Gambian Fiction: An Analytical Study

Cherno Omar Barry

Abstract

Reflections on the singularity of Gambian Fiction in relations to other West African states with English as the official language have been made by several scholars and researchers. When African literature pierced through the silence to voice out the horrors of colonialism, engage in the search for identity, promote African cultural values and advocate for independence, the fervour in which this was carried out was not proportionate in every country. Colonial Gambia emerged within a shaky period in the history of the Senegambia region. From early to late 19th century, ethnic and religious wars were raging in the interior, the French and the British were arguing over the piece of stretched land meandering around the river, and the liberated Africans were being sent from Sierra Leone to settle in The Gambia. Bathurst was born and the colonial powers settled there. The Gambia will for long remain governed from Sierra Leone and so the Christian missionaries were the ones who had the most share in the colonial setup for propagating their laws and beliefs. Gambia's resistance to colonialism took several forms but literature played a much lesser role. Could this be the reason why Gambian Fiction is not represented in anthologies and other literary fora? Early Gambian fiction took quite a different angle in relation to the realities of the times and only in the midst of another form of domination, the Senegambia confederation, would writers emerge strong and united for one purpose: liberate Gambia from Senegal. This chapter traces the itinerary of Gambian fiction and tries to define the stages and periods when the stories take a different tone and feeling. This chapter also introduces a comparative study with those of Anglophone Africa, especially West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Reflections on the singularity of Gambian Fiction in relations to other West African states with English as the official language have been made by several scholars and researchers. When African literature pierced through the silence to voice out the horrors of colonialism, engage in the search for identity, promote African cultural values and advocate for independence, the fervour in which this was carried out was not proportionate in every country.

Colonial Gambia emerged within a shaky period in the history of the Senegambia region. From early to late 19th century, ethnic and religious wars were raging in the interior, the French and the British were arguing over the piece of stretched land meandering around the river, and the liberated Africans were being sent from Sierra Leone to settle in The Gambia. Bathurst was born in the early quarter of the 19th century and the colonial powers settled there. The Gambia remain for long governed from Sierra Leone and so the Christian missionaries were the ones who had the most

share in the colonial setup for propagating their religious laws and beliefs. Gambia's resistance to colonialism took several forms, however, literature played a far much lesser role. Could this be the reason why Gambian Fiction is not adequately represented in anthologies and other literary forums?

Early Gambian fiction took quite a different angle in relation to the realities of the times and only in the midst of another form of domination, the Senegambia confederation, would writers emerge strong and united for one purpose: liberate Gambia from Senegal. However, liberation cries heard from Congo and Ghana did not go unnoticed by emerging politicians who used the newspapers as an effective means of questioning the colonial presence.

This chapter traces the itinerary of Gambian fiction and tries to define the stages and periods when stories took a different tone and feeling. Our attempt to highlight significant phases of the evolution of prose fiction will lead us to discover the diverse and rich contributions by emerging writers some of whom will later make their marks as successful authors. Our prose fiction is heavily marked by the socio-cultural issues our people were more concerned about.

Another dimension of our analysis will deal with the new form of fiction emerging in the last decade. We will try to compare it with the previous two decades and highlight the stark differences in tone and diction.

Gambian fiction is not as complicated to analyse as those from The Gambia's counterparts in the sub-region yet complications lie in bringing an appropriate definition to the vast and diverse collections already registered. The chapter on Gambian Fiction will try to address these issues as well as introduce a comparative study with those of Anglophone Africa, especially West Africa. It will particularly argue the reason why it is less considered within the African literary circles.

What fiction?

To start this discussion, Gambian fiction calls for a definition. Jeremy Hawthon, in his book, *Studying the Novel*, warns us that '*Fiction can be tantalizingly hard to define once we make the attempt to do so*'. Distinguishing character as fiction from a work as fiction, as Hawthon warns, shows a distinct difference worth noting in our work. Works of fiction we will be studying are in three major areas: the novel, the short stories and Gambian folktales and fables. Short stories and folktales are shrewdly identical yet in our analysis, we intend to separate the two by considering all short stories, including those published in a novella form, as imaginative works of the author, whereas the Fables and Folktales, like the myths and legends, are stories that have evolved with a people, a community and a group and which helps define their understanding of the world they live in.

The Gambia's political evolution from pre-independence to date is generally identical to the other West African Anglophone states but presents nevertheless specific singularities. The fact that it is the smallest country does not in any way make it less important; however, history will shape the Gambia differently. Western education1 arrived in the early 19th century and became specifically concentrated in Bathurst (which is the capital now called Banjul) where the majority of inhabitants are the Krio (generally called the Aku2), and the Wolof (mostly slaves accompanying British merchants) from Gorée and Saint Louis. The first missionaries, who arrived in the early 19th century upon the invitation of Charles MacCarthy, then the governor of the settlement, began to propagate Christianity and build schools. The school goers were principally taught to read and write, understand the bible and serve the colony.

It is significant to explain what role school played in a British settlement such as The

Gambia. Unlike most of the other Anglophone countries, school in the protectorate was not as successful as it was in the colony. One reason for this is the strong ties these communities in the protectorate had with religion. Thomas Baldwin, in his report published in 1950, remarked:

The churches in The Gambia operate among an increasingly preponderant Mohammedan community. There remain, it is true, considerable groups of pagans but they show little disposition to become Christians; the tide is flowing strongly with Islam. No doubt, as is usual in mass movements of this kind, many of the converts, have but a superficial understanding of their adopted faith and Christians are wont to mention this fact as though it were a ground of comfort. Experience, on the other hand, shows that adherence to Islam is usually permanent; it is a bleak prospect, humanly speaking, for the churches. (Baldwin 1950:5)

It can therefore be posited that those who were the first to accept Christianity were those in and around Bathurst and thus, they formed the first elites. Efforts to propagate Christianity, and by extension Western education, were heavily marred by the strong attachment to Islam, the constant fights and the lack of confidence that remained with the indigenes. A host of other reasons can be attributed to the slow development of education within the Protectorate.3 However, what is necessary to highlight here is that the privileged few who were educated were composed of mainly the Aku community, the Wolof slaves (later bought and liberated by the missionaries and Governor Charles McCarthy) and few Jolas and Serrers on the island of Barthurst. They will understandably constitute the first writers.

The first signs of literary production emerged in the advent of the creation of newspapers as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Among these, the Gambia Echo presented more literary contribution than the rest. It marked as a modest

beginning for emerging writers. For example, on 11 May 1936, Finden Dailey published a short story Arising out the Minutes on the 18th edition of the Gambia Echo. Though for every issue of the same paper several poems and plays were featured, prose writing was almost inexistent4. It was therefore Dailey who can be considered as being the pioneer. In 1940, four other short stories were published on the Gambia Echo but their authors were anonymous.

This chapter, therefore, analyses Gambian fiction in four stages. The first stage will study the works the pioneer and torchbearer of Gambian literature, Dr Lenrie Peters. His most famous works are his collections of poems and though he published only one novel in a book form, he has contributed several other short stories in renowned magazines. He is crown today as the pioneer of literary writing in The Gambia. The second part introduces the most important stage of literary creation in the Gambia, the Ndaanan era. It is thus named because it defines not only the moment when writers emerged and gained confidence to write, but it also created the avenue for many to publish their first works. Once Ndaanan ceased to exist in 1976 and probably for lack of any other avenue to share their literary passions, several Gambians started to publish their works into books. At the third stage, we will study the major themes that most writers were more concerned about. We will attempt to amply justify why those themes were the main focus. Who were the Gambian women who fist started to write prose? A wind of change started blowing from 1980 to date and several people made bold attempts to write both in the Gambia and outside. Has there been any fiction with regards to the politics on the ground? Is there anything one can call exile literature? Can we discern any form of protest literature? These interesting questions and many others will form the last part of our analysis.

