

# The Contemporary Francophone African Intellectual



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African Intellectual

Edited by

Christopher Hogarth and Natalie Edwards

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL PAST AND PRESENT

CHRISTOPHER HOGARTH

Il est des cas où celui qui se prétend intellectuel  
ne doit plus se contenter de vœux pieux et de déclarations d'intention  
mais donner à ses écrits un prolongement concret.  
—David Diop

“French intellectuals are not what they used to be”, comments Alec Hargreaves in a recent collection of essays on the contemporary French intellectual. However, Hargreaves does not necessarily frame this comment in a negative context, as he points out that, whilst “cultural changes have greatly diminished their stature”, the configuration of this group of “intellectuals” has nonetheless changed: “there are many more women among them and intellectuals of French expression originating in former colonies have added their voices to those of metropolitan French origin” (Hargreaves 2009: 123). In Hargreaves’ edited collection, an article by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy provides an important glimpse of this latter group, and these authors make many references to their own important 2009 collection on Francophone Postcolonial writers, many of whom could be considered intellectuals. That said, the contemporary thinkers to whom Hargreaves, Forsdick and Murphy refer are not necessarily intellectuals with the same motivations as the Franco-Senegalese poet David Diop, whose grandiose declaration on how an intellectual ought to live opens this volume. Diop, like many contemporary Francophone African intellectuals, lived a life between France and Africa: he was born and partially raised in Bordeaux, and spent only part of his life in the Senegal that claims him today. His letter to Alioune Diop, the founder of the Paris-based journal of the African intelligentsia *Présence Africaine*, written before he left for newly independent Guinea in 1958 along with other prominent intellectuals, shows his commitment to this

country's nationalist cause. It is sometimes cited by critics mapping the history of Francophone African intellectuals' engagement, presumably to provide an example of a very active type of intellectual commitment, as Diop, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and others founded Guinea's post-colonization education system; this was to be the first such national system in 20<sup>th</sup> century Francophone Africa to be run independently of France (Mkandawire 2005: 17, and Sall in Guèye 2001: xiv). Ironically, Diop's motivation to serve the first African former colony to break away from France, Guinea, also meant he would have to serve a nation in the grip of a dictator, Ahmed Sekou Touré, whose mania for control led to an anti-intellectualism that resulted in the purging of many of this country's thinkers, especially those who disagreed with Touré's particular brand of "African Marxism".<sup>1</sup> Although Diop did not live to see many of Touré's excesses, the fate of the good intentions that led to intellectuals serving under a nefarious regime should be underscored. Anti-colonial Francophone African intellectuals often found themselves working under anti-democratic regimes in the postcolonization period, and this, along with many other economic constraints, has led to a migration to the West, often to France. As the cases of both David and Alioune Diop show, however, this migration is in many ways a return, since so many intellectual movements were born and propagated in Francophonie's *metropole* during colonial times. It is this relationship between African intellectuals, commitment, and the West that this chapter shall outline.

The tripartite title of this volume requires considerable thought itself, since the terms "Francophone", "African" and "intellectual" are each subject to debate. The noun, firstly, is a culturally loaded term, and one upon which even figures regarded as "intellectuals" cannot agree. Aristotle listed intellectual virtues such as "justice, perseverance, empathy, integrity, intellectual courage, confidence in reason, and autonomy" (Aristotle 2004: lx). These would be attitudes and values, then, as opposed to actions or behaviours. Centuries later, Antonio Gramsci was more interested in the active functioning of the intellectual in society, stating that "all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals ... thus, because it can happen that everyone at the same time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor" (in Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971: 9). Gramsci posited the idea of an organic and inorganic intellectual, defining

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly at the infamous Camp Boiro concentration camp, where as many as 5,000 people were tortured and killed. For more information on this bleak episode of Guinea's history see Alsény, *CAMP BOIRO; PARLER OU PERIR*, (2007), Paris: L'Harmattan.

the traditional intellectual thus: “The traditional and vulgarised type of intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist” (in Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971: 9). He includes journalists in this category, since he suspects they may claim to encapsulate all three, and may regard themselves as the “true” intellectuals.

In the late twentieth century, Edward Said, whilst suspecting that “there has been too much defining of the intellectual” goes on to provide a series of lectures on the idea of the intellectual in a series of radio lectures eventually grouped into a volume entitled *Representations of the Intellectual* (Said 1996: 13). During these lectures, Said often mentions Gramsci and comments that “Today, everyone who works in any field connected with the production or distribution of knowledge is an intellectual in the Gramscian sense” (Said 1996: 9), thus providing a plethora of figures, since so many people are linked to the distribution of knowledge. Said also comments that renowned French philosopher/historian Michel Foucault made some claims regarding the disappearance of “universal intellectuals” and recognizes the emergence of more profession-specific intellectuals (Said 1996: 9-10). Whilst acknowledging the value of Gramsci and Foucault’s attempts at definition, Said does not appreciate the idea of the intellectual becoming “a faceless professional” and proposes the idea of the non-specialized amateur with a wide range of involvement, whose specific “*raison d’être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (Said 1996: 11). The intellectual’s potential burden of representation is something enthusiastically tackled in this volume by Cameroonian writer/critic Nathalie Etoke, who appears to go against the grain of writers like Alain Mabanckou and Abdourahman Waberi by claiming that the African intellectual’s burden of representation is an inevitable aspect of his/her historicity. The intellectual’s range of involvement was also a concern of Frantz Fanon’s, who famously called on intellectuals to forge *national culture*, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of state-based nationalism in his *Les damnés de la terre*, which appeared around the time of accession to independence of many of the Francophone African states to whom he devoted much of his polemic. Pierre Bourdieu often pointed out the inevitable social positioning of intellectuals, which is particularly pertinent to the question of the African intellectual in the post-independence era; not all intellectuals can be reasonably expected to be anti-governmental dissidents, especially in Africa when they were part of the small, educated elite that almost naturally became part of the state apparatus, as Fanon had feared.

