

History and the Production and Reception of Autobiography in Francophone Africa

Nous avons affirmé la nécessité de refonder l'histoire à partir de la matrice africaine. Le système colonial se prolongeait jusque dans la sphère de la recherche. [...] La recherche était un des instruments de la colonisation à un point tel que la recherche en histoire avait décidé qu'il n'y avait pas d'histoire africaine et que les Africains colonisés étaient purement et simplement condamnés à endosser l'histoire du colonisateur. C'est pourquoi nous nous sommes dit que nous devons partir de nous-mêmes pour arriver à nous-mêmes. (Ki-Zerbo, A. *Quand l'Afrique?* 12)

In a recent book, the African Historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo asserts that only by remaining true to her identity can Africa achieve development and find a role to play in the world; only then can Africans become subjects and masters of their own history: History functions here as an identity provider. This paper investigates the status of Francophone autobiography and history in Africa from the colonial time to the present period. In recent debates in Francophone and postcolonial studies on the linguistic conflict of writing in the tongue of the former colonizer, the ability of Francophone memoirs to "re-write" the past has not come under major scrutiny. This lack of attention to autobiography, and memoirs in particular, I argue, becomes especially conspicuous in light of recent publications dominated by memoirs in the last two decades by Africans who witnessed and/or participated in the French colonial project in Africa. It is essential to point out that these autobiographical productions are written in French exclusively and, paradoxically, are published mostly by the former colonizer's publishing houses. The memoirs, set in the historical space of colonization, have the

potential to serve as "archives" for future African generations; indeed, those "archives" may be seen as an alternate "truth" to the history of French presence in Africa if issues of audience and publishing are properly addressed.

Some Problems of Definition: Autobiography and the Birth of Francophone African Literature

Recently, Francophone African literature has benefited from new scholarly studies aimed at revising the history and particularly the origins of that literary tradition. Countering the thesis of the Belgian critic Lylian Kesteloot who claimed the primacy of Poetry in the birth of Francophone African literature in her now classic *Ecrivains Noirs de Langue Française: Naissance d'une Littérature*, the Beninese critic Guy Ossito Midiohouan declares that Kesteloot's claim was contextually and ideologically motivated. Midiohouan posits that the novel was at the birth of Francophone literature, not poetry as formerly asserted by Kesteloot.

While one may agree with Midiohouan as to the primacy of prose over poetry in the birth of Francophone African literature, it is even more accurate to add that autobiography *came, first* among the prosaic productions, including the novel. Moreover, when Midiohouan revisits Kesteloot's thesis, the Beninese critic is careful to specify not that "prose" was at the birth of African literature, but rather "novelistic prose." Such an apparent distinction corrects the tendency of earlier critics of Francophone African literature to confuse every type of writing by labeling it "roman" (novel) or "prose romanesque" (novelistic prose). It is true that autobiography was not yet constituted as a genre *per se* when Bakary Diallo wrote *Force Bonté*, which was uncritically classified as a "roman." Even an eminent critic such as Mohamadou Kane does not hesitate in conflating autobiography and the novel as constituting one single genre.

Il faut s'arrêter aux caractéristiques essentielles de **l'autobiographie africaine**. Elle manque d'être personnelle ou a l'orientation psychologique, tant elle s'encombre de préoccupations collectivistes. L'écriture privilégie le créateur, son témoignage, mais ce dernier ne se laisse pas aller à l'auto-introspection: il ne s'arrête pas outre mesure à sa situation spécifique. S'il le fait, il n'en retient que l'exemplarité, son degré de signification de la situation des autres. Ni dans *Force Bonté* ni dans *Climbié*, ni dans *L'Enfant noir* l'auteur n'insiste sur la particularité de son cas. L'aventure du personnage dans chacun de ces **romans** est significative de celle de nombre de personnages de l'époque. Autrement dit, la préoccupation

des auteurs de ces **romans** est moins la singularité d'un cas que la situation du plus grand nombre. C'est la une caractéristique de la littérature orale qui privilégie le groupe social sur l'individu. ("Francophonies et specialites litteraires africaines" 126, emphasis mine).¹

In the same passage Kane classifies African autobiography as if it belonged to the genre of the novel in African literature.