Dr Lenrie Peters, The Trailblaizer Of Gambian Literature

The purpose of dedicating a whole section to Peters is closely related to his immense contribution in putting Gambian Literature on the map of Afrcan writers within the period when writers in Africa joined their voices to question colonialism and cry out for independence. Until the 1960s, no trace of any author publishing any work of fiction was ever recorded in The Gambia. Yet the periods between 1920 and 1965 were heavily charged with movements and revolutions breaking the dawn of independence in Africa, both in the Anglophone and Francophone countries. The Negritude movement has started sometime in the 1930s and the new generation of writers in Anglophone West Africa have published their first books. In the Gambia, the struggle for independence and self rule began in the 1920s led by Edward Francis Small and his advocacy for 'No Taxation without Representation'. Among the newspapers existing at the time was The Gambia Echo and one of its editors, a Sierra Leonean migrant, was Ingram Ernest Lenrie Peters. Ingram Peters was a fervent supporter of black African movements, particularly the Pan African movement, whose voice he constantly echoed in his newspaper. Ingram Peters, who never opted to nationalise as a Gambian, used his paper to castigate politicians whom he judged irresponsible and against press freedom. His sharp criticism against the racist attitude of the colonial administration did not only stop within The Gambia, as some of his articles and letters were also published in some of the London newspapers (Grey Johnson 2004: 177). Ingram Peters studied Latin and the Classics at Fourah Bay College, which he abandoned before completing due to a failing hearing and moved to The Gambia to join his uncle, Dr Tom Bishop. (Grey Johnson 2004: 155). His first son was Lenrie Leopold Wilfred 'Taiwo' Peters. Young Lenrie

learnt a lot from his father, an education that will prepare him as the first Gambian writer to publish. Young Peters published several poems in Black Orpheus before coming out with a collection in 1964 entitled Poems. He ventured to publish his second book, which was his first and only novel entitled The Second Round, at that pioneering stage. The Second Round is the first Gambian novel published the same year The Gambia gained its independance.

The book is 193 pages long and divided into 11 chapters. Since its first publication, it has been reprinted several times. If critics expected to have a novel defying the colonisers or the post-independent governments, this would be a disappointment. In The Second Round Peters skilfully explores human frailty and emotions. The psychological and social relationships between his characters are strong, deep and complex. The central theme, however, is how one is incapable of taking control of one's own destiny and tries to solve problems by oneself. A fact which makes The Second Round an excellent piece of work is its complete contradiction to other themes of its time. While other writers were struggling to write for a burning purpose (fight against colonialism and for independence), Peters dug deeper and wrote about the much closer problems and complexities our societies face. The Second Round reveals the social decadence Dr Kawa returns to when he knew he could have stayed and have a good life in the United Kingdom with his qualifications and expertise. Peters also shows us the frustrations Dr Kawa feels in trying to understand a society where unfaithfulness, incest, violence and bad judgement prevails and becomes the order of the day. The coming home of Dr Kawa can symbolise two general themes Peters has constantly evoked in almost all his works: The first is the return of the Liberated Africans back to their motherland. They have returned, but to which 'home'? The home they really belong to? With the euphoria created by the

return of Dr Kawa, an emotion felt particularly by his mother, and with all the celebrations, the nagging question of ‘marrying and settling down’, Dr Kawa is swirled in a whirlwind of problems none of which was of his own creation, yet in which he becomes the focus and the ultimate solution. Overwhelmed, he watches as each of the main characters he comes to know slowly yields to a tragic end. By these events, The Second Round would be tagged ‘the first African horror story, the first African gothic novel’ by Larson in his book The Emergence of African Fiction. The other argument is the perpetual question of ‘returning home’. Peters sees the act of returning home as a sacred duty yet home is more alienated than the place one comes from. In several of his poems, returning home is echoed, yet the question that underlies the return is all of hope, joy and pride for these feelings dissipate as soon as the realities of home sink in. Nonetheless, the dying hope seems a lingering residual on the mind of the returnee. Dr Kawa moves to the interior of the country with the hope that life can be better somehow somewhere.

This first novel raises two pertinent questions: why was the author not particularly interested in the colonial grip and the struggle for independence and why was the setting outside The Gambia? Peters’ origins are significant in defining the theme and the tone of his works. Being a descendant of West Indian immigrants, he belonged to a hybrid culture: that of the African and that of the European. Dr Florence Mahoney wrote in one of her books that the people called the Liberated Slaves “had carried African beliefs and customs and traditions, and skills in metal work, weaving, etc., into slavery in the West; they returned with new skills, an English ‘Creole’ language, a new faith – Christianity -, and other customs and traditions, forced upon them.”(Mahoney 2001: 1) However their integration to the societies they found on the African soil was not very easy. First, they found that they have adopted a way of life

far different from the ones their ancestors took with them to slavery. As Mahoney rightly puts it, it took a period of assimilation and under a horrible subjugation to finally efface their traditions and cultures. On their return therefore, they could not adjust to the indigenous peoples' cultures (Mahoney 2001: 1). The most difficult and painful experience was the fact that they were never trusted by the indigenous folk who see their way of life as very 'western' and they were seen by the colonial officers as 'fake Europeans'. They will be subjugated to more difficult and humiliating conditions before they eventually agreed to form a strong community within the colonies they settled in. These people, known as the Creole in Freetown, Sierra Leone and the Aku in The Gambia, will play the crucial role of forming the first colonial administrative civil servants and paving the way for independence in most of the British West African settlements, notably The Gambia and Sierra Leone. So Peters must be seen in two angles: the first, he has a purpose to fight for Africa's independence and freedom but his fight need not necessarily be identical to that of indigenous Africans such Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi or Wole Soyinka. His vision of such liberation was more focused from the inner self. His characters in The Second Round show people who have an inner conflict to resolve first and Dr Kawa, who seems to see all that as an outsider, continues to be further frustrated in his efforts to help. Peters tries to tell us to look within for the freedom we seek and once that freedom is fully attained, then the shackles of colonialism will easily unlock themselves and fall off. With regards the setting, the origins of the author and his relations to The Gambia could provide the answer. First, the author's father remained a Sierra Leonean despite his migration to The Gambia in the early 20th century. Secondly, the author spent his early formative years in Sierra Leone before leaving for the United Kingdom for his Undergraduate studies. However, the most plausible

explanation could be his constant reminder that he was above all an African seeking for his roots. Conscious of the cultural diversity of the African people, he echoes his descendants' sense of not belonging and their alienation to those rich roots that Africa is blessed with. He makes a simile with Alex Hailey's quest for his ancestors to the shores of Africa in one of his poems published in Selected Poetry, when he writes, The first Africa/the early dawn/of ancestral Gods/and naming ceremonies/of ritual sacrifice/and burial rites/are lost even to me for good/irrecoverable! (Peters 1981: 106-107). Dr Tijan Sallah, in his paper entitled 'Dreams of Katchikali' presented during a conference organised by Gambians in the Diaspora on the topic 'The Challenge of Katchikali: Is there a Gambian National Literature?', Peters said, 'My family has been detribalized for several generations. I am like Alex Haley. I am searching for my roots. (Black bibliography, Lenrie Peters: www.answer.com). His setting of Freetown, for his novel The Second Round is another expression of that Freedom he keeps calling for.

Peters has written several other short stories that were not directly linked to the events of the day but that were reflections on his quotidian experiences but which affirms further his talents in prose writing. In 1972, he published a short story entitled 'Recollection of a Beverage' in Ndanaan. It is the story evolving around the good taste of palm wine, its production and processing, its effects and attractions, and most of all, the atmosphere it creates within the outlet it is sold and drank. Peters makes use of his poetic skills to capture the attention of the reader throughout the beautiful narrative offered here. The character Pa Paul, a dedicated client of the 'Black Angel Bar, 'makes the story particularly humorous as he shares funny stories.

In 1973, the year he attended the Afro-Asian Writers conference in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, he published another

short story, ‘The Ride’ in the Afro-Asian Short Story Anthology. The story in the ride exudes deep emotions that can only surface at surprising and unique moments of someone’s life. Zantha turns thirteen that morning and attains puberty. The cocktail of sensations that engulf her spirals to a climax in an exciting race that ensues between Pim, her pony, and a stallion. She goes out for a ride with Pim and in the serenity of their perfect companionship, a stallion kindles strange feelings in Pim. The harmony between the rider and the animal merges as they ride followed closely by the stallion whose effects are electric on Pim. Peters explores quite a soft and sensual theme in ‘The Ride’.

Two stories he published in 1981 would carry different themes entirely. The first, ‘The Local Party Secretary’, delves into politics. It is a monologue of a simple villager, devoid of any formal education and aspiring to be a mechanic some day, narrating how he came to be the unlikeliest preference for the position of ‘Local Party Secretary’. In his new earned position, thanks to the District Secretary, he narrates how he gradually comes to be a man of authority and importance. His main and only task is to ensure that people pay regular contributions as a sign of ‘loyalty to the President and Party’. The collected money is then sent without delay to the District Secretary who then passes it to the President through channels the Local Party Secretary is not privy of.