In this volume, we shall be dealing with the “traditional and vulgarised” intellectual in Gramsci’s terminology, who would nevertheless be “amateurs” in Said’s. We discuss the committed nature of intellectuals by examining a variety of contemporary figures. We refer not just to the historians who have long been recognized as African intellectuals but also to the philosophers and social scientists who are now becoming more prominent on the intellectual scene. However, we find that intellectuals remain in the majority *hommes* and now *femmes de lettres*, literate minorities who often seek to provide versions of society, its ills and suggestions for its betterment through literary portraits. For this reason, the volume concentrates upon intellectuals in a literary sense: the writers who have engaged, represented, questioned and publicized segments of African society. We are well aware, as Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célrier have pointed out, that representation through literature, a realm that includes fiction, fantasy and artistic experimentation, is problematic; some writers, for example, problematize and at times seem to reject links to their continents of origin and supposed duty to engage with or represent it. Whilst we recognize and discuss this phenomenon, we also wish to underscore the persistence of intellectual commitment which is represented especially in this volume by female literary writers still living upon the African continent and engaged within their societies. Whilst it is not our intention to argue that there is too large a cleavage between male and female francophone African intellectuals, nor between those who live, write and publish with publishing houses in Europe and Africa, we hope that this collection will aid discussions of the transnational nature of the Francophone African intellectual, not least by reminding readers of those who have stayed at home as well as the sometimes less than felicitous motivations of those who have chosen to move away from the continent.

The question of which “intellectuals” to include in a volume such as this one is therefore difficult. Each society contains an inexhaustible list of figures who might be called, or call themselves, intellectual actors to some degree. While critics have tended to focus on literary writers (as this volume ultimately will) who are often politically committed both in their writing and who have taken on other roles of responsibility, other figures often receive equal or even wider recognition among common people in everyday Africa. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, though among the traditional group of intellectuals as a historian and university professor, argued that the definition of the intellectual needed to be widened back in 1994: “It makes little sense to shrink the intellectual world within unnaturally narrow boundaries by leaving out, for example, the leading thinkers among religious groups, or their counterparts in so-called traditional society, the

griots, artists, healers, etc.” (in Diouf and Mamdani 1994: 28). Whilst most Francophone African societies these days are exposed to mass-media in some form, without large-scale exposure to a powerful industrial or media-based infrastructure, some traditional African societies will still favour certain individual thinkers who strongly engage with certain issues that seem important to a community, which justifies Ki-Zerbo’s inclusion of such intellectual actors as griots and healers in his own taxonomy.

However, we inevitably do not possess the means to investigate the actions of such a wide range of actors in this non-encyclopaedic volume (nor does Ki-Zerbo do so in his article, which focuses specifically on academics). Our focus is mainly on literary writers, though this chapter wishes to note (1) that many other contributors to Afro-European culture may be regarded as today’s African “intellectuals” and (2) that African writers take on multi-faceted roles, and are as cosmopolitan in their residences and focuses as ever. We shall nevertheless argue that African intellectuals are not to be taken as representing only those well-regarded figures who live a transcontinental existence, as some of the celebrations of Afropolitanism and *littérature-monde* could seem to suggest, but also include figures deeply committed to their “home” spaces. Examples of such actors are the many less famous female writers whose works are examined herein, as well as artist-intellectuals of a different hue, such as the musicians and cinematographers, as critic Simon Gikandi has indicated, whom Cazenave and Célérier also highlight (140), and whose activities are celebrated and emulated by literary writers-turned-musicians such as Alain Mabanckou.

## Which Africa and Africans?

The adjective “African” in our tripartite title adds a further dimension to the discussion of the definition and the role of the intellectual, and invites comparison across a continent that has been affected differently by the colonial experience. The plurality of African countries already renders difficult the task of discerning and comparing their intellectuals’ outputs. Moreover, the “hardening” of borders following the depreciation of Panafricanist ideals has often further impeded dialogue. The splicing of the *Maghreb* and *l’Afrique noire* has also led to different intellectual traditions in these two areas, yet they are tied by their Francophone heritage and their proximity with the French education system and intellectual tradition.

In addition to the African intellectuals of the *Maghreb* and *l’Afrique noire* are another group: those of African heritage who are aligned with

France. Figures such as Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Marie Cardinal and Albert Camus, for example, may be placed into a tradition of intellectuals with roots in or influences specifically from the African continent. The *Pieds-Noirs*, despite the traditional ambivalence towards them, could be included in this grouping. Yet another category that should not be overlooked is what one may call the “Afropeans”, the Europeans of African descent, such as the “Beurs”, the descendants of North African immigrants. Important voices from this very disparate group have been heard in recent decades in intellectual arenas as writers such as Faïza Guène and Azouz Begag have become well-known names. Second-generation Franco-“Africans” such as Marie Ndiaye (who in fact refuses to consider herself at all African), her brother Pap Ndiaye, or Gaston-Paul Effa further broaden the scope of the term “Francophone African intellectual”.

Finally, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne mentions in our interview, another recent phenomenon impacts upon any discussion of the African intellectual: a number of prominent African thinkers, writers and scholars have headed for the United States of America. Whilst Claire Ducournau’s article points to a relatively small number of literary writers living in the USA (in Thomas and Mabanckou, 60), examples going back to the days of V. Y. Mudimbé’s migration show that African intellectuals working in many academic fields other than literature have tended to move to America over the last few decades (and the examples of Mabanckou, Abdourahman Waberi and Nathalie Etoke show us that literature is not a negligible field either). While Mudimbé and Achille Mbembe are well-known philosophers-cum-social scientists in the USA, figures outside the academic world like Célestin Monga, now a resident in Washington D.C., have recently gained notoriety. Having studied at Harvard, the former banker from Cameroon Monga, jailed in his native country for an open letter written against then-President Paul Biya, describes his rejection of the academic system in favor of working for the World Bank in his 2007 work *Un Bantou à Washington*. Nathalie Etoke’s chapter in this collection provides a sophisticated overview of Monga’s work and place in the Cameroonian intellectual scene.

