de Bamako de 1966 à nos jours. In S. Battestini (Ed.), *De l'écrit africain à l'oral: le phénomène graphique africain*. Paris: l'Harmattan.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century : a global perspective*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Giesing, C., & Vydrin, V. F. (2007). *Ta:rikk Mandinka de Bijini (Guinée-Bissau) : la mémoire des Mandinka et Sòoninke du Kaabu*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Giray, E. (1996). *Nsiirin! Nsiirin! : Jula Folktales from West Africa*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Green, C. (2010). *Prosodic Phonology in Bamana (Bambara): Syllable Complexity, Metrical Structure, and Tone*. University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Green, C. R., & Boutz, J. H. (2016). A prosodic perspective on the assignment of tonal melodies to Arabic loanwords in Bambara. *Mandenkan*, 56, 29–76.
- Grosz-Ngaté, M. (1988). Power and Knowledge. The Representation of the Mande World in the Works of Park, Caillié, Monteil, and Delafosse. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 28(111/112), 485–511.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1962). Types of linguistic communities. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28–40.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Halliday, M. A. (1983). Ideas About Language. *Essays in Honor of Charles F. Hockett*, 4, 15.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1964). Comparison and translation. In M. A. K. Halliday, M. McIntosh, & P. Stevens (Eds.), *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language As Social Semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hames, J. (2017). "A river is not a boundary": interplays of national and linguistic citizenship in Pulaar language activism. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 1–20.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (3rd ed.). London ; New York: Routledge.
- Harrison, A., & Harrison, B. (2002). Sociolinguistic survey report for the Marka-Dafin language. SIL. Retrieved from <http://www.sil.org/resources/archives/9180>
- Haugen, E. (1959). Planning for a Standard Language in Modern Norway. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 1(3), 8–21.
- Haugen, E. (1966). Linguistics and Language Planning. In W. Bright (Ed.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 50–71). The Hague: Mouton.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. B., & Street, B. V. (2008). *On ethnography: approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press : NCRL/National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy.
- Hellweg, J. (2011). *Hunting the ethical state : the Benkadi movement of Côte d'Ivoire*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hellweg, J. (2013). Reading Urbanity: Trans-Urban Assemblages in the N'ko Literacy and Healing Movement of West Africa. In B. Obrist, V. Arlt, & E. Macamo (Eds.), *Living the City in Africa: Processes of Invention and Intervention* (pp. 271–289). Zürich, Switzerland: LIT Verlag.
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. O. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holder, G. (2012). Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara et l'association islamique Ançar Dine. *Cahiers d'études africaines*, (206–207), 389–425.
- Hoover, J. D. (2012). Testing orthographies in the Nko and Roman scripts. *Mandenkan*, (48), 39–58.
- Hopson, R. (2011). Reconstructing Ethnography and Language Policy in Colonial Namibian Schooling. In T. L. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and language policy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1988). *Bilingual Education and Language Maintenance: A Southern Peruvian Quechua Case*. Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1994). Literacy and language planning. *Language and Education*, 8(1–2), 75–86.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1995). Five vowels or three? Linguistics and politics in Quechua language planning in Peru. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Power and Inequality in Language Education* (pp. 187–205). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Hornberger, N. H. (Ed.). (1996). *Indigenous literacies in the Americas: language planning from the bottom up*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hornberger, N. H. (2006). Frameworks and Models in Language Policy and Planning. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: theory and method*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Hult, F. M. (2006). Educational Linguistics. In K. Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics (Second Edition)* (pp. 76–81). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2007). Slicing the Onion Ethnographically: Layers and Spaces in Multilingual Language Education Policy and Practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(3), 509–532.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2011a). The Ethnography of Language Policy. In T. L. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and Language Policy* (pp. 1–28). New York: Routledge.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2011b). The Ethnography of Language Policy. In T. L. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and Language Policy* (pp. 1–28). New York: Routledge.
- Houis, M. (1957). Comment écrire les langues africaines ? *Présence Africaine*, N° XVII(6), 76–92.
