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Literature across Boundaries

The Perception and Impact of Francophone African Literatures in South Africa

La littérature au-delà des frontières : la perception et l'impact des littératures africaines francophones en Afrique du Sud

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Pius Adesanmi

Literature across Boundaries: the Perception and Impact of Francophone African Literatures in South Africa*

Any attempt to apprehend literary and cultural flows between the Republic of South Africa and the rest of the African continent in the 20th century must take into account the manner in which the narrative of apartheid constructed the notions of space and boundary. This step is important because the extent to which a given space can be influenced by cultural productions from other places is ultimately determined by the flexibility or otherwise of the constructed boundaries of such a space. Where the boundaries of a space are defined and determined through the fundamentally flawed dynamics of totalitarian ideologies like apartheid, the subjects located in such carceral spaces find themselves in no position to intervene meaning-

* The research for this paper was undertaken during my two-month trip to South Africa as a visiting scholar at the Institut français d'Afrique du Sud (IFAS) in Johannesburg from March to April 1998. I thank Professor Georges Héroult, the Institute's Director of Research, and the entire staff of IFAS-Recherche for the invitation. I also thank my good friend, Professor Stephen Gray, for his enormous contribution to the success of my stay in South Africa. We spent fruitful hours in his house discussing this subject and other sundry literary issues. The Department of Modern Languages, University of the Witwatersrand invited me to present two seminars on postcolonialism and West African women's writing. I am grateful to the staff and post-graduate students of the Department for their warm reception and rich contributions to the mutually beneficial debates. Dr Bheki Peterson, Head of Department of African Literature in the same University, also contributed immensely to my research objectives. I am equally indebted to Dr Craig Mckenzie and Professor Denise Browne of the English and French Departments of the Randse Afrikaans University respectively for finding time to answer my sometimes "dangerous" questions bordering on the pertinence of their curricula. I also express my gratitude to Professor Chris Swanepoel of the Department of African Languages, University of South Africa for finding the time to exchange ideas with me on this subject. Edouard Maunick encouraged me tremendously for what he called our "*communion nègre*". Finally, I thank Professor Norman Strike, Head of Department of Romance Languages, University of South Africa and his colleague, Mme Françoise Browne, for the exceptionally warm reception they accorded me when I visited their Department.

fully in global cultural processes. And history teaches us that the sustained infliction of cultural myopia on its subjects is crucial to the survival of the totalitarian state.

In his prison memoir, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, the South African writer, Breyten Breytenbach, has described how apartheid operated essentially as a narrative of fear: the fear of the unknown Other, or the misrepresented Other. This paranoia made the notions of space and boundary crucial to the narrative: a certain national space was constructed as being the ideal, the envy of all other nations and consequently needed to be protected from real and imagined enemies at all costs.

The political isolation of the apartheid state by the rest of the civilised world—symbolised by bodies like the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN)—worsened the persecution complex of that state and increased its determination to guard its space and boundaries very jealously. Apartheid thus made it extremely difficult for the South African reading public to familiarise itself with the works of Francophone African writers even when such works were available in English translation. And the consequences of this cultural incarceration are still being felt in the post-apartheid dispensation. Our two-month sojourn in the country revealed an appallingly low level of awareness of contemporary writing from Francophone Africa.

Ironically, South Africa's unenviable history of racial oppression and the long-drawn resistance struggle it engendered left a profound mark on the African literary imaginary. It is common knowledge that the struggle of the oppressed Blacks in South Africa became the collective struggle of all African people. Pius Ngandu Nkashama puts it succinctly when he claims that:

“Les événements survenus dans toute l’Afrique australe depuis ces dix dernières années se sont inscrits de façon irréversible dans l’imaginaire, et ils ont marqué de manière déterminante toutes les productions culturelles nées autour des thèmes de la libération et de la liberté”¹.