Peters reveals in this story one of his hidden skills in style and genre. It is a story of political satire revealing major setbacks in African politics. As one discovers through the monologue, Moses of the Rock, the local party secretary and the protagonist, is surely chosen because the only needed qualifications are obedience and particularly trustworthiness. Apparently, the local party secretary should never be smart and use his brains. What he needs to do is to be contented with the newly earned position of

authority, forcibly impose the payment of tax on the already impoverished and despaired people, and truthfully send them to the District Secretary. The humour is intense and the soliloquy rich in creating an interactive mood with the other characters. Such a story could make an excellent essay on its interpretation of African politics. Peters continued to pursue this line of thought in his poems mainly.

.....

His interest in politics and his frustration in the African model of development which breaks the continuity of the ‘past’ and sacrifices what has been jealously preserved are vividly expressed in most of his poems. Peters is also conscious of his origins and the causes that led to the African rape of its most valued subjects and the amputation of its dignity and survival. This, for him, served as a constant reminder of one of its major setbacks. He wrote in Satellites, Wings my ancestors used/to fly from oppression, slavery/tincture of skin, arid birth and death/hang limp on my shoulders/with guilt of the oppressor (Peters 1971: 8). He also emphasised on the decaying cultural heritage of the African people in the post-colonial era. He warns of decadence and a lost culture and keeps reminding the African peoples that solutions can be found in Africa by Africans unless failed governments, neo-colonialism and attitudinal laxity become a thing of the past. In his poem ‘Katchikali’, using an imagery of the Gambian pool spirits of fertility and hope, he writes: But the new people do not understand/will not understand Katchikali/and all the institutions crumble.//As the mud hut crumbles/withers, all is base/seething self-interest and corruption/and the demon of gain/in your waters, Katchikali. (Peters 1971: 56; 1981: 74).

The other story, the last recorded story he published, is entitle. ‘Hunt for a Turtle’ seems to be an extract or an adaptation of an episode in The Second Round. One discovers Dr Kawa and Mr Marshall on turtle hunting. The whole story centres on

turtle hunting and its joys and intricacies.

In conclusion, Peters had the fervent believe that Africa will regain its glory even if this might not happen in his lifetime. His novel The Second Round, which is meant to be a trilogy has the second part already completed and in a manuscript form awaiting publication. This second book entitled The Way Through, has the main character trying to find solutions to the problems in Africa. In this unpublished book he tries to show that Africa can find solutions to all its problems without depending on any external intervention. Even though all his works have been published by Heinemann, he was set to promote publication in The Gambia and until his demise, intended to publish this second novel locally. He also wrote a script for his film-loving brother, the late Dennis Alaba, but since the latter left for the United States, they lost sight and the script was never exploited. He was an excellent opera singer, a talent he shared with his late brother. It is through opera singing that he met and married Rosemary, a British opera pianist in the 1960s with whom he divorced after two years of marriage and to whom his books Poems and The Second Round are dedicated. Dr Lenrie Leopold Wilfred Peters remains, for Gambian literature, ad valorem, the trailblazer and the torchbearer.

Ndaanan, A Springboard To Literary Production

For being the first and only Gambian to be successful in literary production, a group of Gambians approached Dr Peters and proposed the establishment of a literary magazine for the sole purpose of stimulating ‘Literary activities of all kinds and to provide an outlet […] for the seething Gambian talents’. (Peters 1971: i) Dr Peters also noted in his forward that ‘[…] it is a tribute to Mr (Swaebou) Conateh and his colleagues that they have now given us something very worthwhile in which both the accomplished and the initiate can participate alike’. (Peters 1971: i) The magazine

was called Ndaanan.

Ndaanan, I am told, is the wollof word for ‘an accomplished griot’ and as the griot is in a sense a total artist embracing music and dancing, poetry and history, I think Ndaanan eminently expresses the aims of a Literary Publication with which I am proud to be associated. (Peters 1971: i)

When Ndaanan published its inaugural issue in March 1971, the editorial board was composed of Swaebou Conateh as the editor, Dr Lenrie Peters, Gabriel Roberts and Hassan Jagne as the editorial members and Charles Jaw, Esther Sowe and Dr Wally Ndow served as editorial assistants. The Advertisement Circulation Manager was Hassoum Ceesay. In March 1973, a little modification was effected on the editorial board. Swaebou remained the editor but Hassoum Ceesay, Charles Jow and Esther Sowe were incorporated as members. Hassan Jagne took the helms of Advertising and Circulation Manager and two new members, Marcel Thomasi and Margaret Jallow, joined Dr Wally Ndow as Assistants. This will remain the editorial board until 1976.

The Gambia writers’ club, the first writers’ association, started in 1971 as confirmed by Hassan Jagne, one of the founders. Soon after the publication of the inaugural issue, it will be clearly stated on the first page thus: ‘Ndaanan: A Gambian literary publication by The Gambia Writers’ Club to provide an outlet for all creative Gambian writing’. The club shall be referred to on several occasions and by its name. Due to the recognition of the club and in its name, Dr Lenrie Peters attended an international conference organised by the Afro-Asian Writers in Kazakstan and Hassan Jagne attended another conference where he laboured on the plights of literary production in The Gambia.

Ndannan existed for seven years and was able to produce seven volumes during this

period. The first volume came out in March 1971, and two volumes were published in 1972 and in 1973: in both years, it will release an issue biannually in March and in September. However, in 1974 only one volume was produced due to several difficulties including mainly financial and the lack of readership. Ndaanan will not release any publication in 1975 but in 1976, a bulky and final publication will be published.

Contribution to the magazine was opened to everybody: students and teachers; civil servants and private employees; Gambians and non-Gambians; men and women alike. There were 69 contributors to the magazine and of these were 10 women 9 of whom were Gambians. Of the nine women, three were studying at the local high schools, two were housewives and the rest were composed of a student at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, an ex-school teacher, a government civil servant and a senior clerk at the central bank. The non-Gambian, Kwela Robinson, was a housewife living in the The Gambia. Her nationality was not established.

There were a little above 191 contributions in Ndaanan counting the poems, short stories and folktales, plays, book reviews and articles including letters.

There were 33 short stories and folktales and Tamba Baldeh contributed the most with 4 fula folktales. Sankung Sagnia, Salifu Kujabi and Essie contributed three each. Kole Omotoso, a Nigerian residing at the time in The Gambia, contributed a short story.

Very few of the stories were created from the author's perspective. All the rest were folktales transcribed in English. The art of storytelling goes back thousands of years - long before stories were ever written down (Dessler 2009:9). It is common knowledge and symbolic to describe storytelling sessions as taking place around the firelight, under a full moon in the open air with grandfather or grandmother sitting on a high

stool and children on the sand, listening attentively, as the story unfolds.

In Africa, storytelling was central to many tribal traditions. Through their folktales, storytellers passed on the history of their tribes along with their core beliefs about behaviour and the way the world works. Storytelling was too deeply embedded in African cultures to be erased by slavery. (Dessler 2009:13)

Stories are not always told around a fire. Children discover stories in different forms depending on their environment. However, as the African way of life evolves, storytelling has begun to die and be replaced by stories discovered at school. Modern parents today go to work and live in nucleus families. Children hardly have time to hear their grandmothers or grandfathers recount stories to them. In urban life, TV has gradually replaced the story time.

Storytelling is an indispensable part of a community's livelihood as well as the cause for its perpetuity. In almost all Gambian cultural settings, those who tell stories come from a special clan of the ethnic groups or the community. In the western world, the word 'bard', created by both the Greek and the Roman writers, became a part of the English language and defines one who relates events or tell stories. Bards fulfil an important communitarian role today among the Welsh. So does the Indian storyteller who carries a large picture cloth to help illustrate stories told (Bicknell and Trotman 1988:9). There is the traditional and the modern griot. The traditional griot is generally a male figure. Dr Mamadou Tangara efficiently captured the role of the griot in his thesis Les Secrêts de l'Histoire et du Myth dans l'Epopée du Kaabu d'après les Traditions Orales Mandingues5when he portrays him as full of wisdom and upon whom the history of a whole community resides. They are generally elderly and are advisers of kings and rulers. Djibril Tamsir Niane wrote the Sundiata epic using the griot narrative style.6

The Griot's purpose was to: a) know and teach family lineage within the village; b) relate cultural beliefs, customs, and stories with morals to the elders and other tribesmen; and c) provide the evening's entertainment with educational stories. (Pritchett 1997: 7)

With time, the griot's role has become secondary and has dwindled to that of a praise singer7. The Gambian Mandingo griot uses a kora, a 21-string harp-lute as a musical instrument to accompany him in his narration of myths and epics of great deeds and valour of legendary kings and rulers. They also use it to tell stories of great battles and historical events. Today, these have become instruments of entertainment in musical events, ceremonies and traditional cultural manifestations. Griots sing praises in return for financial and economic security.