Overall, in this volume, we take an inclusive approach to the notion of the Francophone African intellectual and thus include chapters on North African, Sub-Saharan and East African writers, in addition to *Pieds-Noirs* and migrants to the United States.

## “Francophone”: The Language of Intellectuals

The third and final part of our title, then, is “Francophone”, a label that has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. An inevitable question arises concerning the use of the label “Francophone” when discussing African intellectuals from countries in which French is either the official language or widely-spoken. Ngugi W’a Thiongo is especially well-known for his exhortation that African intellectuals “decolonize the mind” and establish true contact with the masses through the use of indigenous languages in their cultural expression. Francophone African intellectuals, spearheaded by Léopold Sédar Senghor, played an important role in establishing institutions promoting the French language throughout the world, and this has meant that the spread of local African languages in written expression has been slower than in the Anglophone areas of the continent (in places such as Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, for example). Nonetheless, there are many proponents of the use of African languages ahead of French.<sup>2</sup> Boubacar Boris Diop hails the influence of his countryman Cheikh Aliou Ndao and the long tradition of *Wolofal* (Wolof language written in Arabic characters) when discussing his decision to write a novel in Wolof. For Diop, his ultimate decision to abandon the “langue du dimanche” (Diop 2007: 171) that he feels French represents for Francophone Africans stems from his visit to Rwanda, again highlighting the importance of the “écrire par devoir de mémoire” project that Elizabeth Applegate’s contribution investigates in this collection. While recognizing that Wolof is less ventriloquized to him as a language than is French, Diop also abandons French (albeit temporarily) for political reasons. This African intellectual describes his evolution from a writer who saw the use of French as a “moindre mal” (Diop 2007: 163) to one who decided to abandon it as his language of expression, at least for a period (as Ousmane Sembene often did in his films). Diop notes that he does not know how to write with any humor in French. Diop goes as far as to associate the aiding of the ethnically based massacres in Rwanda by the French government to the idea of protecting the Francophone word from

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Arabic, though not strictly speaking an African language, has been used by authors in North Africa for many decades. The famous case of Algerian writer Rachid Boujedra adopting Arabic ahead of French from 1981 onwards is perhaps the most famous case of an intellectual’s deliberate estrangement from the language of the former European colonizer. However, given the difficulty of reading and writing classical Arabic in comparison to French, many Francophone North African authors have nevertheless maintained French as their preferred written language.

the Anglophone “enemy” of Uganda. He therefore effectively claims the French language as a cause of the Rwandan massacre, leading him to leave it alone for a while. The decision is a fruitful one since, for Diop, “les mots de l’autre m’aidaient à dire autant qu’ils me condamnaient à me taire ou à bégayer bien pauvrement” (Diop 2007: 168). Diop thus appears to feel strongly about the use of Wolof in his work, yet he admits he never said he would abandon French forever, and has returned to it.

The use and exploration of indigenous languages has been favoured in many disciplinary areas. Diagne, for example, mentions in the interview in this volume that he now conducts more interviews than ever in Wolof on Senegalese television and radio. A useful illustration of linguistic differences in African languages comes from Ghanaian Kwasi Wiredu. In his chapter “The concept of truth in the Akan language”, Wiredu sets out to prove that the notion of “truth” as a Westerner appreciates it in English is not so precisely translatable into the language of the Twi. Truth is loaded with various subtle connotations in English, referring back to a generally accepted fact as well as a description of what is so at the present moment. Thus the statement “it snows” might be judged as truthful if this event is known to occur at some point, even if snow is not falling when a person utters this statement, or a person might be said to be speaking truthfully if they obviously believe something to be the case even when it is not! In Akan, the idea of “truth” as translated by *nokware* is less flexible, according to Wiredu. Here the concept of a general “fact” (that it does snow from time to time, for example) does not exist and so to translate *nokware* as “true” is to translate it as “that which is so”; i.e. that which is the case there and then. Thus there would appear to be a difference regarding interpretations of the concept of truth, such a core philosophical issue in the West, when it is translated into an African language. So the problem of truth as something being so may be said to be a universal core philosophical problem, but this is certainly a watered-down version of “truth” in the Western sense. Although it is obviously possible to understand the notion of a “fact” in the Akan language without necessarily having a specific term for it, the point is that terms do not translate exactly from language to language, and above all that certain concepts appear as less obligatory in certain languages.

In the area of applied linguistics, Ibrahima Diallo has done valuable work on the importance of understanding the spread of Wolof in Senegal in media and schools, as well as in religious spheres that form the basis of education for many people. He also points to the persistence of “ajami”, the Fulani script used in education in other areas of West Africa, focusing specifically on the Fouta Djallon area of Guinea, whose religious schools



and marabouts were seen as ideologically influential enough for Sekou Touré to lead murderous purges in this area, particularly against the enigmatic figure of Barry III (2011b). In a 2011 article, Diallo draws on earlier, wider collections on the role of the French language within and outside of France and provides a specific overview of the role of French in contemporary Africa. He notes that “En Afrique, non seulement le nombre de locuteurs a nettement progressé après l’accession à l’indépendance des anciennes colonies, mais ce nombre ne cesse d’augmenter” (Diallo 2011a: 34). Furthermore, he notes that the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* lists 21 countries in Africa (excluding Algeria, where up to 60% of the population understand or practise French) with French as “langue officielle seule ou en partage avec d’autres langues”, meaning that of the 56 members of the OIF, 32 are from Africa and the Indian Ocean, thus meaning Africa has a majority of members in this organization, with 57% (35, 36). Nevertheless, Diallo also notes the loss of popularity of French for political reasons, pointing out the departures of Rwanda, RDC and Madagascar from the OIF and their move towards listing English as an official language (Diallo 2011a: 42-43). In a related point, Diagne in the interview in this volume comments upon the loss of popularity of French in academic circles due to the “brain drain”; the more African intellectuals move to the United States, the more they write in English.