- Hult, F. M. (2008). The history and development of educational linguistics. In B. Spolsky & F. M. Hult (Eds.), *The handbook of educational linguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Humery, M.-E. (2012). Lire et écrire en pulaar au Sénégal : le mouvement pulaar, lieu de toutes les résistances. In *L'Afrique des savoirs au sud du Sahara, XVIe-XXIe siècle: acteurs, supports, pratiques* (pp. 287–312). Paris: Karthala.
- Humery, M.-E. (2013). La littératie pulaar : nationalisme culturel, mouvement social ou instrument du développement ? *Cahiers de la recherche sur l'éducation et les savoirs*, (12), 153–176.
- Hunwick, J. O. (1964). The Influence of Arabic in West Africa: A Preliminary Historical Survey. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 7, 24–41.
- Hunwick, J. O. (2004). West Africa and the Arabic Language. *Sudanic Africa*, 15, 133–144.
- Hymes, D. (1962). The ethnography of speaking. *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, 13(53), 11–74.
- Hymes, D. (1964). Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication. *American Anthropologist*, 66(6), 1–34.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*. London: Penguin.
- Hymes, D. (1974). Ways of speaking. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (Eds.), *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking* (Vol. 1, pp. 433–451). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hymes, D. H. (1972). Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life: Toward a Descriptive Theory. In D. H. Hymes & J. J. Gumperz (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (pp. 35–71). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- Kaba, L. (2004). *Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif et son temps: ou Islam et société à Kankan, Guinée (1874-1955)*. Paris: Présence africaine.
- Kane, O. O. (2016). *Beyond Timbuktu*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kánte, S. (1992). ቋንቋ ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት (N'ko kódyidalan' wála fàsarilán' hámin kódyílan') [The N'ko dictionary].
- Kánte, S. (1968). ሃይል ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ (Nininkalibá' 5 n'à jáabi') [Five big questions and their answer]. (B. M. Jàane, Ed.).
- Kánte, S. (1992). ቋንቋ ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት (N'ko kódyidalan' wála fàsarilán' hámin kódyílan') [The N'ko dictionary].
- Kánte, S. (2003). ቋንቋ ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት ነግሥት (N'ko kódyílan Kànjamaadi kán ní kèlennat'ó kàn) [The N'ko Kanjamaadi Dictionary]. (Bàbá Màmádi Jàane, Ed.). Cairo: Jàane, Bàbá Màmádi.
- Kánte, S. (2003). ወላድ ወላድ ወላድ ወላድ ወላድ (Wàaduu wála Gàana kòdómán' à ní Sòsò fàamalá' dǎfǎ') [The history of Waadu or Old Ghana and the Soso kingdoms]. (B. M. Jàane, Ed.) (3rd ed.). Cairo, Egypt.
- Kánte, S. (2004). ለሌሎች ስንግብ (N'ko dâlù kende) [The proper truth of N'ko]. (B. M. Jàane, Ed.). Bamako: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2007–1958). ለሌሎች ወላድ ነግሥት (Màndén fòdòbà kán': dǎfǎ' ládesenen') [The common language of Manden: an abridged history]. (M. Jàrà, Ed.). Bamako: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2008a). ወላድ ነግሥት (Màndén Dǎfǎ') [The history of Manden]. (B. M. Jàane, Ed.). Cairo.
- Kánte, S. (2008b). ለሌሎች ነግሥት (Màndén Kúrafaba') [The Manden Federation]. (B. M. Jàane, Ed.). Cairo.
- Kánte, S. (2008a). ለሌሎች ስንግብ (N'ko' Kángbe' Kùnbabá') [The big book of N'ko grammar]. (M. Jàrà, Ed.). Bamako: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2008b). ወላድ ስንግብ (N'ko' Kángbe' Kùnfǎlǎ') [The first book of N'ko grammar]. (M. Jàrà, Ed.). Bamako: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2009). ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ (Kán' kùrundú': wála N'ko kùrundú': N'ko kàfà sábanan') [The rules of the language or the rules of N'ko]. (M. Jàrà, Ed.). Bamako: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2010). ወላድ ስንግብ (Sùkú' kàfanen fǎlǎ') [The first little book of poems]. Bamako, Mali: Bakoroba.