Thanks to the work of Philippe Lejeune, Michel Beaujour, James Olney, and Georges May on the definition of the autobiographical genre since the 1970s, we can now say that in the last two decades of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the present century, autobiography has received worldwide recognition and even strong support, particularly in Africa. Philippe Lejeune pioneered the formalization and theorization of the genre in Western literature. Despite criticism of his work, namely of *Le Pacte autobiographique*, where Lejeune uses a structuralist approach to theorize and define the genre, his whole work is remarkable for his honesty and clarity. Lejeune was criticized especially by Georges Gusdorf in his long article "De Pautobiographie initiatique a Pautobiographie genre litteraire," which followed the publication of Lejeune's seminal work. Gusdorf criticizes Lejeune for using Rousseau as the point of departure of the definition of the literary autobiography, and also for claiming that autobiography is intrinsically connected with the bourgeois class. Yet, it is fair to Lejeune to say that he has been self-critical in his entire production, as he has revised his former ideas in *Je estjm autre* (1980), *Moi aussi* (1986), etc. In *Moi aussi*, for instance, Lejeune revises his position in *Le Pacte autobiographique* by pointing out its formalism and its "dictionary-like" definition of the genre; he agrees that there is not a "stable I" and that the self is in perpetual transformation. He shows also that the "grid" he constructed to distinguish between autobiography and fiction

¹ Mohamadou Kane sees African autobiography as an immature outgrowth of French literature, as he is reluctant to call it by its real name: autobiography. Strangely enough, one of the defenders of African literature and its first critic is cast here as its detractor, as he minimizes or does not recognize African autobiography to be different from the novel; we note that the dismissal is based on lack of focus on the personal but rather on the community. I shall disagree with Kane's viewpoint, as I believe that if the essence of Africans is communal per se, there is no use depriving them of artistic quality because they write differently. James Olney was more accepting when he contrasted Richard Wright's and Camara Laye's autobiographies. Yet, neither Olney nor Kane wants to label African autobiography because it differs from European tradition. African autobiography is classified as "roman" (novel) by Kane while Olney labels it "auto-ethnography" a highly suspicious term.

contains some flaws. What is important to note is that Lejeune acknowledges his mistakes, emphasizing that he was conducting research and that the act of writing is a process of self discovery, of construction and of "truth." Therefore, Lejeune's work is instrumental for the study of autobiography, for attempting a general definition.

My study deals with the written form of autobiography as the legacy of French colonization in Africa. The number of autobiographical publications, and especially memoirs by Africans who witnessed colonization, has grown tremendously. Indeed, autobiography is nowadays a distinctive genre in Francophone African literary space, with many contributors. There is a tradition of autobiography in Francophone Africa from the early period of colonization to our contemporary era.

Prior to Midiohouan's reexamination of African literature, another discipline, African history, has seen a revisionist enterprise in the works of Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Jan Vansina who claim a new African history that takes into account African oral literature. In asserting that oral narratives can serve as historical sources that compete with or complement written documents for the study of African history, Ki-Zerbo "made a splash" in the discipline of African history, which was at the time dominated by Western scholars. It is my contention that since the lack of a written tradition had long excluded Africa from any serious study of her history by Europeans, the advent of colonialism and the written word in European languages paradoxically offers a chance for Africans to give their own perspectives on historical events, especially when they write memoirs which, of all the genres and sub-genres of literature, have the strongest ties with history.

Paradoxically, the African writers coming from an oral culture contribute better to our knowledge of what colonial Africa was under French rule by using the written form of self-narrative: autobiography. Thus, the mastery of a written tradition and of a new genre becomes a form of empowerment for Africans. Moreover, while the colonial archives reside in the former colonial metropolis, the written forms of African autobiography constitute another kind of archive on French/African colonial history as it was perceived and lived by the Africans. Memoir, a sub-genre of autobiography, differs from classical autobiography through its inclusion of external events in addition to the personal narrative. The memorialist becomes an observer of historical facts which he/she records, thus memoirs by Africans about Colonialism bear the potential of constituting an historical archive. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson rightly put it:

Memoir. A mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator. [...] In contemporary parlance *autobiography* and *memoir* are used interchangeably. But distinctions are relevant. As Lee Quinby notes, "[W]hereas autobiography promotes an T that shares with confessional discourse an assumed inferiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an T that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others." (198)

There is therefore a continuation in African History and Literature in the search for reliable sources on colonial Africa; written memoirs come to complement the oral dimension that was used by Ki-Zerbo in the writing of African history, especially as far as our knowledge of the French colonial rule in Africa is concerned. In that regard, Francophone Africans are still writing their version of colonial history from an internal perspective.