A salient example of the language choice by African intellectuals is that of Ousmane Sembene. This Senegalese intellectual began writing literature in French, and indeed continued to write in this language throughout his career. His filmmaking, however, tells a different story. Although he made some of his earlier films in French, his later films were in Wolof, and this choice was part of a wider effort which Sembene called his “école du soir”; he and his team would travel around Senegal, visiting communities that had little access to cultural production, and show their Wolof-language films to these Wolof-speaking audiences. The subjects of his films, such as religion and clitorrectomy, were designed to provide some instruction to the populace, through the medium of their own language. This notion of bringing culture and education to populations through national languages is become increasingly popular, and indeed some French literary classics have recently been translated into Wolof<sup>3</sup>. Of course, the publication of books in national languages raises issues of funding and marketing, since the small number of readers will clearly

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<sup>3</sup> Such as Mariama Bâ’s well-known 1979 novel *Une si longue lettre*, published in 2007 by Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal as *Bataxaal bu guddu nii* and targeted at Senegalese schools for use in teaching.

discourage publishers from such investments. Questions of literacy, of reading habits and especially the lack of written scripts of many African languages further compound the problem.

Yet it may be argued that linguistic multiplicity may not necessarily be a betrayal. The “Littérature-monde en français” manifesto, discussed below, seems a revendication of the French language, even if as an “intimate stranger”, according to Raharimanana (Raharimanana 2007: 308). Perhaps similarly to Homi Bhabha’s notion of the “Third Space”, a plurality of languages that draws on both French and national languages may be posited as a means of highlighting linguistic difference and of using a *lingua franca* that is often the best/only means available to convey a message to a wide(r) audience.

For our purposes in this volume, we realize that “Francophone” is a disparate label with which different intellectuals have different relationships, and thus juxtapose chapters on intellectuals who take different stand points on the issue. Overall, any overview such as this should be read while bearing in mind the linguistic limitations placed upon it; some intellectuals may not be included due to their choice of language, and others may represent themselves differently according to the language(s) in which they write.

## **The Work of Francophone African Intellectuals**

To provide an overview of previous works on African intellectuals is no simple task. Part of the problem with such an overview is that the word “intellectual” has not very often been used in the kind of scholarship that examines the works of Francophone African thinkers over the last 50 years. For example, two influential books of recent years refer to “Postcolonial *Thought* in the French-Speaking World” of which Africa is obviously a major part (Forsdick and Murphy 2009, emphasis added) or to the notion of “commitment” amongst Francophone African writers (Cazenave and Célérier 2011).

Indeed, a brief search for titles does not promise happy reading, garnering works with titles such as *La faillite des cadres et intellectuels africains* by Roland Ahouelele Yaovi Holou. One notable exception is Thandika Mkandawire’s collection, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, which is a highly valuable contribution but which is devoted primarily to Anglophone African considerations. Although Mkandawire laments the fraught history of the African intellectual and the difficulties of working within states that are “deaf to local voices” (Mkandawire 2005: 2), he claims that “African

intellectuals cannot be accused of self-referencing and navel-gazing. If anything they have been excessively extroverted, and not always aware of their collective output” (Mkandawire 2005: 9). With this sentiment in mind, we here situate the main debates among African intellectuals from the post-independence era to the present day.<sup>4</sup>

Casting our eyes back to prominent twentieth century Francophone African intellectuals produces a list of celebrated figures. First President of Senegal and celebrated poet Léopold Sédar Senghor is among the best known, creating a culture of the humanist, literary intellectual in power of a post-independence nation state. The anthropologist and historian Cheikh Anta Diop occupies a similarly illustrious position in the history of intellectuals’ involvement in their newly independent nations. Papa Samba Diop adds the names of Amadou Hampaté Bâ, Felix Couchoro and Jean Malonga to Senghor’s, as authors of works that “described and consecrated... geographical and cultural reference points” in African areas, which he feels have been defied by authors in recent years (in Mabanckou and Thomas 2012: 18). In the area of Francophone African history, Burkinabé Joseph Ki-Zerbo is another extremely prominent figure in the generation of thinkers who were active before, during and after independence. Alioune Diop, as the writer, editor and founder of the publishing house *Présence africaine* is a similarly well-known figure, as are the literary writers who publicized the difficulties inherent in the processes of independence and development: Ousmane Sembene, Mongo Beti, Ahmadou Kourouma, Ferdinand Oyono, Williams Sassine, Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, Tahar ben Jelloun and Sony Labou Tansi, to provide just a few examples.

More recently, intellectuals have played a prominent role in debates over neo-imperialism and the direction of African cultures in the post-independence era. Mkandawire outlines the problem of how African academics in the immediate post-independence era faced the problem of being yoked to the governments for which they worked, as they had often been part of the anti-colonial liberation movements that subsequently took power. Speaking from the Francophone African context, Ki-Zerbo uses the axiom, “Silence: Development in Progress” to describe the attitude that academics were expected to take towards governments in the 1960s and 1970s. He suggests that academics had contributed to liberation, and

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<sup>4</sup> We have refrained from discussing pre-independence African intellectuals working under the Francophone colonial regime, but their existence should be mentioned. Christopher L. Miller (1999) and most recently David Murphy (2012) have done valuable work in outlining the contributions of such intellectuals, most notably Lamine Senghor.