- Kánte, S. (2011). ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ ስንግብ (Háte!: Yélen' báda kùnbó, nálimún fà kàn sébe' dí, bée jáa à lá bì, fó jède fūyenyala'). Manden N'ko' Lérada'.
- Kánte, S. (n.d.). ስንግብ ስንግብ (Kùrana kála-n-ke') [The holy Quran].
- Kaplan, R. B. (1989). Language planning vs. planning language. In C. N. Candlin & T. F. McNamara (Eds.), *Language, Learning and Community: Festschrift in Honour of Terry Quinn*. Sydney, Australia: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University.

- Levtzion, N. (1973). *Ancient Ghana and Mali*. London: Methuen.
- Liddell, H. G. (1889). *An intermediate Greek-English lexicon : founded upon the seventh edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE.
- Logan, C. (2017). *800 languages and counting: Lessons from survey research across a linguistically diverse continent (Working Paper)*. Afrobarometer.
- Lucy, J. A. (1993). Reflexive Language and the Human Disciplines. In J. A. Lucy (Ed.), *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics* (pp. 9–32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lüpke, F. (2011). Orthography development. In P. K. Austin & J. Sallabank (Eds.), *Handbook of endangered languages* (pp. 312–336). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lüpke, F. (2014). Language planning in West Africa - who writes the script? In P. K. Austin (Ed.), *Language Documentation and Description* (pp. 90–107). London, United Kingdom: SOAS.
- Lüpke, F., & Storch, A. (2013). *Repertoires and choices in African languages*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic semantics : an introduction*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Mack, B. B., & Boyd, J. (Eds.). (2000). *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (4.1.2000 edition). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Makoni, S., & Pennycook, A. (2007). *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Màle, Í. (n.d.). *N'ko lákàranyali' sila sùdun'*. Bamako, Mali: Bakoroba.
- Mansour, G. (1993). The Spread of the Manding Language and the Emergence of Vertical Multilingualism. In *Multilingualism and Nation Building* (Vol. 91, pp. 26–44). Clevedon, England; Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Massing, A. W. (2000). The Wangara, an Old Soninke Diaspora in West Africa? (Les Wangara, une vieille diaspora soninke d'Afrique de l'Ouest?). *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 40(158), 281–308.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design : an interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Mbodj-Pouye, A. (2007). *Des cahiers au village. Socialisations à l'écrit et pratiques d'écriture dans la région cotonnière du sud du Mali*. l'Université Lumière-Lyon 2, Lyon, France.
- Mbodj-Pouye, A. (2013). *Le fil de l'écrit: Une anthropologie de l'alphabétisation au Mali*. Lyon: ENS Éditions.
- McCarty, T. L. (2011a). Entry into Conversation: Introduction Ethnography and Language Policy. In T. L. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and Language Policy* (pp. 1–28). New York: Routledge.
- McCarty, T. L. (Ed.). (2011b). *Ethnography and Language Policy*. New York: Routledge.
- McCarty, T. L., Collins, J., & Hopson, R. K. (2011). Dell Hymes and the New Language Policy Studies: Update from an Underdeveloped Country. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(4), 335–363.

- McLaughlin, F. (2001). Dakar Wolof and the configuration of an urban identity. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 14(2), 153–172.
- Middleton, J., & Miller, J. C. (Eds.). (2008). Education, School. In *New Encyclopedia of Africa* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 200–224). Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Mommersteeg, G. (1991). L'Éducation Coranique au Mali: Le Pouvoir des Mots Sacrés. In L. Brenner & B. Sanankoua (Eds.), *L'enseignement islamique au Mali*. Bamako, Mali: Editions Jamana.
- Monteil, V. (1908). *L'islam noir: une religion à la conquête de l'Afrique*. Paris: Seuil.
