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Samba Diop. *The Oral History and Literature of the Wolof People of Waalo Northern Senegal: The Master of the Word (Griot) in the Wolof Tradition.* Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995. 389 pp. $99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7734-9031-4.

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To be honest, a review of this work is premature. Despite the author's assertion that the book is a complete revision of his dissertation, the two texts are virtually identical; anyone who balks at the $99.95 price charged by Edwin Mellen will find the UMI version entirely acceptable at a lower price and in some regards in a more appropriate format.

The core of this book, and its greatest asset, is a 975-line transcribed performance of the legend of Njaajaan Njaay, which tells about the origin of the Wolof kingdoms of Waalo, Kajoor, and Jolof. The author has chosen to present the two texts (Wolof and English translation, pp. 69-94; 95-120) in series, rather than on facing pages, as has been done for a number of other dissertations in the United States and in Senegal; the facing-page format would have been preferable.

The legendary tale starts with the time of Noah and the flood (although Diop does not note this, the fishermen of the Senegal river, the *subalbe* or *cuballo*, make this moment their myth of origin), and continues through the migrations of peoples. Njaajaan's father, Bubakar Umar, is said to have come from Jordan to Ghana and thence into Senegal, accompanied by a servant, Mbaarik Bo. In Senegal he married the mother of Njaajaan, but was then wounded and traveled east to die. He left conditions for his wife's remarriage, which the servant Mbaarik Bo fulfilled. Outraged at the lowly status of his stepfather, Njaajaan dove into the river and remained there for seven years, swimming downstream and stopping in various localities.

Njaajaan eventually emerged when he found children fighting over their fish; each at that time would throw his catch on the ground in a common pile, with no way of marking ownership. Njaajaan divided the fish equally among the children, and then taught them how to run a string through the gills, so each could keep his own catch. The adults of the village were surprised that the children stopped fighting among themselves, and learned about the aquatic culture hero; they set a trap for Njaajaan and caught him.

But he refused to talk to them, until one man thought of a trick: Njaajaan was deprived of food for several days, and then the man set about preparing food in front of the captive. But he used only two rocks on which to balance the cooking pot, and it kept tipping over. Finally, Njaajaan spoke (in Pulaar) to tell him to use three rocks. Thereafter, Njaajaan became the leader of the army; his half-brother (through his remarried mother) came and acknowledged his seniority; and the griot concludes with some observations on the origin of various Njaay clans.

The analysis that accompanies this narrative is disappointing. The frame of reference is almost exclusively that of European traditions of comparative literature (the field in which the author's degree was awarded) with too little attention paid to local and regional material (Soninke traditions of Wagadu, the Tukolor traditions of the Futa Toro, or even the Islamic/Arabic histories of the region). The author has missed a number of major sources that should have been included; principal among these would be Jean Boulegue's book, *Le Grand Jolof* (Paris, Editions Facades/Karthala, 1987), which, among other things, reprints the earliest available version of the story of Njaajaan Njay, collected between 1774 and 1778 by Alexandre Le Brasseur, then the governor of Goree (Boulegue, pp. 25-26). Nor does this "revised"

description of Wolof oral literature cover the excellent collection made by Bassirou Dieng, *L'Epopee du Kajoor* (Dakar/Paris, Ed. Khoudia, 1992[?]), which gives two series of epics covering the history of Kajoor (Cayor) by two different performers. The focus on the Waalo, a river-side subdivision of the Wolof states, is too limiting here.

The study, and the text, raise a number of questions which are not answered, but which may be worth posing:

1. What is the nature of the oral tradition behind Njaajaan Njay? It is a story everyone knows; on what occasions is it narrated or sung? The Wolof *gewel* or griot is far better known for praise-singing; discussions of griots sometimes focus on the sociological rather than the performative. It would be useful to have a description of typical performance occasions and repertoire (following the model of Roderick Knight's excellent dissertation on *Mandinka Jeliya* of the Gambia, UCLA 1974).

2. What is the relationship of the Wolof tradition with that of other groups? The story starts in the world of Arabic/Islamic travelers, and Njaajaan Njay will eventually speak Pulaar when he breaks his silence. The Wolof epic tradition coexists with a better documented Pulaar tradition in the Senegal valley, and also shows signs of influence from the Mande world to the east. In the region, the surname Njay/Ndiaye is not only Wolof, but also Soninke. Some attention paid to local cultural borrowings, rather than references to medieval European literature, would seem appropriate.

3. What idioms of power are articulated in this myth of origin? Can one compare Njaajaan Njay with Koli Tengela or Malik Sy or other state-founders? A methodological model here would be the analysis by Lilyan Kesteloot, C. Barbey, and S. M. Ndongo of *Tyamaba, Mythe Peul*, which appeared as a special issue of *Notes Africaines* (nos. 185-186, Jan.-April 1985), although one might multiply such references.

Consideration of these questions would have strengthened the author's analysis and the annotation considerably. They would have led to a greater focus and precision in the discussion. As it stands, much of the work is too general (for example, the discussion of the flood myth, pp. 127-30): the author goes from his specific transcription to universal patterns of folklore and literature, which at times are irrelevant in the light of local connections and echoes. Organization is another problem; actual discussion of the Wolof comes only toward the end of the work (pp. 229 ff.) or is buried in the notes (for example, the historical Njaajaan Njay, discussed on pp. 161-64) and should really be placed much earlier: at the start.

A true revision of the project would involve a thorough review of available sources leading to some description of the narrative tradition over time and in its present social and performative context, and only then attempt interpretation in terms of more global patterns. As it stands, the book is unfortunately not particularly useful. While the text of the story is a welcome addition to the available corpus of epic and historical traditions, the scholarship that accompanies it is incomplete.

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