were then expected to contribute to development, and outspoken critiques of the figures with whom they had collaborated during the anti-colonial struggle would not be seen as productive. However, some academics soon felt a *malaise* towards increasingly authoritarian governments and their expectations of political loyalties. Ki-Zerbo was himself forced to leave his post in the University of Ouagadougou for nearly a decade between 1983 and 1992. In a specific example, Ambroise Kom wrote a fictional segment in a polemical piece on the trials of the (then Western-trained) would-be African academic. Kom laments the fate of S. Diop, a stand-in for the everyman African academic, who returns to his country, expecting to be able to serve it as an academic, but finds himself overburdened by expectations to join a political party. When he refuses to express adherence, he finds himself out of a job, and in spite of attempts to pursue other career paths, eventually decides to return to the West in frustration, where he works in liberty and with a decent salary (Kom 1993: 61-62). Not wanting his example to be interpreted as mere caricature, Kom then provides precise examples of African academics who left their continent of origin due to political and economic pressures, especially those from the Democratic Republic of Congo and his native Cameroon. In one of his examples, President Mobutu Sese Soko's deliberate "flushing out" of intellectuals in the 1980s is alleged to have cost the University of Zaire the services of Valentin-Yves Mudimbé, a writer and theorist of African Studies who stayed in the United States rather than return to a (then) Zaire in which he would have been expected to sing the praises of Mobutu's murderous governing party (something that many academics had no problem doing, Kom claims) (Kom 1993: 62-63).

Mobutu's taming of academics was not necessarily a new technique. Already in the early 1960s, as Mkandawire points out, Ghana's then-president Kwame Nkrumah had called for academic subservience to state ideology, calling on academics and the institutions they represented to stop "anti-governmental activities" whilst receiving wages from state coffers that were "produced out of the sweat and toil of common people" (in Mkandawire 2005: 22). Mahmood Mamdani notes that during the 1970s state authoritarianism increased in Africa, often because of worsening economic conditions, and once academics started to go beyond the "development" stage and critique the regimes they sometimes helped put into place, rulers went from "co-option to repression" (in Diouf and Mamdani, 1994: 3). The risk of academics being rendered subservient to political rhetoric often propagated by dictators has obviously represented a huge threat to intellectual freedom and culture. Some of these intellectuals determined to remain in Africa, such as the outspoken Sembene or the

Cameroonian Ferdinand Oyono.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, by the 1980s, Mkandawire detects a resultant “brain drain” across Africa, with academics opting to leave the continent for both political and economic reasons, which Ki-Zerbo dramatically labels a “mental bloodletting on a massive scale” (Diouf and Mamdani, 1994: 31). Whereas Diagne in our interview here refuses to blame political nor economic pressures absolutely for his own departure from the Senegalese academic scene, he does remark that the desire of his generation to return to Africa in order to serve one’s country as an academic following study in Europe has now transformed into a desire to leave Africa for study in order to never return there to pursue any work. J.P. Ndiaye noted in 1969 that scholars from Francophone Africa tended to spend four to eight years working and studying in France before returning to their countries of origin, but Abdoulaye Guèye, whose book focuses on African intellectuals in France from the 1980s onwards, notes that the number of years Africans spend in France has now rocketed, and his study shows how very few of these intellectuals now wish to return to Africa at all (Guèye 2001: 4).

As I mention in my introduction to my interview with Diagne and his experience with the newly elected Abdoulaye Wade government in the years immediately following 1999, some academics while not feeling physically threatened have felt the risk of being so ideologically compromised by requests that they work for a government whose aims do not precisely conform with theirs that with a spur of added economic considerations they have also decided to leave the continent. On the contrary to intellectuals like Diagne, Mamadou Diouf, Mohammad MBodj, who worked in Africa before migrating to the United States, Achille Mbembe as a *persona non grata* in his native Cameroon began his career in the United States before returning to the African continent to work in South Africa.

The concerns that arouse the engagement of Francophone African intellectuals today have moved on from the post-independence era but still bear its legacy. One of the most prescient examples of this is the set of reactions to the controversial speech by the then-president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, July 26 2007. Sarkozy sparked an angry reaction from Francophone African intellectuals, and their reaction symbolized the force of contemporary intellectual activity within and about Africa. Within months of Sarkozy’s

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<sup>5</sup> Although Oyono may be criticized for his proximity, on a public and personal level to the dictator-president Paul Biya, Oyono’s public work went beyond governmental work (as a Minister of Culture) and diplomatic service and extended to the organization of reading programs and artists’ copyright laws.

infamous “discours de Dakar”, in which the leader of the former colonial power urged Africans to break cycles of non-productive “circular time” living in a present with no concern for the future, several works had been published as retorts to Sarkozy’s representation of Africa as a continent which is supposedly obsessed with nostalgia. While Achille Mbembe’s opinion piece in the magazine *Jeune Afrique* (which itself attempts to act as an intellectual forum for the “young” Africa Sarkozy claimed to be targeting) was the first strong written reaction to this work, by 2008 three collections of responses by African intellectuals had made their appearance (Mbem 2007, Gassama 2008, Chrétien 2008). The collection edited by Makhily Gassama, entitled *L’Afrique répond à Sarkozy* (briefly alluded to in my interview with Diagne in this volume) is dedicated to well-known departed names in the Francophone African intellectual field (Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, Mongo Beti, Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Joseph Ki-Zerbo). However, although these works may recognize intellectual figures from the past, they also hold out hope for future Francophone African intellectual collaborations. As Forsdick and Murphy state, they display “the possibility for new axes and alliances to develop between intellectuals from former colonized cultures” (Forsdick and Murphy 2009: 3).