- Mumin, M. (2014). The Arabic script in Africa. Understudied Literacy. In M. Mumin & K. Versteegh (Eds.), *The Arabic script in Africa. Studies in the use of a writing system* (pp. 41–78). Leiden ; Boston: Brill.
- Mumin, M., & Versteegh, K. (In Press). Introduction. In M. Mumin & K. Versteegh (Eds.), *The Arabic script in Africa. Studies in the use of a writing system*. Leiden: Brill.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Social motivations for codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Nagy, W. E., & Anderson, R. C. (1995). Metalinguistic awareness and literacy acquisition in different languages. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.457.8112>
- Neustupny, J. V. (1974). Basic Types of Treatment of Language Problems. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in language planning* (pp. 37–48). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Newell, S. (2009). Enregistering Modernity, Bluffing Criminality: How Nouchi Speech Reinvented (and Fractured) the Nation. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 19(2), 157–184.
- Ngom, F. (2009). Ahmadu Bamba's Pedagogy and the Development of 'Ajamī Literature. *African Studies Review*, 52(1), 99–123.
- Ngom, F. (2010). Ajami Scripts in the Senegalese Speech Community. *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 10, 1–23.
- Ngom, F. (2015). Murid Ajami sources of knowledge: the myth and the reality. In M. Kominko (Ed.), *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (pp. 331–375). Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Ngom, F. (2016). *Muslims beyond the Arab world: The odyssey of ajami and the Muridiyya*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- N'Guessan, J. K. (2007). Le français : langue coloniale ou langue ivoirienne ? *Hérodote*, (126), 69–85.
- Niane, D. T. (1960). *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue*. Paris: Présence africaine.
- Nikiéma, N. (2011). A first-language-first multilingual model to meet the quality imperative in formal basic education in three “francophone” West African countries. *International Review of Education*, 57(5–6), 599–616.
- N'ko for Beginners: Introduction. (n.d.). Retrieved December 14, 2013, from <http://www.fakoli.net/nko/tutorial/intro.html>
- N'ko yeta-menta. (n.d.). Retrieved October 20, 2016, from http://www.kanjamadi.com/fadafin_sebe.htm

- Odden, D. (1995). Tone: African Languages. In J. Goldsmith (Ed.), *The Handbook of Phonological Theory* (pp. 444–475). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Odden, D. (2016). Tone in African languages. In R. Vossen (Ed.), *The handbook of African languages* (Vol. 1, pp. 444–475).
- Osborn, E. L. (2011). *Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Ouane, A. (1991). Language standardization in Mali. In U. von Gleich & E. Wolff (Eds.), *Standardization of National Languages: Symposium on Language Standardization, 2-3 February 1991* (Vol. 42). Paris: Unesco Institute for Education.
- Oyler, D. W. (1995). *For “all those who say N’ko”: N’ko literacy and Mande cultural nationalism in the Republic of Guinea* (Ph.D.). University of Florida, United States -- Florida.
- Oyler, D. W. (2001). A Cultural Revolution in Africa: Literacy in the Republic of Guinea since Independence. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 34(3), 585.
- Oyler, D. W. (2005). *The History of the N’ko Alphabet and Its Role in Mandé Transnational Identity: Words as Weapons*. Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers.
- Park, J. S.-Y., & Bucholtz, M. (2009). Introduction. Public transcripts: entextualization and linguistic representation in institutional contexts. *Text & Talk - An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies*, 29(5), 485–502.
- Park, M. (1799). *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed Under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*. W. Bulmer.
- Pawliková-Vilhanová, V. (2009). White Fathers’ Linguistic Work and Contribution to the Development of African Languages and Literature. In K. K. Prah (Ed.), *The role of missionaries in the development of African languages*. Cape Town, South Africa: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society.
- Pérez-Milans, M. (2015). Language and identity in linguistic ethnography. *Tilburg Papers in Cultural Studies*, 132.
- Perrino, S. M. (2002). Intimate Hierarchies and Qur’anic Saliva (Tefli): Textuality in a Senegalese Ethnomedical Encounter. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 12(2), 225–259.