What could be the contribution of autobiography and specifically memoirs in an attempt to rewrite the history of Africa? A look at the trends in the production and reception of African autobiography may show the role of the genre in the constitution of African literature and in doing so may help to illuminate the promise of such a chance it offers African history and future African generations.

History of the Genre in Francophone Africa

African autobiography was present from the earliest period of Francophone African literature and at the present time, the genre is still booming, with more and more productions by both men and women who witnessed colonialism and post-colonialism. These autobiographical productions have the potential to document history from an African perspective: they may serve as testimony to the colonial and post-colonial eras. Yet, one notes a shift in the audience of autobiography from the colonial to the post-colonial eras, and it is worth analyzing why this shift occurred and what its implications are for Africa and the literary production of that continent. Francophone autobiography is studied here as both production and reception, focusing on written forms of autobiography, as a legacy of Africa's encounter with French civilization.

I have decided to present a history of autobiography in Francophone Africa that develops in three periods, following the general trend of the genre according to history, ideology and circumstances. Autobiography follows the

development of African literature unfolding in three stages: the colonial period (1926-1959), the period of independence (1960-1980) and the last two decades (1990 to the present).

First Period: 1926-1959, the Colonial Era

The first period of Francophone African autobiography (1926-1959) covers the French colonial presence in Africa and ends before the year 1960, general date for the independence of Francophone African nations.² Autobiography was present at the beginning of African literature; *Force-Bonte*, the very first attested self-narrative by an African Francophone subject was published in France in 1926 by the Senegalese Bakary Diallo and sponsored by Lucie Cousturier, a French writer. His autobiography is in fact a memoir of World War I from the perspective of an African soldier. The memoir poses a problem of identity for Diallo who refused to become a shepherd, the traditional job of a Fulani boy, in order to enlist as a soldier in the French colonial army, embracing the new country and its values with exaggerated pathos. Since Diallo, many memoirs have been published, sometimes with a more critical perspective. It is important to note that even though *Les Trois Volontés de Malic* (1920) was published earlier by another Senegalese, Amadou Mapate Diagne, it never received full recognition from African critics because of its perceived lack of literary quality, leaving *Force-Bonte* to be identified as the pioneer of Sub-Saharan Francophone African literature. One had to wait until the end of French colonialism in Africa, in 1953 to witness the publication of *L'Enfant noir/ Dark Child* by the Guinean Camara Laye.

A series of writings by Africans blending self-narrative with fictional accounts often referred to as "romans autobiographiques" (autobiographical novels) were also published. In 1956, the Ivorian Bernard Dadie and the Senegalese Sembene Ousmane published prose works inspired by their stay in France, *Climbie* and *L« Docker noir* respectively. Bernard Dadie was to publish another autobiographical novel in 1959, *Un Nègre à Paris*, also mixing fiction with his personal experience in the "City of Light."

It is clear that between 1926 and 1960 very few formal autobiographies were written and it is noteworthy that the autobiographical narratives are classified uncritically as "Roman" [novel] (Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonte*) or

2 I am adopting 1960 as a delineating date for Francophone independence as it is generally shortly before, at, or after that date that the ex-colonies of France received their autonomy. I mean to use 1960 for theoretical and practical reasons.

"recit" [narrative] by both the publishers and the literary critics of the period. This is a sign of the times as autobiography then did not have the status it now enjoys.

L'Enfant noir is a complete autobiography as the names of the narrator, main character and author are identical: Camara Laye (the author) writes about the African boy Laye Camara, and the story is narrated by himself, also identified as (Abdou)laye Camara. *Force bonte* belongs also to the autobiographical genre, though it is strictly a memoir, by the identity shared by the main character and narrator with the author Bakary Diallo. While autobiographical novels borrow from the author's life, there is not an exclusive identity between the author and the main character; Climbe, the main character, is not identical to the author Bernard Dadie in *Climbe*.