Arguing in a similar vein at a recent writers' conference in Durban, Nigeria's Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka surmised that the rest of the African continent did not only identify itself with the aspiration of Black South Africans for freedom but was convinced that the whole of Africa would never be free so long as South Africa remained in chains². And more

1. “The events which have taken place in the whole of Southern Africa in the last ten years have been implanted irrevocably in the imaginary and have significantly shaped all the cultural productions created around the themes of liberation and liberty” (my translation). See his article “L’Afrique du Sud et la littérature africaine de langue française”, *Notre Librairie*, 122 (1995): 26-38.
2. The conference was held at the Elizabeth Sneddon theatre of the University of Natal from March 2 to 7 1998. Several writers were present to examine burning literary issues ranging from postcolonialism to exile and female writing. Among the invited writers were Breyten Breytenbach, Edouard Glissant, Tierno Mone-nembo and Yvonne Vera, etc.

than any other group of writers, Francophone African writers were the most influenced by South Africa's history and resistance struggle.

Indeed, the relationship between South Africa's resistance history and the Francophone African literary imaginary is indicative of a conscious process of cultural articulation which enabled Africans to locate their experiences "in the same space of struggle, judgment and enunciation", to borrow Victor Li's felicitous expression³. Hence, the historical figure of emperor Chaka as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance in South Africa has energised a good number of Francophone African creative texts. Senghor blazed the trail of this development by including a poem titled "Chaka" in his 1956 collection, *Ethiopiques*. Mali's Seydou Badian followed Senghor's example by publishing a play titled *La mort de Chaka* in 1961. Then came Abdou Anta Kâ's play, *Les Amazoulous*, in 1972. For sure, these and other Francophone African texts informed by the Chaka epic are textual echoes of Thomas Mofolo's Sotho novel, *Chaka*. The French translation of the novel appeared way back in 1940. Apart from Chaka, the lives of contemporary resistance figures like the late Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela have equally informed the texts of numerous Francophone African writers in varying degrees⁴. Added to these are texts like Maoundoé Naindoubâ's *L'étudiant de Soweto* which draw their inspiration from incidences of popular resistance in Soweto and Sharpeville in the 1970s. The consequences of those uprisings bear no repeating here.

However, since literary and cultural flows have always been able to defy the rigidities of boundary-cutting and spatial determinism at the political level, some actors in the South African literary arena did manifest an early interest in Francophone African writing and sought consequently to introduce such works to the home audience. It should be noted here that the West African literary scholar and his South African counterpart have slightly different perceptions of what constitutes the "African Francophonie". The West African is usually inclined to reduce Francophone African literature to texts from Francophone West African countries while the South African's experience of Francophonie and its cultural underpinnings is limited mostly to French-speaking Indian Ocean countries like Madagascar, La Réunion and Mauritius. The title of Senghor's early anthology of poetry, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie africaine et malgache* (emphasis added) clearly indicates this binarism in the perception of Francophone texts from West Africa and the Indian Ocean.

Making this important observation during one of our conversations on this subject, Stephen Gray, an important South African poet and novelist, attributed this difference in perception to the geographical propinquity of the Indian Ocean countries to South Africa. Hence, the early Francophone

3. He argues very strongly in favour of articulation in his essay, "Towards Articulation: Post-Colonial Theory and Demotic Resistance", *Ariel*, 26 (1995/1): 167-189.

4. See Pius NGANDU-NKASHAMA, *op. cit.*, for a relatively detailed list of such texts.

texts to which South Africans were introduced are those of Indian Ocean writers. The poetry of Senghor and the negritude debate were the only notable inclusions from West Africa.

The earliest efforts to present writing from Francophone Africa to a South African audience dates back to the 1950s. An initiative of Drum Publications led to the publication of an anthology of African writing in Johannesburg in 1958. Edited by Peggy Rutherford and prefaced by the late Can Themba, the anthology which bears the significant title, *Darkness and Light*, contains translations from the poetry of Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo, Flavien Ranaivo, Jacques Rabemananjara, Birago Diop, David Diop and L. S. Senghor. This anthology did not only play a pioneer role in acquainting the local literary audience in South Africa with Francophone African poetry, it also necessitated subsequent efforts in that direction. Also in 1958, the July-September issue of the journal *Africa South* contained a section titled "The Poetry of Sédar Senghor" featuring English translations of some of the writer's early poems. In January-March 1960, the journal shifted focus to the Indian Ocean, publishing English translations from the poetry of Rabéarivelo and Ranaivo.