Gambian writers in this early stage found that the easiest way to express their creative writing skills was by transcribing the stories they have been hearing all their childhood. As some stories exhort the youth on bravery and courageous deeds, others reflect generosity from the rich and wickedness from the jealous. Themes like jealousy, greed, war, marriage and family, and witchcraft are constantly interwoven in these stories. This is a manifest of how deeply rooted Gambians were and have always been to their cultures.

Kingship and the use of animals are also central in the stories. The Hyena represents laziness, dishonesty, greediness, stupidity, selfishness, and all other attributes considered immoral and abhorred. The Rabbit or Hare is the intelligent and the wise. It loves exposing the stupidity of the hyena in almost all stories. The Lion maintains the kingship as in other cultures. The cockroach and the termites in the story 'A Cockroach in Termite Community' by Sankung Sagnia reminds us of the story of 'The Ant and the Grasshopper' in Aesop's fables. The cockroach, like the grasshopper,

meets its death but in different circumstances. The stories ‘What Concerns One Concerns All’ by Kekoto Manneh and ‘Your Flesh for the People, Your Bones for Me’ by Kebba Sanneh are the same story. They try to moralise on selfishness and inculcate to all that what affects someone remotely far could have an adverse effect on one’s life. Another perspective of the story can be the ravaging intertribal or faction wars. Several countries would just sit tight and watch without much effort in helping bring peace and stability to these countries only to realise too late that the same war has started brewing on their doorsteps. ‘Kindang’ by Haddy Sallah and ‘Poor Fanta and the Python’ by Sankung B. Sagnia have very close similarities. Tragedies are hardly expected in our folktales mainly because these translate happiness and generally a successful ending where the bad is vanquished and the good triumphs. However, some stories will break this tradition of ‘happily ever after’ and have a tragic ending. Such is the story by Deyda Hydara entitled ‘The Widowed Bride’. A young gentleman prepares for his marriage and amidst festivities and celebrations, the bride receives the message that his husband-to-be has died in an accident. The story offers no happy ending to the reader. Another tragic tale carefully and skilfully crafted is ‘Isaac’ by Kole Omotoso. The story revolves around a young boy living in desolation. The author carefully describes in detail the boy’s fascination for a car, his careful preparation of the gari8, his only source of nourishment, he had kept in his pocket and how he cleans his obsolete penny and buys food with it from a saleswoman. One would have expected a happy magical ending for this boy as the author plays on the sentiments of the reader. Alas, as the boy was savouring his hard earned lunch, hiding behind the car he was almost worshipping, the owner of the car got in and took a quick reverse. Several stories also have young protagonists. Such is the case in ‘The Boy Who Sees Visions’ by Swaebou Conateh and ‘Isaac’ by Kole

Omotoso. The use of children as main characters in stories is much more developed in the short stories published in novella form by Gambian writers. The child represents innocence and piety as in ‘The Boy Who Sees Visions’ or are victims of the whims and carelessness of the adults as in ‘Isaac’.

Two stories have a unique style of narration worth mentioning. A contributor with the pen name E. Midnight9 published ‘Mboka’s Manuscript’, which is written in the first person. It introduces a philosophical view of things criticising the hypocritical attitude of demagogues in their public speeches. This strange philosophical story is about a manuscript written by David, an Indian from British Guiana and living with Gambian friends in England, which was given to Kemo Sanneh. Kemo recounts how he came to know David and what the content of the manuscript was about. David-David Sunil Zulficar Seegobin is nicknamed

Mboka” by his Gambian friends. “Mboka’s interest and devotion to what he called ‘Third World Politics’ became almost a religion. He gradually became less and less interested in his studies and quite frequently would keep away from classes to read philosophy and assorted political literature. (…) And now this manuscript – the last indication of the cumulative effects of five years of tension and hate were really telling heavy blows on Mboka’s psych. He was really going off his head. (Midnight, 1971, 6-7)

As Kemo reads the ramblings of his friends, he weeps mainly out of pity. Midnight tries to use David to express the sorrowful state people find themselves in their respect for protocol in public speaking. In ‘The Widow’ by Charles Jow, the reader discovers another form of hypocrisy. A woman who does not love her husband deceives the society she lives in by given all the attention and care to this husband while her mind wanders towards the man she really loves, Abdoulie, her childhood

lover in Kaolack. Maimuna is made to marry a very old man against her wish when she was only fifteen. For eight years, she had lived in disgust for this man, yet she had skilfully played the role of the devoted wife and won the devotion of all her in-laws and neighbours. The story begins on the day of mourning for her husband but Maimuna keeps fantasising her beautiful relations with her childhood lover as people come and express their condolences and throw money in the layou10. The story itself explores effects of forced marriages and the complexity of a conjugal life particularly when the bride, in this case Maimuna, is given preference to the other wives and spoilt.

One major challenge Ndaanan will face was the readership. The first issue of Ndaanan was sold for a dalasi per copy which was equivalent to 4 British pence at the time. Later on, as the editorial board began to feel the heavy yoke of financial burden, they increased the price to D1.50. The fall in sales was certainly the reason why it was decided in 1973 to shift the responsibility of the advertisement and circulation manager from Hassoum Ceesay to give it to Hassan Jagne, which unfortunately did not make much significant change. The most appalling situation, closely tied to the financial constraint, was the readership apathy. Despite the newspaper boom in the colonial period, Gambians of the independent era hardly read literary magazines. This, must certainly, have had adverse effects on Ndaanan. In 1976, Ndaanan will cease to exist until 2009, when a new Ndaanan is born with the same spirit of nurturing the budding poets, playwrights and prose writers in literary production in The Gambia.

Among the contributors emerged successful educationists and writers such as Dr Lenrie Peters, Gabriel Roberts, Marcel Thomasi, Juka Fatou Jabang, Charles Jow, J. C. Faye, Junkunda Chaka Daffeh, Kekoto Manneh, Ralphina da Almeida, Lydia

Forster, George Ladepon-Thomas and Salifu Kujabi.

From 2000 onwards, a literary boom has been noticed. Among the rising poets are Mariama Khan, Bala Saho and Bamba Khan. Of the specialist in folktales and short stories can be cited Dembo and Sukai Bojang, Cornelius Gomez, Mam Matty Cham, Michael Hamadi Secka, Sally Sadie Singhateh, Saikou Ceesay and Musa Bah. As for drama, few playwrights are really available yet one cannot but mention Gabriel J. Roberts, Charles Sarr Thomas and Janet Badjan Young. However, one major hitch in the last one and a half decade is quality in the works. Could this have played against the exposure of Gambian literature to the outside world? What could have been the causes? Aren't there excellent writers and playwrights? As the old Ndaanan was a school for aspiring and budding writers, is the New Ndaanan, under the supervision of the University of The Gambia literary club and coordinated by Dr Pierre Gomez, going to be a school of writers too? It has published its maiden issue in January 2009 and is yet to publish the second issue.

Emergence of Gambian Literature: 1980-2000

In 1968, Lady Augustus Jawara published her play, Rebellion. The play explores a very sensitive issue at the time which promotes girl's education. Being the first Gambian woman to publish a book of that importance, she opens a debate that will continue to challenge the first republic throughout its reign. However, the emergence of Gambian literature can be said to begin with Ndaanan. It was unquestionably a springboard in literary production in the The Gambia. Soon after it ceased to exist, the euphoria did not die, for the desire to keep writing was already instilled within some of these budding writers and poets and the three decades that followed, several of these writers published their works in books.

Among the successful writers are Gabriel Roberts who published in 1773 The Trial of

Busumbala in a collection of plays aired on BBC. He later wrote his play ‘A Coup is Planned’ in prose form in 1988 and entitled it The Goosieganderan Myth The most successfully published is perhaps Dr Tijan Sallah, who published in Ndaanan a short folktale in volume 2 issue 2 in 1973 when he was in the sixth form at the Gambia High School. Today he is credited with eight publications most of which are collections of poems and several other contributions in anthologies and literary magazines and journals. Sallah can be considered today as an accomplished poet and a pillar of West African Poetry. He has also published a collection of short stories, Before the New Earth, and a book on the cultural practices of the Wolof. Hassoum Ceesay continued to write. He published Seeking to Please in several volumes since 1976. Seeking to Please, as the poet explains in his maiden edition, is made of a selection the best of the author’s works and serialised. Some of editions carried only poetry whiles others carry short stories. He was strongly attached to our African values as a writer and had vividly manifested this in his early works published in Ndaanan. His last published book is The Power of Ngewel, a novella on marriage within the fana fana community. Swaebou Conated, Juka Fanta Jabang and Ralphina Da Almeida are other examples of published authors. The most successful self-published author among the contributors of Ndaanan, is however Nana Grey-Johnson who has undoubtedly more than eight books under his belt. Some are collections of short stories, novels, historical and biographies. He has just completed another novel on the myth of our African Cultures which is yet to be published.