Not all critics have been so impressed by these collections, nor by the act of “writing back” to European racism in the name of African solidarity. In an internet-based article on Mabankou’s highly popular blog entitled “Les intellectuels africains doivent-ils vraiment perdre davantage de temps à répondre à M. Sarkozy?”, Cheikh Thiam denounces the “Eurocentrism” of the anti-Sarkozy collections. He speaks against a return to anti-colonial reactionary theories of African self-affirmation and encourages intellectuals to concern themselves with:

les questions qui tiennent à cœur à leurs peuples... Il est temps que les intellectuels africains fassent de l’Afrique, des Africains et de la façon dont les masses africaines pensent l’Afrique, une priorité. Nul ne doit tomber dans le même piège que les pionniers de la pensée Africaine qui ont passé toutes leurs vies à répondre à l’occident et à ne s’adresser qu’à l’ancien maître. (Thiam 2007: np)

Contrary to the Africa-centred Thiam, Mbembe, perhaps the most famous living Francophone African social scientist, has written against anti-colonial theories of a discreet African identity, although he is more concerned with “keeping Africanity open” to the wider world (to paraphrase the title of an article by Diagne on Mbembe). Mbembe heavily criticizes the limiting nature of two main schools of thought which he

labels as Marxist/nationalist “Afro-radicalism” and “nativism” and instead proposes “African modes of self-writing” and “Afropolitanisme”. These ideas have met with both popularity and controversy in recent years, and whole issues of the journal *Public Culture* have been devoted to his work. Mbembe defines Afropolitanisme as “une stylistique et une politique, une esthétique et une certaine poétique du monde. C’est une manière d’être au monde qui refuse, par principe, toute forme d’identité victimaire” (Mbembe 2010: 232). Basing many of his arguments on works of African literature, Mbembe writes of Afropolitanisme as reassessing “la réalité” of Africa’s situation and insisting upon self-creation (Mbembe 2010: 222) and as accepting the “nouvel âge de dispersion et de circulation” (Mbembe 2010: 224). As Mbembe attacked the “victimology” of African leaders’ and thinkers’ preoccupation with the colonial past and its legacies, he provoked inspiration in some and exasperation from others. As Mkandawire wrote, for example:

The arguments that Africa’s recent past and current dependence might have anything to do with the present conditions were met with the kind of eye-rolling impatience with which committed postmodernists treat people who still fail to understand that history has come to an end and so has struggle. (Mkandawire 2005: 38)

Mbembe’s controversial attacks on “philosophies du travestissement” thus demand that Africanity “open up” to constant re-creation of ever-changing self. Critiques that this attitude is based more on postcolonial/postmodern cultural theory than grounded in economic reality persist (Mkandawire 2005), though some scholars *have* welcomed the idea of “Keeping Africanity Open” (Diagne 2002).

Literary writers have similarly clamoured for a different, more global approach to the concept of African-ness and to the understanding of their work as African intellectuals. The famous manifesto *Pour une Littérature-monde en français*, which appeared in *Le Monde* March 16 2007, and which was soon followed by the volume *Pour une littérature monde* stated that:

L’émergence d’une littérature-monde en langue française consciemment affirmée, ouverte sur le monde, transnationale, signe l’acte de décès de la francophonie. Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n’écrit en francophone. La francophonie est de la lumière d’étoile morte. (np)

Heralded by many as a new means of promoting African, among other continents’, literary and intellectual production, this manifesto and volume

called for the word “Francophone” to be replaced due to its status as a misnomer; meaning everything and nothing, “Francophone” according to these publications, was a deliberate tag denoting inferiority to “French”. This idea is not without its critics, however. Thomas Hale provides a lengthy historical commentary on the links between France and Africa and dismisses the likelihood of this manifesto sweeping away the use of French and the idea of “francophonie” in Africa, given the momentum of French and the enduring power of the “politics of culture” linking France to Africa and its cultural production (Hale 2009: 171). A collection edited by Forsdick, Hargreaves and Murphy contains a series of articles questioning the long-lasting impact of this literary identity manifesto (Forsdick, Hargreaves and Murphy: 2010). Most recently, Christopher L. Miller questions the possibility and wisdom of developing a “littérature-monde” category in education, pointing out that “world literature” already exists as a pedagogical area and is dominated by works translated into English, whereas the most effective way of bringing Francophone literature *in French* to the eyes of students has been through French departments (Miller 2012).

This discussion of African literary production leads to a necessary discussion of the means of production and the terrain in which African intellectuals work. African journals and publishing houses have an important history, which continues today with presses and magazines such as *Ethiopiennes*, *CAEC*, *Editions Khoudia*, *Editions Le Figuier*, *NEA* and *Peuples noirs Peuples Africains* (although this was not actually published in Africa).<sup>6</sup> Government-sponsored magazines like “Sama Culture” and “Dakar-Jeunes” in Senegal still exist, as do anti-governmental presses. Available in many a *kiosque* in France as well as in many parts of Africa is the magazine *Jeune Afrique (L’intelligent)*, published in Paris.

A newer phenomenon is that of publication collaborations, like *AJOTE* (African Journal of Teacher Education), which is based at the University of Guelph, Canada, and which includes many scholars from various African countries in its editorial board, in addition to several US-based researchers. Another example is that of the Mande Studies Association, an independent organization with links to the African Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, that promotes scholarly and professional events concerning Mande cultures and which has members from nearly 30 countries. International colloquia with researchers in the United States have also been established, such as the international event organized by Tulane University, USA, and l’Université Gaston-Berger, Senegal, “Saint-

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<sup>6</sup> *NEA* is now defunct but continued publishing until recently.



Louis, Senegal, and New Orleans: The Comparative and Linked History of Two Port Cities on Each Side of the Atlantic from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries”: a 3-day colloquium in Saint Louis, Senegal, in June 2012, followed by a further 3 days in New Orleans, in April 2013.

In addition to publication outlets and collaborations, several intellectual organizations are still very much alive, many in the field of development, such as CODESRIA (the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa). WARA (the West African Research Association) is another international collaboration that promotes African scholarship and which has a centre in Dakar, the West African Research Centre (WARC). These associations provide an important nexus for researchers, both local and from overseas, and are essential platforms for intellectual debate. Smaller centres have traditionally added support to these initiatives. The *Kër Birago* in Dakar is a prime example of this; as the “maison d’écrivains”, it is here that many contemporary writers meet to organize colloquia, hold literary and artistic events, and to engage in debate. Although this centre is accused of being highly influenced by the government (incidentally by Elie-Charles Moreau, who himself has received some funding from the government for his *Le Nègre International* publishing house), the work of the centre is an important part of intellectual life in Dakar.

