TRANS-BORDER LANGUAGE ACTIVISM AMONG THE HAALPULAAR'EN OF SENEGAL AND MAURITANIA

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My research deals with a network of Pulaar speakers from West Africa who have practiced forms of literacy teaching, broadcasting, theater, poetry and political activism aimed at promoting their language. Pulaar, also known as Fulfulde, is spoken by millions of people around the Sahel region, with small to significant minorities in countries like Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, as well as several other nations. Most of those I have interviewed have ties to the Middle Senegal River Valley, a region known locally as "Fuuta Tooro," and which straddles the border between Senegal and Mauritania. I consider these people to be "language activists" because they seek to expand the influence of Pulaar in such public domains as education, the media and politics. Between 2010 and 2015, I made four fieldwork trips to Senegal and Mauritania and one to France, where there are many Pulaar-speaking migrants.

One of my interests is how Pulaar language activists attempt to instill an attitude of language loyalty among their fellow Pulaar speakers. The context for this is one in which Wolof, Senegal's lingua franca, has increasingly been tied to Senegalese national identity and in which the Mauritanian government has attempted to implement Arabization in its education and civil service systems. Meanwhile *Haalpulaar'en*, or *Fulbe*, as Pulaar speakers are known, make up about 15% to 20% of the combined populations of both countries. In radio broadcasts, movies, public events and daily conversation, Pulaar language activists valorize demonstrations of loyalty to their language in the face of social pressure to speak more dominant languages. Moreover, proving a willingness to sacrifice and forego personal wealth in the name of promoting Pulaar legitimizes one's credibility within the movement.

My last two fieldwork trips to Senegal and Mauritania occurred from December 2012 to March 2013 and during the summer of 2015, respectively. The first of these trips involved ethnographic research with community radio stations in Northern Senegal. Established as rural development projects with the help of NGOs and development agencies, the radio stations I researched devote much of their broadcasting to themes associated with Pulaar linguistic pride. Many staff members for these radio stations have backgrounds as Pulaar militants, having volunteered or worked as literacy teachers. Importantly, many of their most loyal audience members reside on the Mauritanian side of the border, creating a new domain for the expression of solidarity rooted in the cultural and linguistic ties shared by many people on both sides of the Senegal-Mauritania border. For the most recent of my trips to the field, during the summer of 2015, I travelled to Dakar (Senegal), Nouakchott (Mauritania) and back to the Senegal River Valley. The objective of this trip was conducting biographical interviews with long-term Pulaar language activists. Their insights helped me understand how the movement has been shaped by political developments in Senegal and Mauritania over the past several decades. Among my findings is that the vibrant trans-border collaboration between Senegalese and Mauritanian Pulaar language activists represents more than a form of local resistance against outside influences. Rather, it has often been made possible by opportunities tied to post-colonial state-building and national citizenship.

John Hames is a doctoral candidate in anthropology. *His research has been funded by the West African Research Association, the Center for African Studies, the Center for European Studies, the Department of Anthropology, and the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere.*