The next important moment came in 1966 when another South African journal, *The Classic*, produced a special issue titled "French African Writing". The most significant element in this volume is perhaps Dorothy Blair's introduction, "Whither negritude", which sought to present the essential features of the negritude movement to the South African audience. In April 1972, the journal *Contrast* reproduced the article "Writing in Madagascar". Originally written in French by Ranaivo, the said article was translated to English for the journal by François Jacques and Gray. But a much more important definitinal mediation in the discourse of negritude was published in a 1975 issue of the journal *The Classic*. Written by a writer as important as Richard Rive, the article, "Senghor and negritude", took the South African audience through the epistemological possibilities of negritude. In 1976, *Contrast* refocused its searchlight on Francophone African literature by publishing translations from the poetry of Pierre Renaud (Mauritius) and Alain Belair (Reunion Island).

Apart from these early efforts by South African intellectuals to apprehend developments in Francophone African literature in specialised journals, it is in the Universities that one notices a renewed interest in the literature of French-speaking West Africa. This is evidenced in attempts to introduce Francophone texts—or add more texts in cases where Francophone texts are already being taught—into the curriculum in Departments of Modern Languages, French and African Literature. However, one must point out beforehand that efforts at teaching Francophone African texts in South African Universities, especially in French Sections of Modern Languages Departments (or independent French Departments as the case may be), are severely hampered by the fact that most of the students admitted to study French hardly had any contact with the language at the secondary school

level. This has obvious consequences for methodology. For instance, the French Section of the University of Natal in Durban recently decided to stop teaching literature in the first and second years of its undergraduate programme so as to be able to concentrate on language. One of the lecturers justified this approach by claiming that the students need to master a language before attempting to grasp its literature. Besides, there has never been any significant interest in Francophone African literature in this university as opposed to the situation in the neighbouring campus in Pietermaritzburg.

This preliminary observation raises a few salient questions: which Francophone African literary texts are taught in South African Universities? What are the modalities guiding the selection of texts and how accessible are those texts in a predominantly Anglophone setting like South Africa? As might be expected, Francophone African writing occupies a largely peripheral position in the curriculum of most South African Universities. Indeed, in cases where some texts are taught at all, they are usually included as ancillary texts in a much broader literature programme dominated by texts from the metropolitan literature of France. This, one might add, is in sharp contrast with the situation in Nigerian Universities where independent courses exist in both French and Francophone African literatures.

However, staffers of the concerned Departments in South African Universities now demonstrate a remarkable willingness to explore texts from Francophone West Africa and to encourage their students to develop interest in those texts⁵. Such is the case in the French Department of the Randse Afrikaans Universiteit (RAU) in Johannesburg where Francophone African texts are included in the curriculum and taught by the Head of Department, Mrs Denise Godwin⁶. Here, emphasis is placed on folktales in the first two years and most of the stories are taken from the collections of Birago Diop and Ahmadou Hampate Bâ. This strategy is supposed to familiarise the students with the oral epistemology from which modern African literature evolved. In the more advanced stages of the course, especially at the masters level, students are introduced mainly to the novels of the Zaïrean writer, V. Y. Mudimbe and also the works of his compatriots⁷. The concentration on texts from Zaïre stems from the fact that most of the post-graduate students in the department are from that country. We thus have a situation in which the origin of students determines the texts that are included in the Departmental curriculum.

5. I was asked to suggest texts for inclusion in the enlarged literature curriculum of the French Department in UNISA. I was equally drafted into an ad hoc committee working on the enlargement of the literature content of courses in the departments of Modern Languages and African Literature in Wits.

6. This lecturer has translated M.-a M. NGAL's *Giambatista Viko ou le viol du discours africain* (Paris: Hatier, 1984) to English and is currently trying to publish it.

