The Pedagogical Innovations and Ethical Challenges of Integrating an Online Version of the Registers of the Liberation of Senegal (1857-1903) into the Teaching of History in the Senegalese Middle Cycle Public Schooling

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Abstract

This article analyzes the possibility of a pedagogical renewal in the teaching of the history of the slave trade and slavery in middle cycle (four years of study that can begin at the age of twelve) public school classrooms in Senegal. It does so by proposing that aspects of middle cycle curricula be built around an open-source, online version of the Senegal Registers of Liberation (1857-1903) in order to achieve the National Education Orientation Law of 1991 and the Consolidated History Program of 2006. In this article, we identify the current limits of teaching about the slave trade and slavery and propose new approaches, taking into account innovative pedagogical perspectives that are essential to the training of students congruent with the evolution of historical methodologies in the digital humanities. Beyond this, the article shows the importance of addressing ethical questions around the public use of names of enslaved people which appear in the Senegal Registers of Liberation. In sum, the article explores and proposes revisions in the teaching of the slave trade and slavery in Senegal using digital resources.

Introduction

In 2006, the Republic of Senegal introduced its Consolidated History Program, which stated that the study of history in public schools must contribute to shaping independent, critical, and conscientious citizens. It should enable them not only to acquire scientific and humanistic knowledge, but also the critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and understanding of how the past shapes the present that will enable them to become Senegalese citizens capable of proudly assuring the country's destiny in Africa and the world. It is an understatement, to say the least, to observe that slave trade and slavery are minimally analyzed in middle cycle history curricula in Senegal.[1] Improving our approach to teaching the subject is important because in the precolonial period, the Atlantic slave trade had a significant impact on Senegal, and slavery, as an institution, became common in some societies. Further, the legacy of the slave trade and of domestic slavery weighs heavy on Senegalese society today. One cannot understand the present without understand the impact of slavery and the slave trade.

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Today the focus of middle cycle schooling is broad and not to a great extent Senegal-specific. Students are taught about the mechanisms and circuits of the slave trade and commerce through the study of ancient African civilizations (such as Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia), the empires of medieval Sudan and West Africa (such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Sokoto, and Macina), the Mossi kingdoms, the states of the Gulf of Guinea (Yoruba and Benin) and the societies of Senegambia (such as Jolof, Gaabu, Fouladou) [Republique du Senegal 2006]. Further, under the current middle cycle curriculum, teaching about slavery does not concretely promote the effective application of important pedagogical methods and approaches, such as expository writing and dialogue and task methods,[2] which are, after all, essential to learners. It is at this level that the open-source, online dataset derived from the Senegal Registers of Liberation, a unique historical

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register of the liberations of nearly 30,000 enslaved people in Senegal between 1857 and May 1903, can be useful in pedagogical innovations in teaching about the slave trade and slavery in Africa and Senegal.[3] The Registers provide information on ages, genders, categories, and origins of freed enslaved people, their pathways towards liberation, and the evolution and dynamics of the end of slavery in West Africa.

Based on the directives of the National Education Orientation Laws (1991) and the Consolidated History Program (2006), this article demonstrates how, when transcribed and made accessible online in an open-source format, these registers can promote new pedagogical innovations in the teaching of the slave trade and slavery in Senegal. These innovations are centered on the pedagogy of what we call "discovery exploitation construction" in the digital humanities. Our approach involves the creation of new teaching paradigms that emerge from the online presentation and integration of the registries into middle cycle curricula.

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Thus, our reflection will be articulated around four aspects. First, we will review the current teaching of the slave trade and slavery and its limits; second, we will analyze the possible pedagogical and didactic perspectives of the liberation registers; third, we will look at the ethics necessary for the use of digital humanities in the teaching of the history of coercion in Senegalese middle cycle schooling; and finally, we will explore the challenges the liberation registers raise.