Short Stories and Folktales

Storytelling in Africa presents a richer tradition and a more meaningful purpose. First, it is a means of passing on traditions and codes of behaviour and of maintaining social harmony.11 Second, in some villages, it provides the appropriate environment

to discuss matters as storytelling gathers all the community together (Pritchett 1997:7). Chinua Achebe wrote in his book Anthills of The Savannah,

“… [I]t is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story […] that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us." (Achebe 1987:124)

The story therefore, as Achebe puts it, is the means by which writers translate their worries, narrate their concerns and woes and express their joy. Gambian writers found it much more convenient to use this simple medium for the purpose. Among the published books in the last two decades, collections of stories constitute the largest number. Several of these delve into small lives or the marginal people as Hassoum Ceesay, a literary critic rightly puts it. Several of these stories were first published in the local papers and began to motivate others into creative writing. Hassoum said in an interview conducted with Dr Pierre Gomez:

There is therefore, a cut in the plot, few characters, less flashback and scanty language. Such astringencies is far from being a drawback – it is an asset; it shows how writers have adjusted their style to suit their medium (CEESAY: 1999). 12

The effect of the short stories lies mainly on how much it can be captivating and how it can persuade the reader to continue reading. Most Gambian writers have produced very short novels that can best be categorized as novellas. This is the case for Ebou Dibba (Alhagie and Olu and The Smugglers), Ebou Gaye (Patience is Accompanied by a Smile), Essa Colley (If I am Right or Wrong), Musa Jallow (Across the Scenes) and Sally Sadie Singhateh (Christie’s Crises, Baby Trouble and The Sun Will Soon

Shine). All these works deal with everyday issues revolving around the school, crime, sexuality, women affairs, city life and travel.

Some writers published collections of stories based entirely on Gambian folklore. The first to publish a collection of stories is Hassoum Ceesay with his Seeking to Please in 1976. Seeking to Please is however a generic name used for all his collections some of which were poetry and others short sketches. Nana Grey-Johnson published two collections, the first in 1987 entitled A Krio Engagement and Other Stories and the second in 1989 entitled The Children of the Spyglass and Other Stories. In 1988 Dr Tijan Sallah came out with a collection he entitled Before The New Earth. Among the collection of short stories, it is important to include Emil Magel's Folktales From The Gambia published in 1984, David P. Gamble's two publications Gambian Fula Stories Told by Mary Umah Baldeh and Thoughts on Gambian Folktales both published in August 1981 in San Francisco and in May 2005 in Brisbane, California respectively.

Major Themes in Gambian Literature: From 1980-2000

Issues affecting the common people or related to marginal lives constitute the greater part of the novellas and novels published in The Gambia. Several authors use the child as a hero and with the child, built themes around the school, travel, crime, city life, sexuality, and several other issues. Other themes touch on politics and socio-cultural issues.

The child as a hero

From 1976 to 1980, only Gabriel Roberts had his play, The Trial of Busumbala, published. In 1980, an emerging writer will publish with the Trendsetters, a small novella entitled Olu and The Smugglers. The story is about a young boy who, on

holidays at his grandparents, discovers a smuggling racket and is able to convince the police to investigate. The author, Ebou Dibba, who was living in Surrey in the United Kingdom at the time, will pioneer the era of Gambian contemporary writers. If Ebou Dibba's Olu and the Smugglers did register any success among the school going children in the eighties, another publication, Meet me in Conakry, published in 1984 will have much greater success mainly for its closeness to the Gambian youth. For the first time, a Gambian writer uses the Gambian setting to create fiction. The characters, the space, the theme and the plot were adequate for the book to leave a lasting mark on the minds of Gambian school children. Sheriff Samsudeen Sarr, the author, had the book published with Macmillan in their famous Pacesetters series. The three protagonists, youths who have just completed secondary school, decide to take a perilous adventure towards Senegal up south to Conakry, Guinea. This daring adventure, an eye opener to these youths, is appealing to the target readers because after school, adventure has for long been a nurtured dream among Gambian youths. The one and a half decade that followed, several other books will be published around the youth and adventure.

Table : the child and school

Author	Book title	Related theme
Dibba Ebou	Alhaji	Lift to school Hate maths
Gaye Ebou	Patience is Accompanied by Smile	Capital punishment Good student
Jallow Musa	Across the Scenes	Village boy badly influenced in the big town Early pregnancy Drugs & beach parties
Peters Lenrie	The Second Round	The alma mata Sports and medical exams Head boy involved in incest
Roberts Gabriel	The Goosieganderan Myth	School inspection Maths class
Saho Bala	The Road to my Village	School boy in 'nerves'
Singhateh Sally	Christie's Crisis	School in love affair

		Friends help in investigations French class mentioned

School life goes along with the child's development and children experience much of their adolescent and adult lives within or around the school. In most books where children play the hero, there is some element of the school and it either becomes the main theme of the story or part of the general theme.

Most African writers in the sixties wrote with children as their hero. Some of the stories are semi-autobiographical (Camara Laye's The African Child, Cheick Amidou Kane's The Ambiguous Adventure) and has the school as the main setting.

School life has always been a passionate interest to the young reader, starting way back with Tom Brown's Schooldays, through the innumerable boarding school for girls by Angela Brazil and her followers, to the more glamorous and outstandingly successful ballet books by Noel Streatfield, and on to books about our comprehensive schools (Robinson 1982:15).

Olu and the Smugglers and Meet me in Conakry are two stories that have the child as a protagonist and the school as a convenient setting. Several Gambian books will reflect the school child as the main protagonist. Alhaji (Ebou Dibba:1992), If I am Right or Wrong (Essa S. Colley:1993), The Road to My Village (Bala Saho:1994), Patience is Accompanied by a Smile (Ebou Gaye:1997), Christie's Crises (Sally Singhateh:1998), Across the Scenes (Musa Jallow:1998) and The Ultimate Conflict (Baba Galleh Jallow:1999) are excellent examples. Though the main protagonist in The Second Round is an adult (Dr Kawa), we notice his relationship with Lara, a young lady already involved with Joshua, whom Dr Kawa met at the school. The youth's desire to travel, as expressed in Meet Me in Conakry, is an adventure exploited by other authors too such as Essa Colley, Bala Saho, Ebou Gaye and

Musa Jallow. The last two will explore the school's internal surrounding further in order to depict the relationship between the youth and school. One interesting phenomenon some writers expressed in their stories but not entirely condemning it is corporal punishment. The detailed description will give to the today's reader a scene of horror. In Patience is Accompanied by a Smile, Gaye does not entirely condemn the act and would later give us the reason through the protagonist's mother.

Some students screaming, some growling while others were weeping. At that moment, I could no longer control the warm tears that were rolling downwards along my cheeks. After the fifth round, I withdrew my right hand and stretched the left. My alter ego, Bai, on seeing the blood that was oozing from these wounded palms, decided to subject his cheeks to the heavy slap of the corn palm of the torturer in exchange for the strokes of the cane (Gaye 1977:7).

Gaye projects corporal punishment as a genuine solution in helping mould the child into a disciplined person. In the same story, Sulayman's brother Dodou uses the same measure of correction. When Sulayman decided to tell his father of the harsh punishment he was subjected to by his brother, this is what his mother said: "Dodou wishes you well and wants to cultivate ethical values in you". (Gaye 1977:1) Could this be attributed to the author's religious upbringing where the adage is 'spare the rod and spoil the Child'? The fear experienced by Sulayman in Gaye's book is also shared by Musa in Bala Saho's The Road to My Village. Musa recalls, in a comical manner, the teacher using the ruler to inflict the necessary corrections:

The teacher raised his hand. He raised it above his head so that one could count his ribs. He had a blackboard ruler in his hand. Meanwhile a boy was being stretched by four of the biggest boys in the class. He brought the stick wood down on the boy's back (Saho 1994:11).