7. Mrs Denise Godwin currently has a doctoral student working on the fiction of Mudimbe.

Interestingly, in the English Department of RAU, texts that were not originally written in English are excluded from the curriculum. Craig Mckenzie, a lecturer in the Department and editor of the journal *English in Africa*, opined that a certain line of thought supports the idea that an English Department is supposed to concern itself exclusively with texts from the world's literatures in English. And since such texts are obviously inexhaustible, there can be no possible space left for writers who write originally in French even if their texts are available in English translation. Mckenzie wondered whether a French Department would go out of its way to incorporate into its curriculum works of Anglophone African writers that have been translated into French. Nevertheless, Mckenzie does not foreclose the possibility of opening up the journal he edits to articles on Francophone African texts especially if such articles have a comparative bent.

However, the situation is radically different in the English Department of the University of Stellenbosch where English translations of Francophone African texts have been included in the curriculum as far back as 1987. This is largely due to the efforts of Anna-Hilge Gagiano, a lecturer in the Department, who is keenly interested in the literatures of Francophone West Africa. The students are introduced to the works of Sembene Ousmane and Mariama Bâ at the undergraduate level. The spectrum is broadened to include the works of Yambo Ouologuem and Ferdinand Oyono at the masters level. The situation here is thus similar to what obtains in Nigerian Universities where English Departments include translations of Francophone African literary texts in their curricula.

The University of the Witwatersrand (commonly called Wits) in Johannesburg constitutes another important site of analysis. Undoubtedly South Africa's most prestigious University, Wits presents an interesting case in which Francophone African literary texts are commonly used by the various constituent sections of the Department of Modern Languages. This mostly concerns female writing where the Department proposes common texts to its undergraduate students in a course significantly titled "gendered texts". At the moment, Calixthe Beyala's *Loukoum* is the only Francophone text on that programme. The immediate implication of this is that the teaching of Francophone African texts in this context is done in English even if the teacher comes from the French Section.

At the post-graduate level, the French Section in Wits introduced a new Masters programme in European literature this year. Curiously, the programme stands out as one of the most ambitious attempts so far in South Africa at teaching Francophone African texts in the light of contemporary trends in postcolonial and feminist reflection. Two of the programme's sessions—three and four—are primarily concerned with Francophone African texts. According to the course description made available to us, these two sessions aim at exploring "mythical past, lost present and marginal space in Francophone texts".

Session three is conceived in such a way as to introduce the students to “the metamorphosis of the African space during the colonial period and the responsibility of the colonizing structure in the production of marginal societies, cultures and human beings”. This is supposed to lead ultimately to a study of “unadapted persons and confused minds in marginal or urbanised space” using the texts of V. Y. Mudimbe and Sony Labou Tansi where cases of madness, schizophrenia and masochism are rife. Attention then shifts to “conquest of representational space by women”. The depiction of women is examined in the works of Mudimbe, Sembene Ousmane and Cheik Hamidou Kane. Session four is devoted entirely to the study of Africa’s traditional past and the impact of contact with Europe on Africa’s cultural and traditional values with particular emphasis on the novels of Mongo Beti. It needs be mentioned that this programme is still largely experimental and its success will be a strong index of the gradual admission of Francophone African literatures into the mainstream of literary studies in the South African academy.

The curriculum of the Department of African literature in Wits also deserves our attention. Set up by Professor E’skia Mpahlele in 1983 as part of the University’s Africanisation policy, the Department offers courses in all aspects of the theory and practice of African literature including book publishing. Significantly, none of the Department’s five lecturers is a specialist of Francophone African literature. The curriculum consequently reflects a strong bias for African literature written in English⁸. However, a few canonical Francophone texts are taught in English translation at the undergraduate level. Oyono’s *Houseboy* is included in the booklist for the first year course, “African Fiction: an Introduction”. The second-year course, “Gender and Writing in Africa” includes Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*. Another second-year course, “Performing Power in Post-Independence Africa” has Sony Labou Tansi’s *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Tropez* on its booklist. Camara Laye’s *The African Child* is in the booklist for the third-year course, “Autobiography in Africa and the Diaspora”.