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I. Teaching about the Slave Trade and Slavery in Senegal: A Status Report

After independence from France in 1960, Senegal embarked on a process of curriculum reform to align public schooling with the aspirations of the nation and its newly independent people. Curricular reforms took place in 1965, 1998, and 2006, resulting in a national consolidated curriculum in 2006. In the 2006 Consolidated History Program for the middle cycle curricula, the theme of the slave trade and slavery is addressed through specific and general lessons. The aim of these lessons is:

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> to help students acquire the concepts and facts that will enable them to better understand the events, [but also] to develop specific skills in the subject; to encourage them to pose problems and [...] ask questions; to lead them to be autonomous in the development of their own knowledge [Republique du Senegal 2006, 3].

. The objective is to form "autonomous and supportive" citizens, capable of demonstrating "mobilizable knowledge" on the history of Senegal and Africa, to be based on the historical approach and methodology, to have an irreversible patriotic and civic posture, and to assume responsibility in any circumstance and situation. This is in accordance with the Orientation Law (1991), which stipulates that National Education must aim to:

- "Raise the cultural level of the nation" or, in other words, build the nation by training citizens who are cultured and proud of their Senegalese origins; and
- "Train free men and women, capable of creating the conditions for their fulfillment at all levels, of contributing to the development of science and technology, and of providing effective solutions to the problems of national development. [Republique du Senegal 1991]"

Including instruction on the slave trade and slavery in the curriculum enables learners to become aware of their past, however painful it may be, and to construct a valorizing perception of Black Africans. This historical theme links school education to current issues, which are linked to the problem of identity in an increasingly globalizing world. The goal was therefore to create in young Senegalese a sense of attachment to a community of people who built the Americas through their own sweat and blood and, therefore, to be proud of this community's trajectory and help shape its future. What is really sought is the need to encourage a certain social and patriotic commitment among students, a commitment that would be a useful viaticum to get rid of the colonial negation associated with Black Africans. The idea is, in short, to create in the student a sense of "cultural nationalism" and Black pride.

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Some twenty lessons and a few consolidation activities are devoted to the issue of the slave trade and slavery in the middle cycle curricula. In most of the lessons, this phenomenon is approached from the angle of the civilizations of the great empires or kingdoms of ancient and medieval Africa (see L6 to L11 in the 6th grade; L6 to L11 and then L14 to

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L17 in the 5th grade; L10 to L15 in the 4th grade). Aspects of the slave trade that are covered in detail are its origins, mechanisms, evolution, and consequences.

These curricula do not always make it possible for teachers to delve deeply into, among other things, the demographics of the slave trade (e.g., its volume over time and particularly from Senegal, its patterns with regard to the gender and age of enslaved people, and its differential impact on regions in Senegal and across West Africa). In addition, teachers do not have access to materials that make it possible to explore the actors involved — elites who controlled processes of enslavement and, importantly, the enslaved themselves, some of whom were exported into the Atlantic and some of whom remained in bondage in Africa itself. Apart from Toussaint Louverture, no enslaved person is ever named in the lessons on these issues. The teaching of the phenomenon has not changed in the schools; the curriculum approaches generalized populations of enslaved people as products, not as actors. Students are exposed to historical and literary texts on the subject, they visit the Slave House on Gorée Island, and they prepare a dossier on Gorée in the slave trade or on research work to be presented in the form of a lecture. This means that the learners are more involved in storytelling and narration than in the analysis and critical exploration of concrete and primary historical resources. The teachers' background readings of the slave trade in the classroom reflect an embryonic conception of the facts that consists "almost exclusively in blaming exogenous factors for the fate of Africa from the 15th century onwards" [Seck 2009, 72].

If we want to comply with one of the recommendations of the Consolidated History Program to instill students with "a conception of history that privileges the facts of civilization, economic, [statistical], political, social and cultural data" [Republique du Senegal 2006, 5], it is imperative that students be exposed to statistical resources when learning about the slave trade and slavery. It is also imperative that we humanize the study of slavery and the slave trade in Senegal, centering named people whose life histories are relatable and understandable. The Senegal Registers of Liberation are, therefore, appropriate for studying and understanding the social history of this era, focusing first on the captives and only then preceding to the political, economic, and institutional history of this phenomenon. This would be a history that allows students to have a panoramic vision of a dark chapter in the evolution of Africa.