During public flogging three or four strong boys are generally called to carry and stretch the victim. This was a common and welcomed sight up to the late eighties. The blackboard ruler or a bamboo cane is usually used and most schools will have a particular teacher very closely related to the feared monster in our childish dreams such that the mere mention of his name can calm all ripples of disruptions. This is the case of Ustaz Cham in Gaye's Patience is Accompanied by a Smile. In fact, the child is generally so terrorised that it takes all measures to avoid being caught doing anything wrong. This however, does not satisfy Ustaz who takes pleasure with his might in the classroom to further terrorise the children by inventing crimes none committed. Sometimes, Ustaz Cham will share sweets to all the pupils and much later will ask to be returned the sweets. Those unfortunate pupils who have sucked theirs will therefore be subjected to a punishment of Ustaz's choice.

The Child on adventure

Adventure is varied and takes several forms. The school itself can present to the child several adventurous experiences. Ebou Dibba uses the school setting where he hides his protagonist, Alhaji, and the secret service agent investigating a diamond smuggling racket who poses as Alhaji's Maths teacher. Moving from the village to the city is very common in The Gambia where very few High schools existed before. Such a movement and city exposure has tremendous influence on most young children who can be carried away and indulge into petty crime, premature sex, drugs, fights and constant disobedience. Such is reflected by Musa Jallow in Across the Scenes.

Table : the child in adventure

Author	Book title	Related theme
Colley Essa	If I am Right or Wrong	Wrestling between school mates Traveling to Sierra Leone

Dibba Ebou	Alhaji	ALhaji and the smugglers. The adventure towards Dakar
Dibba Ebou	Olu and the Smugglers	Smugglers and Olu
Jallow Musa	Across the Scenes	City influence
Peters Lenrie	The Second Round	Dr Kawa's relations with the Marshalls With Laura
Singhateh Sally	Christie's Crisis	Christie's discovery of her father's activities

Travelling to discover, both within and outside the country, is a major phenomenon among Gambian youths. The 'nerve' syndrome signifies the desire to venture to the developed countries such as in Europe, in Scandinavian countries or in North America in search for 'greener pastures'. Some of these journeys are made on justifiable reasons (education, visiting or legal migration), however, most of these are huge risks taken by frustrated youths who seek for an Eldorado in these destinations and sometimes quick riches. The risk involved is generally huge. Parents may be pressurized to sell their valuables (land and other expensive assets) to finance the journey. Embassies have understood the scam and have adopted drastic measures to restrict such movements. Out of frustration for being rejected a visa, youths can either involve themselves in visa scams or take the dangerous route to Europe: journey by sea through spain. These concerns did not go unnoticed by writers and Papa Jeng captured it well in Boat Boys. Bala Saho also slightly indicated such a desire in The Road to My Village.

Child abuse and health issues are not very prominent as themes. The only abuse well depicted is corporal punishment and that is not entirely condemned by those who expressed it.

Table : Reflection on African Cultural and Traditional practices

Baba Galleh Jallow	The Ultimate Conflict/Dying for my

	Daughter
Ebou Gaye	Patience is accompanied by smile

Early marriage and female genital mutilation are taken up by very few writers which are disproportionate to the danger they represents today and the degree of its effect on youths, particularly girls. Baba Galleh Jallow published in 1999 The Ultimate Conflict which is narrated in the first person by a father who struggles through the traditional practice of genital mutilation against his daughter. Jallow reedited and republished the story in the United States several years later under a different title, Dying for My Daughter.

Table : Love, sex and marriage

Colley Essa	If I am Right or Wrong
Dibba Ebou	Alhaji
Jallow Musa	Across the Scenes
Peters Lenrie	The Second Round
Saho Bala	The Road to my Village
Singhateh Sally	Christie’s Crisis

Several writers wrote on crime as their main theme such as Cherno Jatta (Sin and Blackmail), Sally Singhateh (Christie’s Crisis) and Ebou Dibba (Olu and The Smugglers) and Alhaji. Smuggling is one theme that seems to fascinate the writers yet Gambia has generally has never shown any sign of organised crime during the periods these writers wrote these stories.

Table : Exploration and travel

Colley Essa	If I am Right or Wrong
Gaye Ebou	Patience is Accompanied by Smile
Jallow Musa	Across the Scenes
Saho Bala	The Road to my Village
Sarr Sheriff Samsudeen	Meet Me in Conakry
Singhateh Sally	Christie's Crisis

All the above themes could be justified as experiences they gathered while outside the country or these are common themes they believe could attract wide readership.

Political and socio-cultural themes

The political consciousness in The Gambia was sharpened for the first time when in 1981 a failed coup changed the perception of Gambians vis-à-vis their mode of life. The horror and the carnage became an eye opener and the political structure that came up after that, with the creation of the Senegambia confederation slightly shifted the attention of the coming writers in their stance towards their government and politics in general. Gabriel Roberts transforms his play, A Coup is Planned published in Ndaana to a novel which he entitles The Goosieganderan Myth. It is worth mentioning here that, when he staged his play for the first time before the 1981 coup, the then High Commissioner for Senegal was invited to watch it. The High Commissioner was very angry with the story's plot and made a complain to the Gambian government. During the investigations, the Reform Club, where Roberts was the Secretary and where the play was staged (it was in Banjul at the time) disown him when they were threatened with eviction as they were occupying government buildings. Roberts only back back as a member of the reform club very recently after many of its members appealed to him to forget the past. In the

Goosieganderan Myth, he tries to showcase a complex situation where a plot to annex The Gambia, (Gandera) into Senegal (Goosiera) is machinated by soldiers in Senegal in collaboration with Gambian soldiers. Whiles the plot is being planned, Lady Sabrina, Gandera's President falls in love with Goosiera's President, Dynamic. In Gandera, the official language is Languish (English) and in Goosiera it is Grench (French). The publication of the novel coincided with the numerous problems the Senegambia Confederation was facing and the marked reality that Senegal was subduing the Gambian nation and gradually ruling it. The military plot can be explained by the heavy presence of Senegalese gendarmes in The Gambia who virtually constituted the most powerful force in the security structure. In 1988-1989, after eight years, the confederation failed and collapsed. Roberts' The Goosieganderan Myth was timely and reflects the concerns of many Gambians.

In the same year that Roberts published his first novel, Dr Tijan M. Sallah published a collection of short stories entitled Before the New Earth. The book comprises of 16 short stories catalogued in 93 pages. This is the third collection of short stories published by a Gambian (after Seeking to Please by Hassum Ceesay and A Krio Engagement and Other Stories by Nana Grey Johnson) and the first to be published outside The Gambia. The stories touch generally issues related to the complexities of human relations and emotions. However, one interesting story decried the effects of colonialism and new independence in Africa. As in his poem 'Second Independence', Sallah uses animals to represent the repressive nature of our leaders and the vain hope of the subdued people in the story 'Weaver Birds'. The story is a true reflection of the effects of colonialism on our African states:

The weavers see themselves as distinct birds [---] Distinct in their tongue which should rule the world. Distinct in their manners, which would be etiquette for the

world. Distinct in their cultures and rules, which should be adhered to by the world (Sallah 1988:54).

The colonisers take the form of weaver birds in the story, yet the attitudinal transposition is evident even in the African states claiming independence. Several other writers questioned the government policy and methods of governance. Nana Grey-Johnson's The Magic Calabash deals with a victim of retrenchment and the heavy responsibilities as sole provider Erubami had and his efforts to struggle to maintain his standard of living. Several other works of fiction on politics have been published generally by Gambians in the form of short stories and novellas but mostly, published works on Gambian politics fall under non-fiction in the form of semi auto-biographies and other works of research as referenced in this book.

In the search for self and identity, Meet Me in Conakry by Sheriff Sarr is a good example. The story will clearly show the demarcation between two peoples of the same language, culture and way of life but who reflect heavily the colonial influence each goes through. The three protagonists in the story, in their first encounter with Senegalese forces, had this to learn:

The language they spoke was Greek to us. We did not understand a single syllable of it. They talked among themselves for a long time before one of them asked us, "Senegalese?" "No, no, no!" I replied, shaking my hands madly. "Gambians, we're from the Gambia. Don't you know The Gambia''? (Sarr 1984:23)

After the second republic, Baba Galleh Jallow, a journalist who worked for the Daily Observer and later established the Independent Newspaper, published a memoir of his difficult experience with the new government regarding the critique nature of his publications. He suffered harassment and torture for these publications which he captured in his book Mandela's Other Children: the Diary of an African Journalist. In

fact, Baba Galleh can be categorised as the first confirmed Gambian satirist. He has published several short satires on the Daily Observer Newspaper in the mid-nineties and his first published satire is Angry Laughter which depicts the horrible experiences under military rule in Africa.