The readership of the first generation was very limited as these autobiographies were read primarily by the French and secondarily by the African elite educated in French schools (Kane, "L'Ecrivain africain et son public"). But even before the existence of these formally organized autobiographies, there was a history of production of autobiographies by the natives of Africa under French colonial rule as documented by Hans-Jiirgen Lusebrink in his excellent article "Du Journal de voyage au temoignage: Autobiographies fragmentaires d'auteurs africains dans la presse ouest-africaine a l'epoque coloniale (1916-1950)." From Lusebrink's account, there were autobiographical productions by Francophone Africans under colonial rule even before the publication in 1926 of *Force Bonte*, typically classified by literary critics as the first Francophone literary work. Those productions appeared in the colonial press in fragmented forms (journals, reports), and most were products of students at French schools in Africa who had to report on their tribal origins, their family life, their childhood. The students were from William Ponty de Goree and the Ecole Normale des Jeunes filles de Rufisque, the most prestigious colonial French schools where the African elites were trained.³ The readership was limited to the French colonial authorities who used these reports from their "evolved" African students in order to better penetrate their souls; in no way was the African population at

3 Lusebrink's research was based on colonial Press archives in colonial Francophone Africa, and it is revealing to notice the undermining function of autobiography by French colonial officials who see it as a tool to understand and control the mind of the African populations under their jurisdiction. The autobiographical narratives were published in journals and reviews: *Dakar-Jeunes*, *Outre-Mer: Revue Generale de Colonisation*, *bulletin de l'Enseignement de L'A.O.F.*, and *Notes Africaines*.

large associated with those productions. It is important to notice that the motivation behind these autobiographical productions was to allow the colonizer to gain familiarity with the colonized. The same idea of seeking knowledge about Africans for the European readership is continued in Diedrich Westermann's anthology *Autobiographies d'Africains: on^e autobiographies d'indigenes originates de diverses regions de l'Afrique et representant des metiers et des degres de culture different?*, (Paris: Payot, 1943). In this anthology, Westermann claims that only the Africans can give Europeans an insider's view of their culture. The autobiographies of the first period were totally published in France and Belgium, and addressed primarily to a European audience, with the African elites as a secondary and minor audience.

Second Period: 1960-1980s, the (Post)-Independence Era

If, according to Mohamadou Kane, the first generation of African writers, including autobiographers, wrote and published primarily for a French audience and in France, there is a striking change in the period following the end of colonialism: more first-person narratives are published in that period.

Along with the growing production in autobiography, there is the creation of publishing presses in Africa. In the Independence and post-independence eras, African writers and the literary elite felt that books by African writers should be published in Africa. As a result, many publishing houses were created. Among these were Editions CLE (1963), the first publishing house in Francophone Africa with the exception of Presence Africaine (1947), which was founded by Alioune Diop, and that already had a representation on both French and African soils. In 1972 the Nouvelles Editions Africaines was created, and later split into NBA-Senegal, NEA-Togo and NEI- Cote d'Ivoire. At the same time, autobiography became more openly affirmed as a genre: the name on the cover matches that of the narrator and protagonist.

From the 1980s till now there have been dozens of autobiographical productions in Francophone Africa. During the 1980s alone, more than fifty Francophone African autobiographies were published. They took various forms: personal autobiography, prison autobiographies, memoirs, journal, autobiographical essays, or interviews. Though the production of African autobiographers increased, it is apparent that most of them were published by the French presses or to a lesser extent by Canadian or Belgian presses while a minimal but substantial number were published by African presses in Africa

or by their pioneer Presence Africaine. In that period the Senegalese Birago Diop appeared as the most prolific as he would publish five memoirs starting with *La Plume raboutee* (Presence Africaine - NEA, 1978), *A Rebrousse-temps* (Presence Africaine, 1982), *A Rebrousse-gens* (Presence Africaine, 1985), *Senegal du temps de...* (L'Harmattan, 1987). Diop's memoirs were almost equally published by African and French presses. Amadou Hampate Ba is another case of a multiple memoirs writer; though the two volumes of his memoirs were published in the early 1990s, it is almost certain that they were written before that period, as they are posthumous works published by the French publisher Actes Sud: *Amkoullel, L'Enfant peul* (1991) and *Oui, mon Commandant!* (1994). Ken Bugul (alias Marietou Mbaye), Nafissatou Diallo and Bernard Dadie would have their autobiographies published by African presses, *Le baobab fowl The Abandoned baobab* (Presence Africaine), *De Tilene au Plateau* (Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines) and *Carnet de prison* (CEDA) respectively.