It is significant that the third-year course, “Contemporary Trends in African Literature” has no Francophone African text on its booklist. The course examines the impact of the “third generation” of writers—mostly those who gained international recognition in the last decade—on the African literary process. Students are therefore introduced to the textual strategies of the likes of Dambudzo Marechera, Mia Couto, Chenjerai Hove, Ben Okri and Biyi Bandele-Thomas. That the Francophone African contemporaries of these writers—Tierno Monenembo, Alioum Fantouré, Patrick Ilboudo, etc.—have made no less an impact on the African literary process is an incontrovertible fact. Their being excluded from such a significant course

8. The Department used to invite a lecturer from Maputo in neighbouring Mozambique to teach lusophone African literature. But the arrangement became too expensive and had to be shelved.

is therefore attributable to the fact that only very few of their texts are as yet available in English translation and are therefore not accessible to lecturers in the Department.

Lecturers in the French section of the Department of Romance Languages, University of South Africa (UNISA), are very conscious of the fact that South Africans are becoming increasingly aware of the rest of the continent, especially Francophone Africa. They have thus deemed it necessary to include texts from that zone in their curriculum. The fact that this University operates mainly by correspondence distinguishes its literature programmes from those of most other Universities since the students have to apprehend texts relatively independently. The few Francophone African texts in the curriculum are somewhat disadvantaged in the struggle for space with the classic texts of the likes of Marivaux, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Hugo and Zola.

First-year undergraduates of French in UNISA are introduced to prose narratives through a broad spectrum of short stories which include writers from North and West Africa. Among the Universities we visited, UNISA is thus the only one that does not participate in the traditional excision of the Francophone literatures of the Maghreb from the pantheon of African literature. Third-year undergraduates grapple with more complex narratives. They study Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* alongside the texts of Madame de Lafayette, Voltaire, Diderot, Verne and Proust. There is a healthy demand for Francophone African literature at the postgraduate level in UNISA. As is the case in RAU, this is not unconnected with the presence of students from French-speaking West and Central African countries. Françoise Browne, a lecturer in the Department, is preparing a doctoral thesis on the fiction of Labou Tansi.

One may wonder at this juncture whether the conscientious efforts to create a curricular space for Francophone African literature in the South African academy as exemplified in the cases described above is complemented by a regular supply of the relevant texts, especially in French. To this end, the visitor to an average University library in South Africa will be amazed by the broad spectrum of literary texts that are available in French⁹. The libraries of RAU and UNISA stand out in this respect. In both libraries, the sections on Francophone African writing contain the most up-to-date creative and critical works. Novels, plays and poetry published in the last eight years by *Présence africaine*, L'Harmattan, Seuil, Hatier and other publishing houses in Paris are displayed alongside the well known critical works of the likes of Locha Mateso, Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Jacques Chevrier and Séwanou Dabla among several others. Furthermore, these libraries also subscribe to specialised journals

9. These libraries compare favourably well with the ones I have seen in Togo and Benin Republic in terms of the availability of Francophone African literary texts in French.

in Francophone African literature: *Présence africaine*, *Notre Librairie*, *Sépia*, etc.

The whole process is completed by the impressive private collection of some of the lecturers we visited. Apart from the University libraries and the private stock of lecturers, the libraries of some institutions of the French establishment in South Africa also have a good number of Francophone African literary texts for the readership in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Such libraries include those of the Alliance française in both cities and, until recently, that of the Institut français d'Afrique du Sud (IFAS) in Johannesburg¹⁰.

This heartening situation is, of course, another evidence of the determination of the present crop of lecturers in French Departments in South African Universities to open up their Departments to the literatures of Francophone Africa even if very few of them are real specialists in the field. For they are the ones who regularly supply lists of books to be ordered from France to libraries. And since the libraries are current, it implies that those who handle Francophone writing in the French Departments are relatively at home with discursive trends in the field. The financial squeeze which recently hit South African Universities, necessitating belt-tightening measures at all levels, is however a source of great concern in the Departments we visited. In view of the traditional tendency to consider language Departments as peripheral in the academy, it is only logical that they are among the hardest hit by budgetary cuts. The Head of Department of French in RAU confessed that it is becoming increasingly difficult to get the library to order all the books recommended by the lecturers.