II. Pedagogical and Didactic Perspectives of the Freed Slaves Register

The Registers of Liberation, an official government record of the liberation of enslaved people in Senegal between 1857 and 1903, which was recorded by French colonial officials after slavery was abolished in Senegal, consists of twenty registers that together contain evidence of 28,930 liberations. They record "the date, the identification number assigned to that specific liberation, the name of the enslaved person, place of birth, age, place of liberation in the colony of Senegal, and name and position of the colonial administrator who authorized the liberation" [Goodwin, Ivans, Roberts, and Wall 2021]. A team of Senegalese and American researchers have transcribed the registers into a dataset and are making a searchable and analyzable version available (https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/5185180). As a compilation of liberations, the registers are a dashboard of freed enslaved people, a kind of tracing of freedoms. They make it possible to analyze the rate and pace of releases and to better understand the geopolitical and economic restructuring in a region like Senegambia. They clearly show that "unaccompanied minors accounted for 68% of the total number of unaccompanied women" [Goodwin, Ivans, Roberts, and Wall 2021]. Indeed, the release of young people was more frequent than that of the elderly. The period of release is also an interesting aspect studied by the registers. Goodwin et al. affirm that a "majority of releases occurred between the months of March and June (41%), the months of October to January account for only 26% of the total releases between 1894 and 1903" [Goodwin, Ivans, Roberts, and Wall 2021]. The registers are, in short, a document that traces the captives and their social and cultural history. They become, therefore, a pedagogical resource of paramount importance. Their use can allow for a finer analysis of the dynamics of liberation in Senegal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by promoting interactive teaching strategies which are at the heart of pedagogical practices. But how?

Registers I, III, V, IX, XI, XIV, and XVII, which detail captives' liberation from August 6, 1857 to April 14, 1903, are a rich and significant pedagogical resource in teaching 4th grade lessons 5 (the economic consequences of the slave trade in Africa), 7 (the slave trade in Senegal), and 8 (the abolitionist movement).[4] In classroom practices and in developing curricula, the teachers can address the following elements:

- In Lesson 5, they explore how the slave trade and slavery in Africa contributed to the disorganization of African economies, the depopulation of the continent, the disorganization of society, the reinforcement of social inequalities and the conflicts between kingdoms;
- In Lesson 7, they analyze the origins and evolution of enslavement and slavery in this country and how enslavement and slavery contributed to its political, social, and demographic consequences by insisting on the same elements mentioned previously;
- In Lesson 8, the focus is on the causes of the suppression of this phenomenon.[5]

Figure 1. Administrative document with information related to freed enslaved people, including their civil status and origin.

Figure 2. Administrative document with further information related to freed enslaved people, including their date of release, the names of their parents, those of the declarants, etc.

Moreover, the content of the Registers of Liberation allows us to go beyond these aspects. A rigorous exploitation of this resource helps to see and insert into the lessons the geographic and social origins of the captives, the periods of liberation, and the actions of enslaved people. The registers also allow us to create and teach both demographic histories of generalized populations and life histories of named enslaved individuals. We can at once understand broad patterns and humanize the study of slavery by piecing together shards of information recorded in the primary source to uncover histories of named enslaved people's networks, familial relations, movements, and more. An analysis of the liberations between 1881 and 1885 shows, for example, that the captives freed by the jurisdictions of Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, Dagana, and Get Ndar came from various regions of Senegambia: Sudan, Brouillard, Gambia, Fouta Diallon, Ouassoulou, Ngabou, Cayor, Casamance, Haut-Niger, Guidimakha, Boundou, and others. All age groups were represented, as indicated in the registry: children (1 to 14 years), adolescents (15 to 25 years), adults (27 to 50 years). And within each of those age groups, the registers allow us to dig down to the level of the individual and understand through fragmentary data something about the individual's unique life history.