What is remarkable in the second period is that we witness the entry of female autobiographers into the arena. Women autobiographers (Aoua Keita and Nafissatou Diallo) made their entrance into the autobiographical scene in 1975.⁴

In the second period, there was a tendency for modern African autobiographers to cater to two audiences: the European and the African, and among Europeans the French were the preferred audience; this is the case of Hampate Ba's memoirs *Amkoullel, l'Enfant peul* and Kesso Barry's autobiography *Kesso: Princesse peule?*

4 In "Ecrits autobiographiques et engagement: le cas des Africaines d'expression française" Beverley Ormerod and Jean-Marie Volet see Marie-Claire Matip's short life narrative, *Ngonda*, as the "ancestor" of Francophone women autobiography (438). While this is an important statement, *Ngonda* has not received the same welcome and fame as did Awa Keita's memoirs perhaps because of better artistic qualities in the Malian woman political leader and writer. This could parallel what happened to the almost forgotten *Les Trois Volontés de Malic*, precursor of African autobiography to which critics preferred Bakary Diallo's *Force Botte* as the pioneer of African autobiography and literature.

5 Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* (1969), has met with a lot of criticism for plagiarism of famous European authors. Since the controversy about his book, he has retired in his village and has devoted himself to religion and mysticism. He was said to have lost his mind, but this does not hinder his reaction to Ba's depiction of realities that are not foreign to him. In addition, this reaction can be taken seriously, as Ouologuem has been disappointed and frustrated about publication in the European press. His reaction may as well be interpreted as a frustration that Ba oriented his narrative to a European

Third Period: 1990s - to the Present: Entry into the 21st Century

This period is marked by a striking production of more memoirs than personal autobiographies as if there were a need to put an emphasis on the historical or political. The historical refers to the colonial era and the independence period together, while the political embraces both the independence period and immediate historical events.

While autobiography deals with personal narrative with the subject at its center, memoirs include the self-narrative and show how the self was influenced by people or external events; memoirs have a much closer tie to history, especially in the African context, as the memorialists give their view on historical events in both factual and impressionist ways. Amadou Hampate Ba's memoirs fall between the two periods of the development of African autobiography as mentioned above, since his posthumous works were published by Helen Heckmann in the 1990s. Mamadou Dia, ex-President of Senegal Council and a former political prisoner under President Senghor published *Memoires d'un militant du Tiers-Monde* (Publisud, 1985) after his release from prison and later in 2001, he would publish *Afrique, le prix de la liberté* (L'Harmattan) a continuation of his first memoir and a defense of his alleged implication in the coup against President Senghor. Other memorialists include the Burkinabe Joseph Issoufou Conombo *Souvenirs de guerre d'un tirailleur senegalais* (L'Harmattan 1989) followed by *Acteur de mon temps: Un voltaïque dans le XXe siècle* (L'Harmattan, 2001). Another Burkinabe memorialist is the ex-President of Upper Volta (currently Burkina Faso), the late Sangoule Lamizana, who would publish *Sous les drapeaux*, volume 1 (Jaguar Conseil, 1999) followed by *Sur la brèche trente années durant*, volume 2 (Jaguar Conseil, 1999). Political testimonies were published by notable political figures: Denis Sassou N'Gouesso with *Le manguier, le fleuve et la souris* (Lattes, 1997) and Jonas Savimbi and Atsutsé Kokouvi Agbobli with *Combats pour l'Afrique et la démocratie, entretiens avec Atsutsé Kokouvi Agbobli* (Favre, 1997). The Senegalese Abdourahmane Konate publishes *Le Cri du mange-mil: Mémoires d'un Préfet sénégalais* (L'Harmattan, 1991).

