

changing definitions evidence of contestations within and between linguistic communities. Translation is thus integral to conceptual history not only as the scholar's burden but also as a matter of negotiation and contestation among language users. It is, along with other methodological considerations put forward in this rich volume, another domain for doing conceptual history in Africa.

Harri Englund
University of Cambridge
hme25@cam.ac.uk

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Tamba M'bayo, *Muslim Interpreters in Colonial Senegal, 1850–1920: mediations of knowledge and power in the Lower and Middle Senegal River Valley*. London and Lanham MD: Lexington Books (hb £54.95 – 978 1 4985 0998 5). 2016, 203 pp.

Discussing the issue of Muslim interpreters in French colonial Africa, Tamba M'bayo follows in the footsteps of a new generation of social scientists such as Benjamin Lawrence, who believe that by placing African interpreters in a central position, the world of academia can generate more positive understandings of them and their roles. Drawing on archival/written and oral evidence, M'bayo attests that from the 1850s to the early 1920s, Muslim interpreters functioned as indigenous intermediaries between French colonial officials and Africans along the Lower and Middle Senegal River.

Due to a lack of empirical studies, M'bayo believes that the functions of Muslim interpreters as transmitters of socio-cultural and political knowledge in the context of French colonial rule have been misrepresented and misunderstood. His book shows, through the intermediaries' perspectives rather than those of the French officials (in the administration and army), how interpreters mediated between French and Africans during a period of military intrusion and economic competition, leading to full colonial occupation by the end of the nineteenth century.

First, he affirms that depictions of Muslim interpreters as collaborators or unscrupulous, dishonest, untrustworthy individuals in previous publications and general accounts have made it difficult to perceive their roles as 'cultural brokers, emissaries, diplomatic hosts, military and expedition guides, and treaty negotiators'. In Chapter 4, M'bayo states his belief that they played central roles in transmitting messages between French authorities and Africans, keeping communication channels open and allowing them to navigate between the two spheres. Because of this role, 'they shaped the power dynamics at play in relations' between the two groups. He also mentions how French colonial authorities recognized their important work, leading certain French governors such as Faïdherbe and Brière de l'Isle to highlight their roles in the success of the civilizing mission. Further evidence of their importance to French elites is the French colonial transformation of the School of Hostages, *École des Otages*, into the School of Sons of Chiefs and Interpreters, *École de Fils des Chefs et des Interprètes*.

M'bayo concedes that certain cases of disloyalty and self-interest did exist. However, most interpreters were men of integrity who were aware of their difficult mission of balancing personal, communal and French interests. For the author, it seems irrational to portray them as a homogeneous group of French puppets or self-seeking career opportunists, given the complex evolution of the

French colonial system over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century as well as the competing forces, constraints and opportunities the Muslim interpreters faced. M'bayo redefines the relationships between colonizers and colonized to see them as 'reciprocal and symbiotic relations in which both groups contested and negotiated the terms of power relations'. His approach allows us to situate the interpreters in the context of the moment (temporal and spatial), and enables us to think about the internal pressures (such as growing conversion to Islam) as well as the external pressures (such as colonization and French rule making) that made the second half of the nineteenth century a complex and challenging period for both groups.

The intersections of gender, interpretership and the French colonial system are also discussed. In Saint-Louis, female interpreters were exceptional, almost non-existent. For M'bayo, the reason may be the growing influence of Islamic patriarchy in the region, which prevented women from participating in public office; it may also have been the result of traditional African patriarchal hierarchies. With regards to the opinion that the French administration did not employ women officially as interpreters during the period studied, the author affirms that no archival/written or oral evidence exists.

M'bayo discusses the interaction of Islam and the French colonial system. Some Muslims were concerned that Muslim interpreters worked for a non-Muslim colonial administration. How did the Muslim interpreters deal with the French concept of '*mission civilisatrice*'? Muslim interpreters did not see their employment as detrimental to the Islamic faith, as long as their employers respected the practice of Islam among Muslims. The most complicated challenges Muslim interpreters faced were whether the French would respond to growing demands for a Muslim court, and whether they met their employment obligations. Through examining these issues, M'bayo demonstrates how Islamic identities were constructed and makes us appreciate the different agencies interpreters navigated. In the end, as M'bayo highlights, Muslim interpreters were successful in pushing Faïdherbe to create the Muslim tribunal for Saint-Louis in 1857.

For M'bayo, Muslim interpreters chose to perform a 'selective kind of French acculturation to the extent [that] they sought to get the better of the two different and often conflicting worlds'. They hoped to satisfy both their own needs and the needs of the French by enhancing their influence over the French and the local population. This process is what the author calls becoming 'Frenched' or reinventing their Muslim identity over time, as the French reinforced their grip on policymaking and as the importance of Saint-Louis grew.

This account is a very well-written, easy-to-read book. Most importantly, it sheds new light on the roles played by interpreters and intermediaries in general, and, more specifically, on the important role of Muslim interpreters.

Aliou Ly

Middle Tennessee State University

Aliou.Ly@mtsu.edu

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Mara A. Leichtman, *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese migration and religious conversion in Senegal*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 253 01599 0; pb US\$30 – 978 0 253 01601 0). 2015, 294 pp.

For a long time, scientific work on the phenomenon of migrations within sub-Saharan Africa has focused on population movements towards more prosperous