The registers thus offer a panoply of teaching and learning activities, including:

- running statistical analysis of data from the registry to identify the distribution and classification of captives by gender, age, and geographic origin;
- computing the number of liberations by time period;
- discerning the leading consequences of enslaved people's liberty;
- constructing bar, pie, and semicircle diagrams according to the objectives assigned to a lesson;
- analyzing data to answer a wide range of issues essential to understanding the slave trade, its consequences, and its abolition in Senegal and Africa; and
- writing life histories of enslaved people from shards of recorded information.

These lessons are based on the manipulation of digital data in the Registers of Liberation. Thus, specifically, we could

have, among other things, pedagogical interventions related to the registry, such as project-based approaches and cooperative learning.

Project-based approaches promote a rewarding educational experience by making it possible to highlight activities in the classroom that lead to the production of new concrete knowledge on a question. They introduce learners to the processing of "different data to give them meaning according to the objectives pursued, defined and decided by the collective in charge of the project" [Boutet 2016, 28]. Project-based approaches approaches are therefore a pedagogy of experience that encourages the learner to "understand reality".

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Cooperative pedagogy makes it possible to learn from others and strengthens citizenship and critical thinking, thereby promoting positive interdependence. In other words, it is a pedagogy intended to make learners understand that the process of acquiring knowledge and knowledge is based on mutualization and that the percentage of success is also the result of pooling in training. Cooperative learning includes the category of social interaction models. In short, the approaches described above help the teacher to be part of the objective-based pedagogy recommended in teaching-learning.

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It is easy to see that the advantage of the registry is that it can promote active and guided methods. In active methods, the teacher places the student at the center of learning, encouraging them to construct their own knowledge by using a variety of teaching resources adapted from the information in the registers. Such active methods, fundamental in historical practice, fulfill the goals of the Consolidated History Program but require an "organized and methodical sequence plan" focused on situational and prerequisite (cognitive) preparation, modeling (explanatory phase), guided practice, objectification, regular revisions, and evaluation [Couerbe 2015]. This sequencing aims to motivate students, to inform them, and to encourage them to analyze data, interact with one another, and produce historical analyses. It places learners in the timeframe of the history of the phenomenon studied and its multiple ramifications. Exploring, analyzing, and interpreting digital data with students allows them to become aware, from a comparative pedagogical perspective, of the multicultural and multifaceted nature of the slave trade and slavery, to grasp "the identities forged there, and to integrate into the construction of historical knowledge a community of [Black] destiny that concerns the past and the present as well as the future" [Heimberg 2009, 21].

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Beyond the "active approach" that the registers could promote in teaching and learning, their appropriate and practical use argues in favor of three theoretical currents: cognitivism, constructivism, and socioconstructivism. As Cardin writes, "These three approaches have in common that they recognize the determining role of the learner in the construction of his or her own knowledge and skills" [Cardin 2009, 34–35]. The use of evidence from the Registers of Liberation enables instructors to adapt their teaching of the slave trade to the intelligence and personality of the students. This enables them to examine the socio-cultural statistics of the phenomenon in question through pedagogical testing (activities, tasks, and confrontations). Advocating an "ethical use of the document", in turn, allows students to construct history and to get out of the straitjacket of the standard history of the slave trade and slavery, which is limited to recounting its causes, mechanisms, organization, and consequences.

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While we know more and more about the ways in which students appropriate the history taught, and we know that the force of the lecture alone is powerless to fix passive learning and knowledge, the practices of transmitting "a closed knowledge to which students must adhere" forcefully question, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, the real stakes of historical training [Hery 2009, 115].

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The transition that can be made by the registers is thus a boon for learners in the process of acquiring first-hand historical knowledge. By focusing on the slave trade and slavery from the perspective of African enslaved people who sought their own freedom rather than from the perspective of the capitalist slave traders in Europe and the Americas, the registers provide a new understanding of the past.

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III. Digital Humanities, Ethics, and the Teaching of Slave Trade and Slavery in Senegal: What Postures?

