State-Building and Multilingual Education in Africa

How do governments in Africa make decisions about language? What does language have to do with state-building, and what impact might it have on democracy? This book provides a longue durée explanation for policies toward language in Africa, taking the reader through colonial, independence, and contemporary periods. It explains the growing trend toward the use of multiple languages in education as a result of new opportunities and incentives. The opportunities incorporate ideational relationships with former colonizers as well as the work of language NGOs on the ground. The incentives relate to the current requirements of democratic institutions and the strategies leaders devise to win elections within these constraints. By contrasting the environment faced by African leaders with that faced by European state-builders, it explains the weakness of education and limited spread of standard languages on the continent. The work combines constructivist understanding about changing preferences with realist insights about the strategies leaders employ to maintain power.

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107042087

First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Albaugh, Ericka A.
State-building and multilingual education in Africa / Ericka A. Albaugh.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-04208-7 (hardback)
1. Multilingualism – Africa. 2. Language and education – Africa. 3. Education and state – Africa. 4. Education, Bilingual – Africa. 5. Language and languages – Study and teaching – Africa. I. Title.
P115.5.A35A43 2014
306.44′96–dc23 2013027345

ISBN 978-1-107-04208-7 Hardback

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Preface

This book originated as a query of a simple, yet controversial, assertion by Lamin Sanneh, author of *Translating the Message* (1989). He wrote that missionaries had preserved culture in Africa by translating its languages, and therefore should be lauded rather than maligned as often they were in modern Africanist scholarship. As a person of faith, I was intrigued. Yet as a budding Africanist, aware of the many sins committed on the continent in the name of saving it, I was wary. And so I set out to look with objective eyes at the impact of language transcription in Africa. This topic was too big, of course, and it had to be shaped into a *political* question. Fortunate to travel to Cameroon with a predissertation fellowship, I found that a question crystallized. In a country of enormous diversity that had tried to subdue its difference since independence, why was the government suddenly deciding to use a multitude of its languages in its education system? Exploring this question and its corollary – "What has been the impact of this policy?" – has taken several years and several trips to Africa.

The predissertation trip to Cameroon took place between January and June 2001, with three months spent in Ngaoundere learning Fulfulde, and the remaining three months traveling to make contacts in eight of the country's ten regions. The "real" field research occurred during the academic year 2002–2003: July and August in Paris, September to December in Cameroon, January to March in Senegal, and March to May in Ghana. In March 2004, I conducted two weeks of interviews in Paris and Marseille/Aix-en-Provence. Though the dissertation was completed in May 2005, my research continued with follow-up trips to Cameroon and Senegal in the summer of 2009 and to Cameroon in the summer of 2011. In all, I have spent more than fourteen months in Cameroon, four months in Senegal, two months in Ghana, and three months at various points interviewing in France.

The original manuscript would not have begun or concluded without the training and encouragement I received from my dissertation committee members. Through several years of working as his research assistant and profiting from his advising, my consideration for Donald L. Horowitz, my Chair, has grown from initial trepidation to sincere intellectual respect and personal appreciation. His insistence on high academic standards and a fearless ability to speak

his mind have emboldened me with increasing courage to present my own views with confidence. Robert O. Keohane is truly a gifted mentor, and he, more than anyone, has guided my development as a scholar. I prize his skill for taking a tangle of ideas and organizing them from his broad vantage point into a coherent research project. I appreciate above all his unflagging belief in me. Steven I. Wilkinson, fresh from his own field research, but already with the perspective of an established scholar, provided invaluable practical and theoretical suggestions. He also exhorted me continually to write more clearly, more directly, and more boldly, and the dissertation has improved as a result. Finally, I thank Catharine Newbury for agreeing (with some pleading) to accept a student from Duke who hoped to benefit from the strengths in African politics that she offered her students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Graciously, she consented not only to my presence in several of her classes at UNC, but to serving as an outside adviser, even when she moved an even greater distance to Smith College.