- Person, Y. (1968). *Samori : une révolution dyula*. Dakar, Senegal: Institut fondamental de l’Afrique noire.
- Peterson, B. J. (2008). History, Memory and the Legacy of Samori in Southern Mali, C. 1880-1898. *The Journal of African History*, 49(2), 261–279.
- Philips, J. E. (2000). *Spurious Arabic : Hausa and colonial Nigeria*. Madison, WI: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Philips, J. E. (2004). Hausa in the Twentieth Century. *Sudanic Africa*, 15, 55–84.
- Philips, S. (1983). *The Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*.

- Sanogo, M. L. (2003). L'ethnisme jula: origines et évolution d'un groupe ethnolinguistique dans la boucle du Niger. In Y. G. Madiéga (Ed.), *Burkina Faso, Cents Ans d'Histoire, 1895-1995* (pp. 369–379). Paris, France: Karthala.
- Sanogo, M. L. (2007). Evolution Terminologique et Restructuration d'un Ensemble Linguistique : le Cas du Mandingue. *Revue Electronique Internationale de Sciences Du Langage*, (8).
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language, an introduction to the study of speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Sapir, E. (1985). The Psychological Reality of Phonemes. In *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*. University of California Press.
- Saussure, F. de. (1972). *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.
- Schieffelin, B. B., & Doucet, R. C. (1994). The “real” Haitian Creole: ideology, metalinguistics, and orthographic choice. *American Ethnologist*, 21(1), 176–200.
- Schiffman, H. (1996). *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Schiffman, H. F. (2006). Language policy and linguistic culture. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: theory and method*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Schmidt, E. (2005). *Mobilizing the masses : gender, ethnicity, and class in the nationalist movement in Guinea, 1939-1958*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Schulz, D. (2003). “Charisma and brotherhood” revisited: Mass-mediated forms of spirituality in urban Mali. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33(2), 146–171.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). Indirect Speech Acts. In Cole, Peter, & Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 59–82). New York: Academic Press.
- Sebba, M. (2011). *Spelling and society: the culture and politics of orthography around the world*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Seesemann, R. (2011). *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-century Sufi Revival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sells, M. A. (2007). *Approaching the Qur'an: the early revelations*. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press.
- Showalter, S. (2000). *The Same but Different: Language Use and Attitudes in Four Communities of Burkina Faso*. Dallas, TX.: SIL International.
- Silverstein, M. (1976). Silverstein, Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description. In K. H. Basso & H. Selby (Eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology*. Sante Fe, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Silverstein, M. (1979). Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology. In R. Cline, W. Hanks, & C. Hofbauer (Eds.), *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels* (pp. 193–247). Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Silverstein, M. (1981). The Limits of Awareness. Sociolinguistic Working Paper Number 84.
- Silverstein, M. (1985). Language and the Culture of Gender: At the Intersection of Structure, Usage, and Ideology. In E. Mertz & R. J. Parmentier (Eds.), *Semiotic mediation: sociocultural and psychological perspectives*. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

- Silverstein, M. (1993). Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Function. In J. A. Lucy (Ed.), *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics* (pp. 33–58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Silverstein, M. (1998). Contemporary Transformations of Local Linguistic Communities. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27(1), 401–426.
- Simonis, F. (2010). *L'Afrique soudanaise au Moyen âge: le temps des grands empires (Ghana, Mali, Songhai)*. Marseille: Scérén-CRDP de l'académie d'Aix-Marseille.
- Simonis, F. (2015). Le griot, l'historien, le chasseur et l'Unesco. *Ultramarines*, (28).
- Skattum, I. (Ed.). (2000). *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9(3), 1–5.
- Slezak, G. (2007). La dynamique des langues à Banfora: résultats d'une enquête par questionnaire. In G. Mieke, J. Owen, & M. von Roncador (Eds.), *Language in African Urban Contexts: A Contribution to the Study of Indirect Globalisation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Sow, A. I. (1977). *Langues et politiques de langues en Afrique noire. L'expérience de l'Unesco*. Paris, France: Nubia.