The Registers of Liberation allow us to explore many cultural and social aspects related to slavery and the slave trade.

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Who was made captive? From what geographic regions did captives come from? From what societies and cultures? What names and surnames did enslaved people have? Such sensitive information in a conservative society like Senegal's, where discussions of people's enslaved descent are discouraged, raises ethical questions about the use of the registries in the classroom. In the collective imagination, enslaved people were inferior, and descendants of enslaved people continue to carry that stigma today. Thus, a kind of self-censorship around discussions of slavery has been created to avoid conflicts and divisions that could undermine national cohesion. It is attested that even in the humanistic studies the issue of slavery in Senegambian societies has been almost silenced for a long time by African historians. For Ibrahima Thioub:

> the relative scarcity of studies devoted to domestic slavery by African historians contrasts sharply with the importance of the phenomenon, its generalization across the continent, its variable scope from one era to another, the role and functions of slaves in all areas of activity, and the diversity of their social status. [Thioub 2009, 17]

How, then, can we reconcile the public-facing and accessible nature of the digital humanities with the ethics of teaching this phenomenon, which in some societies is considered dehumanizing, to young college students?

These questions, though not an exhaustive list of considerations, identify some of the critical issues to address prior to using digital resources like the Registers of Liberation. Marc Bloch calls for an appropriation of the modern tools of science in history, tools which do not make a clean sweep of the past but instead represent part of a transdisciplinary approach that allows for the forging of new formal models to achieve the objectives of teaching and learning. Far from being only a virtual library, the humanities are spaces for the construction of scientific knowledge that can be used in class and exploited in accordance with current pedagogical recommendations. ₂₁

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Without ethics and responsibility in their use and transmission, the application of digital humanities to the teaching of slavery in conservative societies such as Senegal's can be destructive of cohesion and harmony between populations. Descendants of enslaved people may feel dehumanized by stereotypes regarding slavery, which fosters resentment and hatred between descendants and those who claim to hail from enslavers, among others. Ethics in such a case would be part of a patriotic perspective.

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As for responsibility, it would lie in the fact that to teach is to choose. To choose is to proceed by useful discrimination: discrimination that would have as its goal the respect of human dignity. This would not mean ignoring historical reality. It is a question of acting with respect, morality, and prudence in the process of transmission.

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The use of digital data in history, a strategic and sensitive discipline, especially when it comes to taking an interest in slavery, calls for the data to be appropriated pedagogically, that is to say, bearing in mind that not everything can be transmitted and said as such without subterfuge. Clearly, it is a question of how to bring about the "emergence of a digital materialism" based on appropriate methods of training, learning, and information transmission. In this case, the digital historical resource should be used not as a "bomb" that destroys social cohesion, but as material for reflection, science, didactics, and pedagogy. It then becomes what pedagogues and didacticians would describe as toolboxes for the trainer and the teacher that are part of two levers of performance of the history curriculum: teaching through tools and sources.

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IV. Challenges of Introducing Pedagogical Innovations Using Digital Humanities

The challenges linked to the use of digital humanities in educational pedagogy are many and varied. The development of technologies in a connected century means that no training or learning process can ignore digital technology. What is at stake is the quality of learning and the performance of students who may feel more at home with the web than with paper; hence the conception of the Learner 2.0. The Learner 2.0 is that learner of the technological and digital age, a learner who is aware of digital innovations, which are part of their experience, activities and daily evolution. This is why introducing pedagogical innovations using digital humanities means connecting Senegalese schools and learners to the

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world of today and tomorrow. This would also be in line with principles of the New School for Senegal,[6] a modern school serving universal needs, where teachers are called upon to incorporate new knowledge and methods in history that are commonly accepted for their relevance, originality, validity, and decisive contribution to learners. Embracing these innovations and their impact on sicence and society reflects and unerstanding that the digital humanities can promote individualization and collaborative work.