Unfortunately, satires and other publications putting government officials to task and questioning government policies are not circulated in The Gambia. With the passing of laws against such publications at legislative level, some writers are forced to live in exile where they continue to produce publications.

Gambian women writers

Up to the 21st century, almost no Gambian woman has taken the pen to put down in book form any literary work. The first book published was by Lady Augusta Jawara in 1968 in the form of a play entitled Rebellion. Before the publication, Lady Augusta Jawara, who was the first Gambian First Lady, had been involved in staging plays with actors like Charles Sarr Thomas and Marcel Thomasi . She won an award two years earlier at the Cultural Art Festival in Dakar for her play African King. It was a unique occasion as it was the first of its kind ever organised in West Africa. Rebellion, written under the pen-name Ramatoulie Kinteh, is a play that deals with girl education. The daughter of a powerful Gambian chief send two of her daughters to school and the eldest of the two, after completing her secondary education, is recommended by her teacher to pursue further education in the UK. The father refused categorically on the argument that traditionally, girls, educated or not, only finish up being married and becoming house wives. Ramatoulie shows a contrast between the two situations where the elder daughter of the chief revolts and finally goes to the UK to study medicine while the younger daughter embraces the tradition and leaves school to marry early. Lady Augusta was able to spin a beautiful story

where the elder daughter is welcomed after studies and the younger, after having several children is completely dependent on her husband.

Janet Badjan Young is the most successful in the area of plays; however, only one, The Hand of Fate, has been published. She has staged more than six plays some of which are The Ultimate Inheritance, The Dance of Katchikalli, Trial by Jury, and The Battle of Sankandi. She resides in The Gambia and is working on building a State-of-the art theatre.

The first Gambian lady to publish short novels is Sally Sadie Singhated. All her publications were done outside The Gambia and the main protagonists are generally young girls. Her published books are Christie's Crises, Baby Trouble and The Sun Will Soon Shine. Sally loves to write intricate stories and create suspense. Outside the fact that she has in all her works a heroin, what is common in all her novels so far is that the main themes evolve around social problems related to family, love, marriage, female genital mutilation, among others, and the stories are set in The Gambia.

With Mariama Khan's 95 poems entitled Futa Toro published in 2003, she marks herself as the first woman poet to publish a collection. Before her, several other Gambian women published poems in Ndaanan and others on the national newspapers but none ever published a collection before. In 2004, Mariama will co-publish with his brother Bamba Khan, 142 poems in a collection entitled Juffureh: Kissing You With Hurting Lips. Mariama contributed 83 of the poems under the. main title 'Songs of a Sister'. A year after this publication three ladies will publish together a collection of poems entitled The Repeal. Juka Fatou Jabang invited Mathilda Johnson and Ann Therese Ndong Jatta to share their poetry under that title. Initially, Juka intended to publish an anthology of Gambian women poetry but as such a

project was huge, she contended herself to edit a collection. The Repeal is composed of 48 poems from which Juka contributed 17, Mathilda 24 and Ann 7. Though poorly published and undated, Rohey Samba, a prolific poet, will come up with two beautiful collections entitled Tomorrow Waits and Mother Gambia Beats. Both collections are reflections of the poet's experiences and social concerns. All this reveals that there are more women poets than writers

Writing Gambian folktales are generally not common to women, yet The Gambia will set an extraordinary example through Mam Matty Cham. Cham's Olimata and Other Stories touches on common Wolof tales of treachery, deceit and wickedness. All the tales are collected and compiled by Mam Matty Cham who is, in fact, an autodidact. She will receive the help and encouragement of a Peace Corp volunteer. Sukai Mbye Bojang co-authored with her husband, Dembo Fanta Bojang, a collection of Folktales entitled Folktales From The Gambia. This collection of short stories is compiled after a difficult and tedious task of collecting and translating tales from different authentic sources. Ralphina da Almeida will become the first Gambian woman from the Krio tribe to publish a collection entitled Poems, Stories and Krio Proverbs. This book, a reflection of a lifelong effort to literature, gives an insight of the Krio people.

CONCLUSION

There is enough evidence to attest that Gambian writers, though quite conscious of the pan-african movements and the cry for independence, did not write much fiction on the matter like their counterparts in Anglophone Africa. However, the same cannot be said of poetry. Much poetry has been produced denouncing colonialism and raising the voice against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Such are those of Lenrie Peters, Tijan Sallah and several other poets of the post colonial era.

Gambian literature, however, can be viewed in two major angles. On the one side is

the boiling desire to write and publish, and on the other side is the major obstacles and burden of publishing. Publishing for the Gambian writer remains a much serious challenge compared to their African counterparts. Among the major obstacles are the lack of an established publishing house, the absence of structures to guide and facilitate authors who have a complete manuscript and are required to publish them, the training required to help fine tune some writers' skills, the absence or scarcity of competent editors and proofreaders, the exorbitant cost involved in publishing, the absence of a vital readership, and most importantly, the lack of protection required for their published works.

Except for emerging publishing houses or small enterprises in the area, well established publishing houses are not accepting manuscripts for which they have no guarantee of sales. In fact, most authors today are now required to write on themes upon the request of publishing houses and receive royalties in return. This measure restricts authors from writing on what they feel. One such publishing house is Macmillan. Macmillan has shifted nearly all its attention, in the last three decades, to publishing learning materials. Such materials are also developed, produced and then published entirely by Macmillan staff. Writers are encouraged to write what Macmillan needs for its market. Such is the method adopted by most renowned publishing houses. One of Nana Grey-Johnson's books, The Magic Calabash, initially published in 1998, has been republished by Macmillan in 2004 as a second edition. In an interview with Dr Rosamond King on 12 December 2006, Nana explained his experience with Macmillan particularly in reference to certain parts the latter wanted to either modify or delete completely. He will say "if you read the [Magic] Calabash Macmillan edition, there are no boo-boos, no typographical errors. It's perfect. But, there was a drawback. […] what I had to accept in the Magic Calabash 'à la

Macmillan' is a watered-down version that avoided [several topics of interest]. But […] we had to compromise. We have to compromise. We will always have to compromise because we don't have one of our own." In the lengthy interview he had with Dr King, he elaborated on the serious obstacles one faces when publishing. Some of which are related to cost of production, quality service, distribution and particularly cultural hitches and a poor market. However, his passion always triumphs and his love to share dominates over the financial worries and obstacles he face. Another renowned African publisher, Longman Pearson, still accepts African manuscripts, but on strict criteria established by them. Long gone are the days when African manuscripts were too easily accepted for the Heinemann's African Writers' Series. Though this Longman Pearson's special African edition still exists, Heinemann African Writers and Junior African Writers Series are embarked on collecting manuscripts through the Writers' Association of The Gambia because they are seeking new talent and need to have 'a fair representation of the African countries'.

Very recently, enterprising Gambians have set up local publishing enterprises and are helping out irrespective of the huge cost involved. The Book Production and Multimedia Resource Unit (BPMRU), a government established printing agency, has been among the first to start helping to print books. It was established with the support of the Peace Corps in The Gambia and has since been a branch of government responsible for printing after taking over from the Government Printing Services. It has now been upgraded and renamed The Gambia Printing and Publishing Corporation. Sandeng Publishers was a conception of Momodou Sabally, Mariama Khan and Bamba Khan, three young emerging writers. Sunrise Publishers is owned by Patience Sonko-Godwin, a well-published historian, and the Edward

Francis Small publisher is managed by Foroyaa (a local newspaper in The Gambia). The former publishes mainly the owner's works and the latter provide printing services at a very reasonable cost. Fodeh Baldeh, a writer and an English language specialist who also works as Senior Lecturer at the University of The Gambia is running a publishing enterprise called the Fulladu Publishers.

The writers strive to uphold quality in their products yet there is always that nagging feeling among the critics: Is the work substantially superb in production and quality? Have the works been properly edited and proof-read? Has it met the conventions and the criteria for quality production? Recently, Fulladu publisher has firmly established itself as a recognized publishing house. It provides proofreading and editing by skilful and experienced people. It also provides the layout and design as well as the printing of the material. Except for a few privileged authors including Mr Baldeh, its services have not extended to marketing and distribution which is the other most difficult stage of knowledge production. Most of the services provided are therefore considered as self-publishing because authors still pay for them and receive back the finished product to deal with the distribution and marketing. These are laudable endeavours from enterprising Gambians who strive with their meagre resource to provide materials for the future generations. Macmillan The Gambia, managed by Gambian expert, Mr. Theophilus George, has concentrated in producing learning materials for the Gambian schools which is its major interest. Mr George has however confirmed that he intends to publish authors whose works prove excellent and productive to The Gambia.