The internationalizing potential of the internet, whose virtual nature allows information to be circulated, consumed and disseminated all over the world, will surely render the continental provenance of ideas less relevant. Yet, the places of physical organization for the debates that lead to the reflection and popularization of such ideas and their real trickle-down effect on specific populations must surely still be taken into account. The continued desire for an endogenous intellectual development of populations on the Francophone African continent should not be sneered at because a great number of African intellectuals currently reside elsewhere, therefore.

Considerable shifts have recently taken place in the publishing industry itself. To quote the title of a work by Senegalese writer Fatou Diome, an inhabitant of Paris, fictional writers have an ambiguous “préférence nationale”. Editorial politics mean that although some writers, like Sokhna Benga in Senegal, have been able to publish their own work in Africa, many other publishing houses have seen funds dry up, provoking authors to go to French presses. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy see the persisting relationship between France and African intellectuals (who often reside in France and publish a lot of their output there, especially today) as something all critics must take into account, and

thus avoid treating France and Francophonie as separate entities. Rather than trying to separate France from Francophonie, they seek to create “connections between thinkers in metropolitan France and its former colonies... in a dialectical, conjunctive rather than in a binary, disjunctive relationship” (Forsdick and Murphy 2009a: 163).

Whereas Forsdick and Murphy see “the content of thought” of Francophone “postcolonial intellectuals”, especially their “critical engagement with the relationship between metropolitan France and its former colonies” as more important than “the place of birth of these writers” (Forsdick and Murphy 2009a: 164), other critics also focus on how such writers are able to gain the requisite visibility for their work in order for them to be viewed as “intellectuals” in the first place. Cazenave and Célérier bemoan “the irony and paradox... that Africans have to leave their countries in order to be able to read African literature” (Cazenave and Célérier 2011: 148) and provide an overview of the dwindling role of African publishing houses in the output of intellectual work by Francophone writers of African origin. My own research in Senegal in 2009 revealed that funding to traditional publishing houses such as NEAS had dried up under Abdoulaye Wade, who had instead promised a quite large sum of money to “new” publishing houses. Thus in fact there is a proliferation of previously unknown “maison d’édition” in Senegal, most prominently “Le Nègre International” who have published a variety of texts, from poetry by new female authors to translations of Wade’s work into Arabic (with a hagiographic introduction by the publishing house’s chief editor Elie-Charles Moreau). Other works from other presses include a translation into Catalan of Wade’s story of his accession to power, *La longue marche*.

In a revealing recent article in a recent volume of *Yale French Studies* devoted to Francophone African writers, Claire Ducournau describes a “prosopography” she conducted, which investigates the origins and visibility of writers of Francophone African origins. Noting that insistence on the authenticity of “Africanness” has largely been replaced by more fluid notions of identity in recent works, Ducournau notes nonetheless (with Dominic Thomas) the recurring motif of the African continent as a territorial reference point for many authors despite their desire to avoid restrictive labels (Ducournau 2012: 49-50). With this sense of Africa as an anchor in mind, Ducournau investigates the origins of a series of Francophone African writers and the forces that lead to their visibility, including publishing practices in Africa and Europe. Her qualifications for visibility include such criteria as the reception of literary prizes, appearances in various types of anthologies and collections, book reviews, appearances in literary magazines, internet sites, invitations to

conferences, and finally roles as signatories to the notorious *Pour une littérature-monde* manifesto. In what is perhaps not a surprising result, Ducournau finds that the most visible African writers are published in Europe, but plays down the idea that the tension between localized African writers and transnational circulation has been significantly widened during recent years. In fact, Ducournau ends her article on a hopeful note, claiming that “we are witnessing a new vitality in the publishing industry in a number of countries (of which Ivory Coast and Senegal occupy a privileged status) themselves new *centres* of writing and production” (Ducournau 2012: 61). This conclusion would seem to serve to dissipate many concerns about the Westernization of Francophone African literature and thus remains valuable, especially since it is based on raw data. However, one should be warned against taking this data at face value. Visibility comes at distinctly important levels, and the visibility of authors based in Europe and America is understandably higher than that of those based in Africa.

However, one cannot lose sight of the persistence of “artist-intellectuals”, writers of literature, of fictional (and not so fictional) stories about everyday Africa. Like Sony Labou Tansi (a diplomat) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane (a UNESCO development worker), these literary writer-intellectuals often also take up other roles as commentators on African society. As Cazenave and Célérier have recently argued, many Francophone African writers of the last few decades have desired the “burden” of being “engaged” writers.<sup>7</sup> These authors’ work effectively argues that many contemporary African writers, like Mabanckou, Boubacar Boris Diop and Tansi before them, create worlds in their texts, (sometimes purportedly African and sometimes not) which both represent contemporary issues and call into question *the form* of representations of the contemporary world. This to us seems like an intellectual act, one that can also be detected in Mbembe’s *De la postcolonie*, which critiques representations of Africa by its governments and press.

Yet the novel seems to us to remain the most prevalent form of intellectual activity in contemporary Africa, and it is for this reason that we concentrate upon literary production in this volume. The legacy of writer-activists such as Senghor and David Diop is still very apparent in the output of literary writers from across the continent. The representation of Africa in novels may have begun with links between literature and

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<sup>7</sup> These authors also point out, however, that this “burden”, as they describe it, is sometimes firmly undesired by African writers who prefer to represent other issues, lives or worlds in their texts.

development, as critics such as Lillian Kesteloot (2001) and Bernard Mouralis (1981) noted, but has moved far beyond this. Cazenave and Célérier argue that formal experimentation now seems to be *de rigueur* and that Magic Realism especially influences some contemporary writers, such as Tansi and Boubacar Boris Diop. This may pose questions of solipsism since questions of readability often surface. Yet, we find that intellectual engagement and political commitment do *not* have to be the same things and recent authors have clearly felt freer to experiment with commitment, with representation and with literary form. Kourouma's representation of the experiences of child soldiers, told within a framework of experimentation with narrative voice and register, is one example of this. A further and particularly salient example is the *Ecrire par devoir de mémoire* project, which involved a group of literary authors writing about the Rwandan genocide. Invited to participate in the project, the authors visited Rwanda and were given free reign to represent the genocide through their own literary devices. This is an interesting dramatization of the process of "Francophone African intellectual commitment", since the writers were sent from Europe and were not Rwandan for the most part. Nevertheless, their collective work pushes our understanding of representation of the continent, of engagement with political and/or social issues and of literary experimentation.