These advisers, as well as other faculty and graduate student colleagues in the Department of Political Science at Duke University, provided a stimulating and rigorous environment to incubate this project. Since graduating, I have begun teaching at Bowdoin College, where I continue to find support. My colleagues have heard or read various iterations of my chapters. Students in my courses on African Politics and on State-Building in Comparative Perspective have challenged and inspired my thoughts on these issues. Chase Taylor helped me greatly with maps. I also am deeply indebted to the generosity of Lauren MacLean, Pierre Englebert, and two anonymous reviewers for their immeasurably helpful comments on the manuscript. Of course they are not to blame for mistakes that remain.

I have been exceedingly fortunate to receive financial support from many sources. The Pew Foundation funded three years of my graduate study at Duke. The extraordinary Predissertation Fellowship offered by the Social Science Research Council allowed me a year in which I could study African language (Hausa and Fulfulde) and African history, as well as enjoy a six-month exploratory tour of Cameroon. The U.S. Education Department's Foreign Language and Area Studies program provided for intensive French language study in Paris and field research using the French language in Cameroon and Senegal. Duke University's Graduate School supplied the funds for my research in Ghana. The Spencer Foundation made my final year of writing immeasurably more peaceful by granting me a Dissertation Fellowship for Research Related to Education. Bowdoin College allocated research funds for me to return to Cameroon and Senegal twice, along with summer research assistants through the Gibbons Fellowship program to help with GIS mapping. And a Bowdoin Faculty grant allowed me to draw all of the pieces together in the final write-up during my junior sabbatical year, 2011–2012. I am grateful to all of these institutions for their belief in my work and their truly generous financial support.

I also want to thank the publishers of three journals for permission to reuse portions of the following articles: Some of the material in Chapter 4 appeared as "The Colonial Image Reversed: Language Preferences and Policy Outcomes" in *International Studies Quarterly* 53, 2 (June 2009): 389–420; much of the material in Chapter 6 appeared as "An Autocrat's Toolkit: Adaptation and Manipulation in 'Democratic' Cameroon" in *Democratization* 18: 2 (April 2011): 388–414; and many ideas about bargaining and preferences sprinkled through Chapters 5 and 6 were previously published as "Language Choice in Education: A Politics of Persuasion" in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, 1 (2007): 1–32.

To the many people in Cameroon, Senegal, Ghana, France, Britain, and the United States who responded to interviews, letters, e-mails, or phone calls, I am indebted. Any presentation of research findings is an interpretation, and I am aware that many of the people who contributed their thoughts and experiences will not necessarily agree with my analysis. I have endeavored to keep their voices and faces in my mind as I write, and to be true to their stories. I am thankful for the many research assistants who agreed to help me, particularly Usman Ahmadu in Cameroon, and for the organizations and people who allowed me to live in each country: SIL, Jim and Karen Noss, Professor Teddy Ako, and especially Solomon and Alice Tatah in Cameroon; the Tekpo family in Accra; and famille Mbaye in Dakar, who offered much more than a comfortable home and the best restaurant in Senegal.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, Jason, who, if truth be told, should be a coauthor of this manuscript. When we married, we agreed that I would support him first through his schooling, and then he would support me through mine. I got by far the better part of the bargain. He has been patient through school-inspired moves from California to Massachusetts and then to North Carolina and to Maine, stable through coursework, encouraging through exams, and amazingly enthusiastic through eighteen months of field research. In the three African countries, he accompanied me (not only because I was pregnant, but because he was genuinely interested) on nearly every interview in that year of dissertation research, except when he was too sick to venture out. This man who prefers cool climes and familiar food sacrificed many of his comforts to support my dream of becoming an Africanist scholar. The discovery was sweeter, and the trials bearable because he was with me. And in the write-up stage, he continued to prove his dedication, juggling an accountant's work schedule to help care for our children and even initiating an absurdly early wake-up regimen to make sure we both had time to work and share evenings together as a family. He built my database, helped with formatting, and proofread each chapter. Most importantly, he reminded me continually that life is more than work and study. I know now more than ever why I married him.

The finished book will never do justice to all of its contributors. But if the final product is anything of quality, it derives from the nurturing setting in which it grew.