

Memory, Memoirs and Narratives in Mali

ALIOUNE SOW

During the past academic year, I have pursued my research on memory, memoirs and narratives in Mali. In addition to examining memory practices and discourses, which have developed since the democratization of the country, I have looked at how major political changes have radically transformed Malian literary production. Paying attention to the particular role played by autobiographies and memoirs, I investigate the new literary patterns and unexpected generic tendencies which have emerged since the political transition of 1991. At issue are the new reading demands and habits in contemporary Mali, which demonstrate a strong preference for memoirs and autobiographies. The aim of the study is also to describe and understand better the specific conditions of the revival of memoirs and autobiographical writings which, in the Malian context, were repressed and regulated by the multiple restrictions imposed by the military regime after it took power in 1968. With close reading of selected narratives, the research describes newly developed local literary practices. It examines the distinct motivations of writing and analyses the ambivalent forms and modes of writing used by authors as diverse as former political prisoners, military officers, civil servants and journalists. Ultimately, the narratives - their reception and circulation - signal imperatives, obligations and admissions about the past and demonstrate that the proliferation of memoirs not only responds to the national discourse on memory but very often challenges the consensual approach noticed in other local memory discourses and practices since democratization.

This year, I have presented papers on memoirs in Mali at international conferences (such as the African Literature Association), co-organized a workshop with Professor Luise White on African memoirs after 1980, and published a



paper on the question of military power and cinematographic production in Mali. The paper appeared in the journal *Critical Intervention*.

In addition to my research on memoirs, I have also pursued my work on Malian popular theatre, both within Mali as well as its reception in France. Focusing on the work of the theatre company Blonba, I examine how migration is informing and shaping Malian theatrical practices and analyze how theatre practitioners are responding to French dominant discourses on Malian migration. At the same time, I look at how theatre practitioners engage with the strategies

adopted by social movements in France to address the question of Malian migration. I have presented a paper on this topic at the annual African Theatre Association meeting in Swansea (UK).

Alioune Sow is associate professor of French and African Studies.