In this third period, recent political changes or events have generated a substantial number of memoirs written by survivors of these turmoils; thus,

readership primarily, which might have led him to leave out or add things that could be frustrating for an African reader like Ouologuem himself.

the Rwandan genocide is recollected as a historical event to be recorded by memoirs and testimonial literature. Political turmoil in Burundi has generated autobiographies; a few examples are: Maurice Niwese. *Le Peuple Rivandais un pieddandla tombe: Re'cit d'un refuge etudiant* (L'Harmattan, 2001) and Venerand Ndegaya. *depression au 'Burundi: journal d'un prisonnier vainqueur* (L'Harmattan, 1993).

Africans who have risen to eminence have written their life story to document that promotion such as in *Autobiographie d'un Gabonais: Du Village au Ministre* by Vincent de Paul Nyonda (L'Harmattan, 1994) exemplifies this phenomenon. One of Africa's prestigious and successful sons, the Malian Cheick Modibo, in collaboration with Jacqueline Raoul-Duval would publish *Navigateur interplanetaire, l'extraordinaire aventure d'un enfant du Mali parti a la conquete de Mars* (Albin Michel, 2000).

As we saw, there was an increasing production of memoirs that overlapped the second and third stages. This attests not only to the dynamism of the autobiographical genre but also to the endeavor of Africans to revisit the past. The common theme to this past is generally the colonial era, and most African autobiographers belong to the generation that witnessed colonialism, took part in it and/ or opposed it (Aoua Keita, Hampate Ba, Conombo, Lamizana, Mamadou Dia). Most of the memorialists are in their seventies or older, and see that there is a need to inform the newer generations of Africa of that transforming epoch: colonial Africa under French rule. There is therefore a need to speak to a public, to leave a testimony to other generations, and paradoxically, the memoirs are a good supplement to the oral tradition, as they keep the words in print even when the authors have passed away and they testify to the new identity of Africans, who now have their own scripture and history. The fact that older Africans write their memoirs in the language of the former colonizer is not currently an issue; what is relevant both in oral and scriptural traditions is the identity of their target audience and actual readers. Through reading the memoirs one notes that some did write with the intention of getting published, without worrying about the readership, while others did write to justify themselves vis-a-vis a particular readership and aimed at informing that public. Amadou Hampate Ba is a case in point as he originally wrote his memoirs under the encouragement of European friends, and while his life writing allows him sometimes to take a critical stand, Ba failed to address the African audience *inside* the text. He also failed to address a larger African audience when one considers publication.

I contend that when dealing with autobiography, the identification of the target audience is very important and it is not surprising that Philippe Lejeune gave the readership a very important role in the definition of autobiography in *Le Pacte autobiographique*. The tide speaks for itself as Lejeune affirms that there must be a tacit pact between the writer-narrator and the reader. In this seminal book, Lejeune did not over-emphasize the issue of the readership, but in pointing out its importance, he inspired my conviction that the narrative and the facts are dependent on a particular readership. In the case of Ba's memoirs, it is for all intents and purposes that a European audience was targeted.

As I have stressed the importance of the identification of the autobiographer's audience, it is fair to say that the reader of Ba's memoirs may be struck by the amounts of explanatory details and by the numerous addresses he makes to a potential non-African reader, a European audience in *Amkoullé, l'enfant peul*.

"Pas si vite!" s'criera sans doute *le lecteur non africain*, peu familiarise avec les grands noms de notre histoire. "Avant d'aller plus loin, qu'est-ce donc, d'abord, que les Peuls, et que les Toucouleurs?" (20)

Voila qui est sans doute bien difficile a concevoir *pour une mentalité moderne*. Comment admettre qu'un ami puisse de son propre chef "divorcer" la femme de son ami et que ce dernier accepte la chose sans discuter? C'est que jadis, le veritable ami n'était pas un "autre," il était nous-même, et sa parole était notre parole. (59)

Mais revenons à Tidjani. Il n'avait pas seulement appris, dans son jeune âge, à manier pelle, pioche, hache et houe de cultivateur, il n'était pas seulement—on l'a vu a Toïni—un tireur émérite et un cavalier expert, il savait aussi, chose plus inattendue pour *le lecteur européen*, coudre et broder a la manière des métis arabes de Tombouctou. (153)