- Sow, A. I., & Abdulaziz, M. H. (1993). Language and social change. In A. A. Mazrui (Ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. VIII: Africa since 1935 (Vol. VIII)*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Spitulnik, D. (1996). The social circulation of media discourse and the mediation of communities. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 6(2), 161–187.
- Spitulnik, D. (1998). The language of the city: Town Bemba as urban hybridity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 8(1), 30–59.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Spolsky, B. (2008). Introduction: What is Educational Linguistics? In B. Spolsky & F. M. Hult (Eds.), *The handbook of educational linguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Stoll, D. (1981). Words can be used in so many ways. In S. Hvalkof & P. Aaby (Eds.), *Is God an American?: an anthropological perspective on the missionary work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (pp. 23–39). Copenhagen : London: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) ; Survival International.
- Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. V. (Ed.). (1993). *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy*. Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Sutton, M., & Levinson, B. A. U. (Eds.). (2001). *Policy as Practice: Toward a Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Educational Policy*. Stamford, Conn: Praeger.
- Sylla, A. B. (1997). La politique linguistique de la Guinée de 1966 à 1984. *Mots*, 52(1), 144–151.
- Tamari, T. (1994). Cinq textes bambara en caractères arabes: présentation, traduction, analyse du système graphique. *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, (8), 97–121.
- Tamari, T. (2006). L'Enseignement Islamique de Niveau Avancé: Cours, Pédagogie, Implications Culturelles et Perspectives Comparatives. *Mande Studies*, 8.

- Tamari, T. (2016). Styles of Islamic Education: Perspectives from Mali, Guinea, and The Gambia. In R. Launay (Ed.), *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (pp. 29–60). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Tamari, T., & Bondarev, D. (2013). Introduction and Annotated Bibliography. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 15(3), 1–55.
- The Experimental World Literacy Programme: A Critical Assessment*. (1976). The Unesco Press & United Nations Development Programme.
- Thiong'o, N. wa. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. London; Portsmouth, NH: J. Currey; Heinemann.
- Tollefson, J. W. (1991). *Planning Language, Planning Inequality*. Longman.
- Touré, A. S. (1967). *L'Afrique en marche* (4th ed.). Imprimerie du Gouvernement.
- Traoré, K. (1991). Problèmes orthographiques de bambara-jula. In N. Cyffer (Ed.), *Language standardization in Africa*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag.
- Traoré, M. L. (2009). L'utilisation des langues nationales dans le système éducatif malien: historique, défis et perspectives. In B. Brock-Utne & I. Skattum (Eds.), *Languages and education in Africa: a comparative and transdisciplinary analysis : edited by Birgit Brock-Utne and Ingse Skattum*. (pp. 155–161). Oxford: Symposium books.
- Travélé, M. (1913). *Petit dictionnaire français-bambara et bambara-français*. Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner.
- Trefault, T. (1999). *L'école malienne à l'heure du bilinguisme: Deux écoles rurales de la région de Ségou*. Paris: Didier Erudition.
- Trudell, B. (2012). Of gateways and gatekeepers: Language, education and mobility in francophone Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(3), 368–375.
- Tuchscherer, K., & Hair, P. E. H. (2002). Cherokee and West Africa: Examining the Origins of the Vai Script. *History in Africa*, 29, 427–486.
- Tucker. (1971). Orthographic Systems and Conventions in Sub-Saharan Africa. In T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Current trends in linguistics* (Vol. 7). The Hague: Mouton.
- Turcotte, D. (1980). La planification linguistique en Côte d'Ivoire: faire du français le véhiculaire national par excellence. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 13(3), 423–439.
- Turcotte, D. (1983). *Lois, règlements et textes administratifs sur l'usage des langues en Afrique occidentale français (1826-1959): répertoire chronologique annoté*. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Turritin, J. (1989). Integrated Literacy in Mali. *Comparative Education Review*, 33(1), 59–76.