Moreover, incorporating digital humanities into teaching practice means introducing both teachers and students to the concept of scripting: "entering the digital era of learning head-on" [Sauvage 2019]. The challenge, in fact, is to think of a digital pedagogy of the future applicable to history. It is a question of thinking about teaching history by the click of a mouse, which "enables us to move beyond the ancestral and obsolete (albeit etymological) association of work/suffering towards learning/pleasure" [Sauvage 2019]. It is also a question of integrating the teaching of history in Senegal into globalization, with the aim of inscribing it and the learners in the time-world of digital pedagogy, which is mperative in a century of information and communication technologies.

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Ultimately, if we consider that tomorrow's world is that of the virtual and of information and communication technologies, if modernity inevitably involves the integration of nations into the digital world, then we are called upon, within the framework of our training curricula, to give a central place to the digital humanities. Digital innovation must be a prime concern and imperative. It will be a question of pedagogical adaptation via digital didactics in history, for the educational dimension of digital humanities is expressed in "the transmission of skills within and outside educational institutions, the training of trainers and teachers, democratization and open access to culture" [Bourgatte, Ferloni, and Tessier 2017, 157].

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Conclusion

The treatment of issues related to the slave trade and slavery in Senegalese middle cycle schooling is trapped in a form of academic writing that privileges its mechanisms, consequences, and areas of action. This form of history relegates the captive to a demographic and their individual social and cultural dimensions to the background. Thus, we need to make a sociological history of the captive in the turmoil of the slave trade and slavery more central to the history of Senegal. Teachers have been hindered in this task by the lack of available sources on slavery in Senegal. The open-source, online version of the Senegal Registers of Liberation allows us to fill this historiographic gap. The possible didactic transposition of the data from the registers can promote the renewal of school history on this issue. In addition, it argues in favor of a lively and constructive pedagogy that allows teachers and learners to break with the liturgy and traditional rites of teaching about the slave trade and slavery in class. The implementation of activities and tasks that give a great deal of space to the analysis of figures, to the sociology of the captives and to their geographical and cultural origins, not only makes it possible to avoid dissociating historical culture from the interests of the student, but it also allows us to make the pedagogical space the cradle of historical vocation and of the collective consciousness that is so much sought after in a century of conflicting identities. The use of the registers must however be accompanied by a robust discussion of the ethics and morality of transmission of this history in order for digital humanities not to become a tool of social disarticulations.

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On another note, one might well ask how, in a continent marked by the digital divide, should we reconcile the teaching of history and the use of digital technology? Even if the problem has arisen in the recent past, the efforts made to equip certain schools with computer rooms are helping to encourage pedagogical innovations associated with digital technology. The requirement to be part of these innovations has become an imperative that the COVID-19 pandemic has helped to bring to light. From now on, education and training are required to be bimodal for greater effectiveness and efficiency.

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Notes

[1] The middle cycle consists of four levels. It is open to students from 12 years old. At the end of this cycle, students enter secondary school at the age of 16. They obtain the Baccalaureate at the age of 18 or 19, a diploma that opens the doors to university.

[2] The method of tasks requires the pupil to "take the initiative, his activity, his thinking, putting him as much as possible in situations where he

will research (search for information, documentary research), surveys, interviews, reports of visits, excursions, group work, case studies, role-playing...". It is a situation where the student participates in their training through practical activities related to the teaching program of their level of study.

[3] For more on the Senegal Registers of Liberation, see Roberts and Wall in this special issue.

[4] See https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/5185180.

[5] With the registers, there is a good chance that the teacher who wishes to remain in these three classic orientations can be even better equipped to strengthen or improve them.

[6] In January 1981, the General Assembly on Education and Training was convened. Echoing a deep malaise in the Senegalese education system, the participants (government, trade unions, civil society, etc.) concluded the need for a "radical overhaul of the education system, with a view to a new school more in line with the deep aspirations of the Senegalese people, to the mastery of the scientific and technical conditions of our integral development, democracy, social justice, peace, human progress" [Republique du Senegal 1991]. The New School is clearly a school for Senegal and its aspirations.

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