It is tempting to conflate the availability of texts with the rate and pattern of reading. Such a conflation will have the obvious consequence of masking certain disturbing facts about the consumption of Francophone African literature in South African Universities. It is true, as we have noted, that the texts are available in University libraries but a careful analysis of the borrowing pattern¹¹ revealed that only the works of negritude poets are regularly consulted or borrowed. These are followed by the works of the older novelists like Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Sembene Ousmane, Ahmadou Kourouma, Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Yambo Ouologuem. It is, of course, evident that these texts are exploited in the strict context of academic preoccupations—assignments and preparation for examinations. Some of the librarians we interviewed opined that it is almost inconceivable for students to borrow Francophone African texts—even in English translation—just for the sheer pleasure of reading.

10. The library recently gave out its stock of literary texts to the Alliance française in order to maintain a strict social science orientation in accordance with the mandate of IFAS.

11. We did this analysis by consulting the borrowers' index on the books and discussing with the librarians.

The implication of this is immediately clear: the vibrant younger generation of Francophone African writers whose first works were published in the late 1980s or early 1990s are almost totally unknown to the South African readership and have certainly not been able to penetrate University curricula. One has in mind the likes of Philomène Bassek, Evelyne Mpoudi-Ngolle, Patrick Ilboudo and Kitia Touré. Calixthe Beyala is the only notable exception here since one of her works is already on the programme in Wits. But in all likelihood, the younger writers will definitely gain more attention in the near future since, as we indicated earlier, some of the Departments are currently reshaping their literature programmes to include more texts from Francophone Africa. The initiative undertaken by the Department of French Language and Literature of the University of Cape Town is of especial significance in this respect. Here, groups of postgraduate students are made to translate Francophone texts into English. The watershed in this development was the translation and eventual publication of a South African edition of Sembène Ousmane's *Niiwam and Taaw* in 1991.

If South African students have no problems getting Francophone African literary texts from their institutional libraries, does the larger reading public have the same easy access to those texts? This question is crucial if we are not to reduce our analysis to the strict context of academia. South Africa has an extremely advanced bookshop system. The most important ones are Exclusive Books and Facts and Fiction both of which have branches all over the country. After visiting branches of these two bookshops in Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria as well as several other less important bookshops, we discerned an interesting phenomenon: the bookseller locates literature somewhere in the interstitial space between nation and nationalism. For when South African bookshops display shelves carrying tags like "African Literature", "African Fiction" or "African Writing", what they actually mean is "South African Literature", "South African Fiction" or "South African Writing". And we must be quick to add that, even in this case, most of the books on display are works of White South African writers like Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, J. M. Coetzee, and Breyten Breytenbach. Occasionally, one or two works of the likes of E'skia Mphahlele, Njabulo Ndebele and Mazizi Kunene are dumped among the lot.

This situation is, of course, understandable in view of the fact that the country is still boldly negotiating its way out of the atavisms of an inglorious past. The reduction of African literature to South African literature by bookshops also has to be read against the backdrop of the fact that for the average citizen sees the new South Africa as constituting the "centre" of the continent, other countries being its marginal others. Consequently, Francophone African texts are absent from the shelves of these bookshops. In visits to all the branches of Exclusive Books and Facts and Fiction in Johannesburg and Pretoria, we found only one copy each of Sembene Ousmane's *Niiwam* and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*.

But things have not always been this disheartening if one is to go by the account of some of the local literati such as Stephen Gray who frequent these bookshops. Gray recalled that there was a time when it was possible for South African intellectuals to obtain English translations of Francophone African works from Exclusive Books since the bookshop had regular stocks of the works of those writers that had been translated and published in Heinemann's African Writers Series. This is how Gray, for instance, was able to build a vast personal library of Francophone African writing in which the works of the negritude writers and first generation novelists are assembled alongside those of second generation writers like Alioum Fantouré, Malick Fall, Tierno Monenembo, Williams Sassine, Aminata Sow Fall and Henri Lopès. Furthermore, the Alliance française in Pretoria once had an arrangement to supply the French original of Francophone African works to the local branch of Exclusive Books in the city. The programme had however been discontinued at the time of our research, obviously as a result of low sales.