- UNESCO. (1964). *The use of mother tongue for literacy: A report on the use of the mother tongue for literacy: conclusion*. Ibadan, Nigeria: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (1966). *Réunion d'un groupe d'experts pour l'unification des alphabets des langues nationales: Bamako (Mali), 28 février - 5 mars 1966*. Paris, France: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (1974). *Meeting of experts on the use of mother tongues in literacy programmes in Africa*. Bamako, Mali.

- Unseth, P. (2008). The sociolinguistics of script choice: an introduction. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2008(192), 1–4.
- Unseth, P. (2011). Invention of scripts in West Africa for ethnic revitalization. In J. A. Fishman & O. García (Eds.), *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Unseth, P. (2015). Multidialectal Orthographies: An Approach to Systematically Spelling Differing Dialects. In C. Dyck, T. Granadillo, & K. Rice (Eds.), *Dialogue on Dialect Standardization* (pp. 9–22). Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2005). Bambara et français-tirailleur. Une analyse de la politique linguistique au sein de l'armée coloniale française: la Grande Guerre et après. *Documents Pour L'histoire Du Français Langue Étrangère Ou Seconde*, 35, 123–150.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2007). Petit-nègre et bambara. La langue de l'indigène dans quelques oeuvres d'écrivains coloniaux en Afrique occidentale française. In D. Perrot-Corpet & C. Queffélec (Eds.), *Citer la langue de l'autre : mots étrangers dans le roman, de Proust à W.G. Sebald* (pp. 77–95). Lyon, France: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2012). Le petit manuel français–bambara à époque coloniale, entre description et appropriation pratique. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 46(2), 251–270.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2014). «De La Bouche Même Des Indigènes» / «From The Mouth Of The Natives». Africanist Linguistics During The Colonial Period: The Native Informant And The Making Of A Linguistic Corpus. *Language and Language Behavior. Saint Petersburg State University.*, 14, 206–213.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2015a). Des pratiques de terrain aux descriptions linguistiques : la constitution d'un savoir scientifique sur les langues africaines. Le cas des langues mandingues. In M. Espagne & H.-J. Lüsebrink (Eds.), *Transferts de savoirs sur l'Afrique* (pp. 203–226). Paris: Karthala.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2015b). Reducing languages to writing: the politics of transcription in early colonial French Bamanan handbooks. In K. Zimmermann & B. Kellermeier-Rehbein (Eds.), *Colonialism and Missionary Linguistics*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Van den Avenne, C. (2017). L'exploration coloniale en ses langues: Une philologie des carnets africains du capitaine Binger. *Genèses*, (106), 131–153.
- Vydrin, V. (1998). Sur l'écriture mandingue et mandé en caractères arabes (mandinka, bambara, soussou, mogofin). *Mandenkan*, (33), 1–86.
- Vydrin, V. (2009). On the problem of the Proto-Mande homeland. *Вопросы Языкового родства–Journal of Language Relationship*, 1, 107–142.
- Vydrin, V. (2011). L'alternative du N'ko : une langue écrite mandingue commune, est-elle possible ? In K. V. Alexander (Ed.), *Pluralité des langues, pluralité des cultures: regards sur l'Afrique et au-delà ; mélanges offerts à Ingse Skattum à l'occasion des on 70ème anniversaire*. Oslo: Novus forl.
- Vydrin, V. (2012). Une bibliographie préliminaire des publications maninka en écriture N'ko. *Mandenkan*, (48), 59–120.

- Vydrin, V. (2014). Ajami Scripts for Mande Languages. In M. Mumin & K. Versteegh (Eds.), *The Arabic script in Africa: studies in the use of a writing system* (pp. 199–224). Leiden ; Boston: Brill.
- Vydrin, V. (2016a). *Cours de grammaire bambara*. Paris: Presses de l'INALCO.
- Vydrin, V. (2016b). Toward a Proto-Mande reconstruction and an etymological dictionary. *Faits de Langues*, (47), 109–123.
- Vydrin, V., Bergman, T. G., & Benjamin, M. (2001). Mandé Language Family of West Africa: Location and Genetic Classification. *SIL International*, 2000(3). Retrieved from <http://www.sil.org/silesr/2000/2000-003/Manding/Manding.htm>
- Vydrin, V., & Konta, M. (2014). Propositions pour l'orthographe du bamanankan. *Mandenkan*, (52), 22–54.