Many of the chapters in this volume testify to a continued social commitment, alongside a questioning of modes of representation and a renewed energy for formal experimentation. In the following chapters, contributors each focus on one or a small number of examples of contemporary Francophone African intellectuals, highlighting the fields in which they work, the questions they raise, and, where appropriate, the solutions they propose to the specific problems they treat. No such study may be exhaustive, but we aim to give insights into a variety of intellectuals, some well known, such as Hélène Cixous, and some newer names such as Hélé Béji, some male and some female, some from North, East and Sub-Saharan Africa, and some working in Paris or the United States.

In chapter one, Nathalie Etoke provides a powerful rejoinder to some of the comments made by Mabanckou and Waberi regarding the notion of a role of the intellectual, and their apparent reluctance to accept the label of "African". Etoke focuses on the notion of "historicity", arguing that Africans can never fully avoid being conditioned by their experiences in the continent in which they (mostly) grew up and others' perceptions of them as Africans, "Peu importe l'endroit où l'on se trouve, peu importe nos multiples nationalités, on n'échappe pas à notre historicité". Etoke

does not state that the African intellectual needs to be “Africa’s fireman” (as Mabankou once famously claimed not to want to be) but feels that one can write as an African and tell the stories of African reality without feeling shackled.

In chapter two, Elizabeth Applegate explores the activity of African intellectuals in response to the Rwandan genocide. The “burden of commitment” as outlined in this introduction is under particular discussion here, as Applegate charts the “Ecrire par devoir de mémoire” project. The trip to Rwanda undertaken by a group of African writers and financed by the French Ministry of Culture produced nine books in total, and Applegate focuses upon two of these. Her discussion of Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi: le livre des ossements* and of Koulsy Lamko’s *La Phalène des collines* raises pressing questions as to the conditions and limits of contemporary intellectual engagement. By examining the process of writing testimony, Applegate uncovers other processes at work, such as the impact of colonialism on the Rwandan experience and of the changed role of the intellectual in the political arena. She all the while underscores the narrative experimentation in both of these texts and argues that literature only has the power to change attitudes and behaviours if both writer and reader conspire.

The relevance of the past to the present, and the notion of a disappearing past in particular, provides an appropriate segue into chapter three, in which Amy Hubbell explores the notion of the Pied-Noir intellectual. Hubbell highlights the fragile sense of belonging amongst this group, brought together by a shared experience in Algeria and a shared experience of exile, and how their intellectuals wrote from a precarious space. Marked by nostalgia, loss and separation, their intellectual output is predicated upon the absence of Africa and their memories of it. They thus offer a reminder; we may emphasize how many contemporary writers have moved to France and made this country their adopted space of intellectual activity, but not all have made this move by choice.

We turn to an overview of contemporary issues in African women’s writing in chapter four, by Claire Dehon, who analyses a wide range of texts dating from the early 1960s to very recently in order to sketch the most pressing issues for female writers in West and Central Africa. Concentrating on the representation of love and money, Dehon highlights how these writers have constructed subversive, transgressive modes of being that propose models for modern women who can live independently from male domination.

Chapter five by Eloïse Brezault examines the work of Ivoirian writer Véronique Tadjo. Brezault places Tadjo’s work within a wider discussion

of the role of the African writer in a globalized society. Brezault points to Salman Rushdie's notion of "imaginary homelands" to underscore the impact of recent movements in nations and communities. The changed topography of intellectual commitment and engagement that Brezault discusses has profound effects upon writing today. Focusing on the novel *Loin de mon père*, Brezault reads the main protagonist's trajectory as she returns to her native Côte d'Ivoire for her father's funeral. Her journey, anchored by this metaphor of burial, of the earth as a point of beginning and of ending, brings her to question her understanding of belonging, of origins, of territory, of displacement and of commitment. Brezault shows how Tadjo underlines the necessity of the artist to participate in nations and communities but simultaneously questions the meaning of terms such as these. Tadjo's text thus imagines an alternative space for a committed intellectual through literary experimentation.

In chapter six, Marie-Therese Ellis looks at the work of Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi. Ellis situates the work of this internationally renowned writer in debates about feminism and Islamic feminism in particular as she elucidates this writer's approach to intellectual commitment. By examining Mernissi's literary text, *Sultanes oubliées*, Ellis points up the ways in which Mernissi blends historiography and fiction to provide alternative representations of the past and of women's role in it. Ellis argues that this cacophonous text questions our understanding of what she calls "paralyzing or polarizing" discourses of Islamic history and women's position in society, and thus carves out an alternative space for the Islamic woman intellectual.

In chapter seven, Wakaba Futamura analyses a relatively little-known Tunisian intellectual, Hélé Béji. Béji's central concern in the two works analysed by Futamura, one of which is more autobiographical and the other of which is more theoretical, is the loss of Tunisia's heritage in the contemporary era. Futamura's discussion centres upon the place of the past in the present day, and of the intellectual's commitment to national history. Futamura situates Béji's work within the wider field of Tunisian intellectuals in the postcolonial period and underscores in particular the contribution of women to these debates. As she looks back over the course of her life, Béji points to moments of collaboration and commitment, and questions the legacy of these in the present day, as do/did intellectuals such as Senghor, Sembene and others outlined in this introduction.

The final chapter is composed of an interview with one of the main Francophone African philosophers currently at work, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, and preceded by an outline and analysis of the intellectual career of this well-known African figure. Born in Senegal, Diagne moved to