Interestingly, even if French-speaking West African writers have been excluded from mainstream, bourgeois bookshops in South Africa, they have found a sure refuge in the numerous and well-stocked bookshops which deal in second-hand books especially in Johannesburg. These less glamorous book stalls are all the more important because some of them actually do not only have English translations of Francophone African texts but also some works in the French original. But even here, most of the store keepers averred that the South African reading public is not really enamoured of writers from French-speaking Africa, hence the eternally low sales.

An examination of the literary pages of the more intellectually inclined South African newspapers would seem to buttress the fact that Francophone African writers hardly have any readership outside language Departments in the universities and among small pockets of literary personalities who are most often writers themselves and have therefore had contacts with some of the Francophone writers in question. Doubtless, the literary pages of newspapers constitute an important index of what the literati are reading in a given country.

A comparison with the Nigerian situation is in order here if only to demonstrate how the literary pages of newspapers could help in gauging the state, quality and scope of literary discourse in a given socius. In the last two years, Nigeria has witnessed a healthy literary revolution spear-headed by the *Post Express Literary Supplement (PELS)*, a weekly pull out of the national daily, *The Post Express*. Incidentally, this four-page literary phenomenon is edited by a writer, Nduka Otiono, a member of the increasingly visible third generation of Nigerian writers.

PELS along with the literary pages of other newspapers like the *Vanguard* and the *Guardian* have become the most fertile discursive sites for literature in Nigeria today. Their role has become even more pronounced with the dearth of specialised literary journals consequent upon the collapse

of the country's University system within the anti-intellectual climate foisted on the country by the military. In these pages, books are reviewed very regularly; ideas are consistently generated and contested on very topical issues like postcolonialism, postmodernism and universalism. One only has to peruse the pages of *PELS* and the other newspaper literary pages over a certain period of time to determine which books the country's literati are reading.

Part of the revolution of *PELS* then is an unprecedented exploration of contemporary writing from Francophone Africa in order to apprise the Nigerian public with literary mutations from that part of the continent and also to reduce the gulf between the Nigerian literati and their Francophone counterparts. Readers of *PELS* are regularly treated to penetrating reviews of the latest novels of writers like Pius Ngandu Nkashama, Calixthe Beyala, Sembene Ousmane, Cheik Hamidou Kane, Ahmadou Kourouma and Werewere Liking. What is more, these reviews are often complemented with translations of the interviews of these writers.

It is worth noting that the entire Nigerian literary community would have been excised from the seismic debates occasioned by Beyala's alleged plagiarism of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* in her award winning *Les honneurs perdus* but for the intervention of *PELS*. This publication followed the unfolding events very closely and members of the Nigerian literary community were thus able to participate in a debate which opened up diverse perspectives on the very notion of plagiarism.

In South Africa, the literary supplement to the *Mail & Guardian—The Review of Books*—comes closest to the role *PELS* plays in the Nigerian literary process. Indeed, *PELS* and its South African counterpart are similar in several respects: they are both weekly publications and their articles bear the same discursive poignancy. They also share the same agenda in seeking to inscribe literature in the national discourses of their respective countries. The only glaring difference lies in the exclusion of Francophone African texts from the preoccupation of *The Review of Books*. It is evident that this publication does not have a definite agenda to apprise the South African reading public with developments in Francophone African literatures. We examined several past issues of *The Review of Books* and the literary pages of other South African newspapers for the slightest indication of interest in African literatures of French expression but found nothing in that respect. To my mind, the absence of Francophone African texts from the literary pages of South African newspapers provides yet another indication of the general lack of awareness of Francophone writing in the country.

It would however be preposterous to conclude that Francophone African writing is bound to remain eternally in the margins of literary preoccupations in South Africa owing to the daunting odds we have analysed. As we noted earlier, South Africa is still very much a society in transition and the whole process is rooted in a deontology of exploration: the urge to explore new horizons and categories of knowledge.

