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Susan Stringer. *The Senegalese Novel By Women: Through Their Own Eyes.* New York: Peter Lang, 1999. 201 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8204-4568-7.

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This remarkable study of Senegalese women's fiction offers a much-needed introduction to this literature as well as thought-provoking critical analyses of both major and minor works. Moreover, Stringer's work offers a useful corrective to the notion that French Studies can simply assimilate Francophone Literature without considering the specific contexts and problems that belabor African novelists and their reading publics. She opens the study with an examination of the social, historical and cultural contexts relevant to the novels analyzed, and closes with a strong rejoinder that westerners should not impose the vagaries of western critical fashion on African literatures, but consider the novels as much as possible through Senegalese women's eyes. In other words, it is inappropriate to judge African fiction on the basis of western aesthetic standards alone, just as it is imperialistic to assume that African women will accept western feminism wholesale without modification. According to Stringer, "Whereas western feminism is attempting to create a feminist set of values, Senegalese women writers are trying to reconcile traditional moral values with freedom of choice" (155). All of her readers will benefit from her sensitive interpretations of these novels and of the problems that Senegalese women face.

Stringer's study clearly breaks new ground, as it is the first study of francophone African women's writing to define its field in national terms. Although Dorothy Blair preceded Stringer with her *Senegalese Literature: A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), and many other critics have produced francophone literary histories shaped by the political and cultural boundaries of the postcolonial state, Stringer is the first to focus on a body of women's literature in this manner. Since her focus is narrower, the literary landscape she paints arrests the attention in a way that sweeping overviews such as those by Blair or Ihechukwu Madubuike (*The Senegalese Novel: A Sociological Study of the Impact of the Politics of Assimilation*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1983) cannot. It complements those earlier works, but indicates new critical perspectives that shape our overall perception of Senegalese literature differently.

Women writers have a firm foothold in Senegal, and at least two novelists are widely considered to have produced novels that are part of the new francophone literary canon. Stringer devotes chapters to both of these women (Mariama Ba and Aminata Sow Fall). These are solid chapters, with few surprises. Nevertheless, some surprises do await the reader. For example, the chronological ordering of the chapters gives Nafissatou Diallo a pre-eminence that she never enjoyed until Stringer brought her to the attention of a wider critical audience. Admittedly, Diallo's oeuvre does not have the importance of works by Sow Fall and Ba; however, she is an important foremother, and we cannot understand the development of Senegalese women's fiction without her. The same is true of the lesser-known women Stringer discusses in a later chapter. Indeed, her remarkable prescience in underlining the importance of Ken Bugul at a time when few had even heard of her, should be applauded. Although the chronological structure that Stringer has chosen can help us to see Senegalese literature in fresh ways, as it does when it sharpens the reader's interest in Diallo, it also leads to a certain repetitiousness on the thematic level. Sometimes this is confusing, as it is difficult to see how these themes develop and change over time, for they are scattered throughout the study. Readers do benefit from a truly insightful reading of the issues and themes that are significant in Senegalese women writers' eyes. Unfortunately, insight sometimes falls short, as when Stringer writes about the "anonymity of oral literature" (23). A more current bibliography of the appropriate literature produced in the social sciences and especially in folkloristics would have led her to put this and similar comments on the editorial scrap-heap.

These are mere peccadilloes, however, in light of what this study of Senegalese women's fiction has to offer. The re-edition of this monograph testifies to the significance and originality of Stringer's scholarship. *The Senegalese Novel By Women: Through Their Own Eyes* not

only foreshadowed many of the critical tendencies that have taken hold in the field since 1996, but has also held its ground as the strongest study available of African women's literature defined primarily through national identity. Without a doubt, readers interested in Senegalese women's fiction will turn to Stringer's study.

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