

The New Malian Literary Landscape

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This year I made two visits to Mali to pursue my research on Malian letters since the onset of political democratization in 1991. During my first trip, I worked in Bamako, the capital city, and then traveled to the Kayes region in the western part of the country to conduct interviews with activists from the Agence Malienne des Expulsés about migrant issues. In particular, I was able to investigate a new theatrical repertoire, which is created and performed by former illegal migrants willing to communicate, and indeed problematize, their own experience. This popular dramaturgy points to new theatrical practices, and translates, in unexpected forms and language, the obsessions and fears but also the success related to the Malian experience of migration. They raise unexamined questions of genre and performance, place and settings, testifying to the innovativeness and dynamics of local cultural practices.

In Bamako, I also pursued my research on life narratives and memoirs and more precisely prison narratives written by former political prisoners of the Moussa Traoré military regime. These texts are part of a larger group of narratives published at an impressive rate since the onset of democratization, and which include memoirs written by former military officers as well as by ordinary citizens willing to testify about the military regime. During this first trip I interviewed Amadou Traoré, one of the most important political figures in postcolonial Mali, who is a former political prisoner and now publisher. I also worked with Ibrahima Touré, a Malian director, who has just finished an adaptation of Ibrahima Ly's prison narrative *Toiles d'araignée*.

I continued with this research during my second trip to Bamako, which coincided with the country's celebration of 50 years independence. While looking at the role of life narratives and memoirs

during moments of commemoration and how they relate to official practices of memory, I pursued my interviews with other political prisoners such as Bakary Koniba and Seydou Badian Kouyaté. I also spent time in the national archives looking at the relationship between Malian politics and literary practices and met with other actors involved with the literary scene such as editors and publishers.

This research is part of a larger project which examines the developments that have been brought to the Malian literary domain since the fall of the Moussa Traoré military regime in 1991. Some of these developments include: the complex modes of local rehabilitation of literary figures such as Fily Dabo Sissoko, Yambo Ouologuem and Ahmed Thiam; the rediscovery and sensitive dissemination of the militant poetry from the northern regions at a moment of great political anxiety within this particular zone; and the unexpected orientations of the Malian novel. All of these literary initiatives, discoveries and changes are unmistakable signs of a desire to reconstruct and solidify a national literary history devastated by 23 years of military regime.

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