The post-apartheid discourse of African Renaissance is indicative of the new drive to explore hitherto repressed dimensions of “self” and “other”. This new dialectic of change is bound to create a propitious atmosphere for the inscription of Francophone African writing more firmly in the South African literary space. The already-mentioned writers’ conference in Durban is an irrefutable proof of this assertion. The presence of Tierno Monenembo (Guinea), Abderahman Ali Waberi (Djibouti), Idriss Youssouf Elmi (Djibouti) and Abdelkader Djemaï (Algeria) points to the fact that Francophone African writers have begun to draw the attention of the South African literary public.

It is significant that these writers were invited by the Centre for Creative Arts of a South African institution, the University of Natal. This only corroborates the argument of most of the scholars we interviewed that South Africans are becoming increasingly aware of African writing of French expression. Apart from their success in drawing the attention of large audiences to their writing during the duration of the festival, the invited Francophone writers also visited secondary schools where they read from their works and sensitised their young listeners to the existence of an African literature written in French. What is more, the extensive press coverage of the event was an added boost to the image of the Francophone writers. Using translators, Monenembo and Djemaï granted a good number of interviews which were published in local newspapers before the end of the conference. We must also remember that an important Francophone African poet like Edouard Maunick is now domiciled in Pretoria after having been his country’s first ambassador in post-apartheid South Africa. It goes without saying that his presence in the South African cultural circuit constitutes an enormous boost for Francophone African poetry in that context.

The gradual expansion of curricula in French Departments to include more texts from Francophone Africa is another significant development in the slow movement of Francophone literatures to the mainstream. We must however insist that the future of Francophone African literatures in South Africa is not linked solely to the dynamics of internal mutation in the country’s Universities. For we must not gloss over the importance of the private initiatives of certain enthusiasts of Francophone literatures who have seemingly dedicated themselves to the promotion of that literature in South Africa. The efforts of a writer like Stephen Gray is significant in this respect. This writer lived in France in the 1960s and was consequently introduced to the writings of the negritude poets and other Francophone African writers. Since then, he has sought to promote Francophone African writing in South Africa by translating their works—especially poetry—for publication in local journals. His latest effort is a translation of the works of four Indian Ocean poets for the journal, *Staffrider*, in 1993. In essence, the future of Francophone African literatures in South Africa depends to a great extent on the amplification of initiatives like Gray’s and the sustenance

of the increased awareness of Francophone texts in language Departments in the country's Universities.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that the boundaries of the Apartheid state were constructed in a way that did not encourage literary and cultural transactions between that carceral space and the rest of the world, Francophone African literatures still managed to establish a marginal presence in South Africa, mainly within the context of the negritude debate. Today, a good number of South African Universities have incorporated writing from Francophone Africa into their literary curricula. South Africa is now in a post-Apartheid era rooted in a deontology of exploration and change which, from all indications, will reinforce the renewed interest in Francophone African literatures in that country.

RÉSUMÉ

La littérature au-delà des frontières: la perception et l'impact des littératures africaines francophones en Afrique du Sud. — Bien que les frontières de l'apartheid aient été édifiées de telle sorte qu'elles n'encouragèrent pas les échanges littéraires et culturels entre cet espace carcéral et le reste du monde, les littératures africaines francophones ont réussi à conserver une présence marginale en Afrique du Sud, surtout dans le cadre du débat sur la négritude. De nos jours, un grand nombre d'universités sud-africaines ont inclus les œuvres littéraires d'Afrique francophone dans leurs programmes. L'Afrique du Sud est maintenant entrée dans une époque post-apartheid, laquelle est enracinée dans une déontologie de l'exploration et du changement. De l'avis général, ce climat d'ouverture devrait y renouveler l'intérêt envers les littératures africaines francophones.

Keyword/Mots-clés: African Renaissance, Apartheid, curriculum, deontology, literary flows, negritude, transition/Apartheid, *déontologie, échanges littéraires, négritude, programme littéraire, renaissance africaine, transition.*