After all the trials of publishing the work, another major problem looms ahead: distribution. Today, as most Gambian writers have to invest heavily to see their works published, they would expect to see them properly distributed and receive their

honorary rights or better still, the profits. In the Gambia, books hardly sell, not only because the market is small but also because the reading culture is very low. In fact, books generally sell only to a particular public: the tourists and expatriates. Another method has therefore been adopted by some of the writers and that is to seek agencies, companies, international and non-governmental organisations to patronise their publications. This works on isolated cases. Action Aid The Gambia has been very instrumental in this. Nana Grey-Johnson, during an interview conducted at his residence, stated that sometimes one waits for a long time after distributing the books to certain outlets, to only return much later to find them gathering dust. He had to recollect them and store them in a carton at the home store.

The outlets used by writers to sell their books are tourist centres, bookshops, schools, supermarkets and their homes. Sometimes individuals would even collect some books to sell them to friends. The inconvenience in marketing materials in The Gambia is three fold: a low literacy rate, a dying reading culture and low income. Quite a small percentage of the population is educated and most of these are plunged in the vicissitudes of a challenging survival and are only satisfied in using their little but hard-earned knowledge to find work. Reading books passionate very few people. In the last few years, the percentage number of students from the senior secondary schools who can communicate fairly well both orally and in writing has diminished at an alarming rate. Beyond the strictly recommended books in the syllabus students can hardly remember a book they have read. Their attention has been diverted to other more entertaining and self-satisfying hobbies such as watching American or Nigerian movies, miming or singing rap songs and dances, or surfing the internet for those who can have the access. And though most parents are aware of this, they hardly find an excuse to force them to read because the same

parents find buying books very expensive. Is it practical for a government employee to buy a book costing $10 when the person receives an average monthly salary of $55; a salary from which rent, electricity, water bills, school fees are paid? And From which the daily food is paid for, and then comes transportation, medical bills, traditional and religious ceremonies, extended family expenses etc.? It takes great courage to spend money on books when it is not evident that such an amount of money would come by again soon. Priorities are therefore set and sacrifices made. Eventually the writer becomes the sacrificial lamb and for some, the passion for writing dies out. This could explain why several authors could publish only one book and others have several manuscripts gathering dust.

For several years now, a special day is reserved as Gambian Literary Day. Dr Pierre Gomez of the University has been in charge of organizing it with lectures on issues related to Gambian literature. This has been well attended and several interesting papers have been presented by writers, researchers and literary critics. It is another boost for the promotion of Gambian literature. Newspapers, particularly the Daily Observer and The Point, have for long reserved whole pages entirely for Gambian literature. Either a selection of poems is published or someone's interesting story is being told. This has somehow developed a taste for reading for pleasure.

The revival of a literary magazine by the University of The Gambia is another giant step in promoting young writers and will without doubt provide another literary boom.

Writers have not been organised within a framework of a formal structure. There were in existence three associations: The Gambia Writers' Club (the association that created Ndanaan in the early seventies), The Gambia Association of Writers (GAW) and the Association of Authors and Writers (AAW). All have slowly and silently gone dormant or even extinct. With the resuscitation of the association of writers recently,

the Writers Association of The Gambia whose executive committee is presided over by Nana Grey Johnson, there are hopeful days for writers and all stakeholders.

1. Notes

I will use Western education in the place of Formal education because I constantly argue that formal education already existed before the establishment of schools in the western form of education. The Quranic education is also formalised and structured.

2 Aku is a Yoruba word referring to the language used by Yoruba freed captives. It is now the word used to refer to all the Liberated Africans in The Gambia. Lets note also the those Yoruba who have remained Muslim and are called the Oku Marabouts.

3 The Protectorate constituted almost 95% of the country. The Colony comprised of only Bathurst (Governor House) and the satellite villages on the island (Portuguese town, Jollof town, Soldier town etc)

4 Hoping that someday a researcher will make a comprehensive inventory of the literary publications in the press during the during the colonial era.

5 This is Dr Mamadou Tangara's Ph. D Thesis defended in September 2007 at the University of Limoges in France.

6 Djibril Tamsir Niane's book is entitled *Sundiata et l'Epopée Mandingue* and it narrates the story of one of the most influential kings of Mandingue called Mali and around whom lies a strange myth about the buffalo and the lion.

7 The true griot still exists except that they do not come to social events to sing and gain money. Women and men come to social events singing praises of people (the well-to-do in general or the owner of the ceremony) in exchange for little money.

8 Gari is pounded yam or cassava often used as a main meal in most of the Sub-Saharan countries in Africa.

9 Efforts to discover who E. Midnight remained in vain.

10 Generally a small calabash or a locally-knitted plate placed in front of the widow where money is thrown as a sign of sympathy.

11 Ibidem, p. 9.

12 CEESAY (Hassoum), *Daily Observer*, 5 January 1999.

REFERENCES CITED AND USED

1- ***Novels***

- Essa S. Colley, *If I am Right or Wrong,* Great Britain : Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd.,1993.
- Ebou Dibba, *Alhaji*, Hong Kong : The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.
- Ebou Gaye, *Patience Accompanied by Smile,* Banjul : The Observer Company Ltd, 1997.
- Musa Jallow, *Across the Scenes,* Kanifing : Printing And Stationery Corporation,1998.

- Lenrie Peters, *The Second Round,* London; Nairobi: African Writers Series N°22, Heinemann Educational Books. 1965.

- Gabriel J. Roberts, *The Goosieganderan Myth,* London : Vantage Press, 1988.
- Bala K. Saho, *The Road to my Village,* Helsinki : Trittum Oy, 1994.
- Tijan M. Sallah, *Before the New Earth, African Short Stories*, Calcutta, India: Writers Workshop, 1988.
- Sheriff S. Sarr, *Meet Me in Conakry*, Hong Kong: Macmillan Publishers Ltd. Pacesetters Series, 1984.
- Sally Sadie Singhateh, *Christie's Crisis*. - Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1998.

2- ***Short Stories and folktales***

- Lenrie Peters, 'Hunt for a Turtle', Vincent, T., *Black and African Writing: a FESTAC anthology*, Lagos: The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation National Theatre. 388p. pp. 82-85.1981.
- Lenrie Peters, 'Recollection of a Beverage', *Ndanaan*: The Gambia's First Literary Magazine, Vol. 2. Issue 2, Banjul: Ndanaan. 1972.

- Lenrie Peters, 'The Local Party Secretary', Vincent, T., *Black and African Writing: a FESTAC anthology*, Lagos: The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation National Theatre. 388p. pp. 73-82. 1981.
- Lenrie Peters, 'The Ride', Permanent Bureau of the Afro-Asian Writers, *Afro-Asian Short Stories: An Anthology*, Afro-Asian Series 2-3, Cairo: Permanent Bureau of the Afro-Asian Writers. pp. 17-33. 1973.

3- ***Other Reference Materials***

- Gabriel J. Roberts, *The Trial of Busumbala*, in HENDERSON et al; - Nine African Plays For Radio - London : Heinemann, 1971, 185p.

- Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah,* London: Heinemann Ltd., 1987.
- Thomas H. Baldwin, *Recommendations on the Aims, Scope, Content and Methods of Education in The Gambia*, Gambia Printing Services, 1950.

- Treld Pelkey Bicknell and Felicity Trotman, ed., *How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books and Get Them Published,* London : Macdonald & Co., 1988,

- Hassoum Ceesay, ‘Untitled Article’*, Daily Observer Newspaper*, Banjul: Observer Press, 5 Janvier 1999.
- E. Midnight, ‘Mboka’s Manuscript’, *Ndaanan*, Vol 1, Issue 1,1971, p 6-7
- Dylan Pritchett, *African Storytelling Traditions,* John F Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts, 1997.
- Martha Robinson, *The Writing School Guide to Writing for Children,* London: Nationwide Studies Limited, 1982.

4- ***Online Reference***

- Gail Dessler, *African Folktales : Stories from the Heart and Land*, http://imet.csus.edu/imet1/desler/passages/storytell/student.htm, 02/04/2009 22:13.