- Vydrine, V. (1995–1996). Who speaks Mandekan? : A note on current use of Mande ethnonyms and linguonyms. *MANSA Newsletter*, (25), 6–9.
- Vydrine, V. (1996). Sur le “Dictionnaire Nko.” *Mandenkan*, (31), 59–75.
- Vydrine, V. (1999a). Les parties du discours en bambara: un essai de bilan. *Mandenkan*, 35, 72–93.
- Vydrine, V. (1999b). *Manding-English dictionary : Maninka, Bamana*. St. Petersburg: Dimitry Bulanin.
- Vydrine, V. (2001a). Lettres de Souleymane Kanté et Maurice Houis. *Mande Studies*, 3, 133–146.
- Vydrine, V. (2001b). Souleymane Kanté, un philosophe-innovateur traditionnaliste maninka vu à travers ses écrits en nko. *Mande Studies*, (3), 99–131.
- Vydrine, V. (2010). Le Ñkó kódyidalan de Souleymane Kanté et la tradition lexicographique «occidentale» pour le mandingue. *Mandenkan*, 46, 73–98.
- Waddell, K. (2016, November 16). The Alphabet That Will Save a People From Disappearing. *The Atlantic*.
- Ware III, R. T. (2014). *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Weinreich, U. (1954). Is a structural dialectology possible? *Word*, 10(2–3), 388–400.
- Weinreich, U., Labov, W., & Herzog, M. I. (1968). Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change. In W. Lehmann & Y. Malkiel (Eds.), *Directions for Historical Linguistics* (pp. 97–195). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Welmers, W. E. (1949). Tonemes and tone in writing in Maninka. *Studies in Linguistics*, 7(1), 1–17.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (2006). Anatomy of the Salafi Movement. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(3), 207–239.
- Wilks, I. (1968). The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan. In J. Goody (Ed.), *Literacy in traditional societies* (pp. 162–197). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Wilks, I. (2000). The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest. In N. Levtzion & R. Pouwels (Eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (pp. 93–115). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Williams, C. (1994). *Arfarniad o ddulliau dysgu ac addysgu yng nghyd-destun addysg uwchradd ddwyieithog*. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Wales, Bangor, Bangor, Wales.
- Woolard, K. A. (1998). Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry. In B. B. Schieffelin, K. A. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wortham, S. (1996). Mapping participant deictics: A technique for discovering speakers' footing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(3), 331–348.
- Wortham, S. (2001). *Narratives in action: a strategy for research and analysis*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wortham, S. (2008). Linguistic anthropology of education. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37, 37–51.
- Wortham, S. E. F. (2005). Socialization beyond the Speech Event. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15(1), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2005.15.1.95>
- Wortham, S., & Reyes, A. (2015). *Discourse Analysis beyond the Speech Event*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wyrod, C. (2003). *The Light on the Horizon: N'ko Literacy and Formal Schooling in Guinea* (Master's Thesis). George Washington University.
- Wyrod, C. (2008). A social orthography of identity: the N'ko literacy movement in West Africa. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2008(192).
- Yerende, E. (2005). Ideologies of Language and Schooling in Guinea-Conakry. In B. Brock-Utne & R. K. Hopson (Eds.), *Languages of instruction for African emancipation: focus on postcolonial contexts and considerations*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania : Cape Town, South Africa: Mkuki n Nyota Publishers ; Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS).
- Zappa, F. (2011). When Arabic Resonates in the Words of an African Language: Some Morphological Features and Semantic Features of Arabic Loanwords and Calques in Bambara. In G. Lancioni & L. Bettini (Eds.), *The Word in Arabic* (pp. 229–249). Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Zito, A. (2012). *Prosperity and Purpose, Today and Tomorrow: Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and Discourses of Work and Salvation in The Murridiya Sufi Order of Senegal* (Doctoral Dissertation). Boston University, Boston, MA.