Certains s'etonneront peut-être qu'un enfant aussi jeune (il devait avoir autour de six ans) soit capable de faire tant de choses. C'est que les enfants africains étaient extrêmement précoces, leurs jeux consistant le plus souvent a imiter les travaux des adultes, qu'ils aidaient d'ailleurs très tôt dans leurs taches. (176)

Certains lecteurs occidentaux s'étonneront peut-être que des gamins d'une moyenne d'âge de dix à douze ans puissent tenir des réunions de façon aussi réglementaire et en tenant un tel langage. (247)

Le roi, précédé de son seul chambellan, passa devant son fils sans même lui Jeter un regard. Personne ne s'en étonna, le fait de ne pas manifester ses sentiments envers ses enfants faisant partie des coutumes africaines que *les Européens* comprennent d'ailleurs assez mal. Chez nous, c'est aux oncles et aux tantes qu'il appartient de manifester extérieurement leur affection pour leurs neveux et nièces qu'ils considèrent comme leurs propres enfants. (482, my emphasis)

These quotations strongly suggest that Ba's autobiography was written primarily with a European audience in mind. That said, one also notices a dynamism in Ba's narrative when such an audience is evoked: through all these references to a potential European reader, Ba is in fact using a pedagogical approach.

On the issue of readership, my view seems to be reinforced by a relatively new reaction to Ba's autobiography by Yambo Ouologuem, the famous author of the controversial *Le Devoir de violence*.⁶ Ouologuem, who is from the same village as Ba and also an oral tradition specialist, attacks the vision of the world given by Ba. Let us note that this is an African reader reacting against the vision of the world and the facts in a self-narrative by his fellow countryman. Ouologuem's reaction is reported through an interview between Christopher Wise and Sekou Tall, another countryman of Ba, in *Yambo Ouologuem: Postcolonial Writer, Islamic militant*.

Wise: Can you say more about Yambo's relationship with Ba?

S. Tall: Amadou Hampate Ba and Yambo are from the same village. They come from Bandiagara, and so they have worked together on oral literature, as well as

6 The importance of identifying the audience that the writer is addressing has been pointed out by Emmanuel Ngara in *Stylistic criticism and the African novel*. "The relationship between the writer and his audience is important in a number of respects. A writer writing for children should be conscious of the level of sophistication and linguistic attainment that is expected of that kind of audience. An African writing about Africa with an African audience in mind will have a different orientation from a European writing about Africa with a European audience in view. Two critics of African literature may be cited as examples. Charles Larson in *The Emergence of African Fiction*, and Harold Collins in *Amos Tutuola*, are writing about Africa but with a European audience in view and so there is much in what they say which is revolting to an African readership. Indeed, an African writer writing about Africa with a European audience in mind is likely to adopt a different attitude and a different style from an African writing about Africa with an African audience in view." (21) Even though Ngara's criticism was intended for the novel, it applies very well to the genre of autobiography, and more specifically in the case of Mampate Ba.

many other subjects and themes. On the outside, Amadou Hampate Ba has published two books that did not please Yambo, *Amkoullel: l'enfant peul* [Paris: Babel 1991] and a second book. This was because Amadou Hampate Ba told of things that weren't really true and because they had at one time developed their ideas together. Yambo was disappointed in Amadou and was unhappy with his writings. This is what he told us. Ba failed to include what Yambo told him in his book [*Amkoullel: l'enfant peul*]. In other words, there are explanations of certain things in this book that they had once agreed upon together, and that Yambo had himself contributed, but Ba left them out. Instead, Ba described things that are not true. He misled his reader. He wrote according to his own ideas, rather than those of his townsmen. He wrote for himself, but not for the people of Bandiagara, whom he disregarded. So there was a disagreement between them. Yambo and Ba disagreed on what had been said earlier. (237-38)

Clearly, this interview shows that from an African reader's viewpoint, Ba did not speak from an African's perspective, but had to twist certain things, and it is for this that Ouologuem reproaches him. One has the impression that Ba wrote for a different readership, which I suspect to be a European public, and this may be explained by some narrative constraint or the exigencies of a genre which Ba, as an African storyteller, was not used to. This may explain why the vision of the world he portrays is not shared by his fellow countryman from Bandiagara. My contention is not that Ba wrote his autobiography just for Europeans, but rather that the Europeans constituted his first and essential readership; this does not negate the fact that Ba had an African audience in mind. In this case, the European readership comes first and the African is second. The story-teller is aware of the diversity of his audience, because, beyond the European audience, Ba's work was also intended to reach Africans. He uses a pedagogical technique to educate his foreign readers: the use of rhetorical questions to attract their attention at the beginning of his autobiography: "'Pas si vite!' s'ecriera alors le narrateur non africain, peu familiarise avec les grands noms de notre histoire. 'Avant d'aller plus loin, qu'est-ce donc d'abord que les Peuls, et que les Toucouleurs?'" (20). This imaginary dialogue between the autobiographer and a European audience reveals that Ba was conscious of the difficulties of telling about his life to a readership unfamiliar with the culture.

Throughout my account of the history and general trends in the production of autobiography in Francophone Africa, I have consistently specified the publishing house of each production. It is thus manifest that a large number of autobiographies and memoirs have been published in France despite the fact that publishing houses exist in Africa. There is an apparent

paradox in the desire of Francophone African autobiographers to document a past where colonialism weighs heavily and yet to have their work published by presses run by the former occupiers. The general theme of those productions is how Africans underwent colonialism and how they developed subsequently. Most autobiographers did not hold French colonialism in high regard, and the validity of their anti-colonial and revisionist discourse on the history of colonialism from an African perspective, however subjective, is undermined by the policy of the publishing press. It is clear that the revisionist discourse is ideological, and yet if that discourse is to be published by the former colonizer's publishing press and moreover if it is intended first for a French readership, the sender (the African autobiographer) has also to bear the constraint of addressing that particular readership in a way that will not be offensive.

That this is obvious becomes clear when we imagine the African autobiographer addressing a Francophone African readership and having his autobiography published by an African press, a situation in which he/she will enjoy considerably more freedom. A Francophone African autobiographer writing with a French readership in view will have to please and not offend that audience if he or she wants success in her or his publication. The implications are enormous because there seems to be an ideological discourse historically marked but which fails to achieve its true readership; it is as if the Francophone African autobiographers were telling the story of their lives to the wrong audience. For the ideological discourse to achieve full success, it is essential that the addressee be a kindred spirit and that the messenger be ideologically on the side of the sender. Of all the literary genres in Francophone Africa, autobiography, and memoirs in particular, strive to convey a certain message of truth, a revision of colonial history, but paradoxically that message is told to a French audience and by French press. Audience and press are two constraints that the Francophone memorialists have to take into account in writing a revisionist version of colonial Francophone Africa, and it risks robbing their discourse of its freedom and truth.

The romantic perception of the writer as an independent being is contradicted by the fact that, according to the French Historian Jean-Yves Mollier (*La Lecture et ses publics a l'epoque contemporaine*), ninety percent of practical books and literary books are motivated by the publisher's demands, rather than the author's. According to Mollier the book appears then as the result of a concerted contribution of the author and the editor, in the spirit of

the publishing house, to the point where the author is compelled to self-censure or to transform his book in the direction suggested by the editor. Mollier was referring to the publishing process of French authors by French publishing houses; we can infer that for Francophone African authors being published by such presses, the control will be more acute.

The prevalence of autobiography in Africa has been attributed to a search for identity within a world created by colonialism. The value of life histories in relation to historical research on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, offers Africans a form of "history from below." In order for Africans to truly define their identity for themselves and write their own history according to their perspective, it is crucial that the editorial and readership dimensions be addressed. Autobiography is regarded by some critics as a stepchild of history and literature that does not receive full recognition from either disciplines, but as far as Africa is concerned, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, autobiographies can serve as "secondary historical source" and become "archives" of African history, by men and women who witnessed the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism. Autobiography is the pioneer of Francophone African literature and its sub-genre, the memoirs, can play a significant role in "re-writing" the colonial history of the continent. It is also another way of documenting African History from an internal African point of view, freeing it from the colonial control it underwent, and in order to achieve that freedom, a policy of publishing and promotion of African autobiography and history must be implemented. At a time when French officials, intellectuals, and people are divided about the stand to take on the legacy of French colonialism, especially how colonial history should be written and taught in French schools, it is also the duty of Africans at every level to reflect on the modality of writing African history according to their perspective: memoirs by Africans on colonial Africa offer us such an opportunity.

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