

Writers as Historians of War in African Literature of Francophone Expression

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Abstract

Many wars have been fought on African soil before and since the 'suns of independence' smiled on the black continent. Historians are typically known as chroniclers of events in human society. Writers are also seen as compilers of human experiences, real or fictional, since literature is seen as the mirror of the society. Recently, it appears that the writers' roles are being expanded and transformed as many African literary works chronicle wars as they happen in different parts of the continent. The relationship between history and literature has generated a lot of polemics among literary scholars and critics, historians and historiographers and practitioners of related disciplines. This paper is not joining in this argument; rather it attempts to show through a critical study of selected African literary texts of French expression how writers chronicle wars and conflicts in postcolonial Africa. The paper beams its searchlights on the literary genres and techniques adopted by these literary war chroniclers in an attempt to fictionalise historical experiences. It could be said that sources of historical elements inform narrative techniques of each writer-historian of war.

Keywords: Historicisation, War, War Narrative, Writer-Historian, Rwanda

Introduction

Writers have been interested in history directly or indirectly. In 19th century France, historical novels came into fashion. It would appear that after the Revolution in Europe, acute consciousness of a changed world and, hence, of the difference between historical periods, led novelists to a new interest in re-creating the specificity of a past era or more precisely reconstituting it in the light of their own present preoccupations, with a distant preference for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.¹ Walter Scott remains a reference point of the historical novel in Europe, known for his literary influence on some French writers. Hugo published *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), and Alexandre Dumas *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844). Both are popular with historical novel, but it is in relation to Honoré de Balzac's *Les Chouans* (1829) that critics consider Walter Scott's sway very strong.

After the two world wars that marked the 20th century, many European historians and writers alike have been able to chronicle them as part of human experience. Historical and literary works centred on these wars still abound as a form of knowledge in the 20th and 21st centuries. The French writer, Henri Barbusse, wrote *Le Feu* (1916), Guillaume Apollinaire's published his collection of poetry *Calligrammes* (1918), and Paul Eluard and Louis Aragon also wrote what was called poetry of resistance during the World War II. Worthy of note is the fact that many French writers such as Malraux and Camus fought for France against German Occupation. And critics opine that Camus' *La Peste* (1947) is a metaphorical or allegorical representation of German occupation of French territory. The inhabitants of Oran were held behind the walls of their city to circumvent the spread of the deadly plague, so also German soldiers held the French during the war. The war inspired the publication of diverse literary works, written through the experience of their authors: *La Vallée Heureuse* written by André Soubiran, *Le Grand Cirque* by Pierre Clostermann, *Le Caporal épinglé* by Jacques Perret (Lagarde & Michard, 1998). The narrative of real experiences did constitute a process of historicisation of fiction, or rather fictionalisation of history. During this period, written literature was not well developed in Africa. Africans were still under the chains of imperialism and colonialism, although majority of them participated in the World War I.

Many wars have been fought on African soil before and since after the 'suns of independence' shined on the black continent. Although historians are typically known as chroniclers of events in human society, recently it appears that there are systematic expansion and transformation of writers' roles in the society. African writers are now seen as compilers of human experiences, real or fictional, since literature is seen as the mirror of the society. Many African literary works are chronicles of wars as they happen in different parts of the continent, as writers assume the responsibility of public historians or traditional *griots* who are seen as custodians and transmitters of local cultures, traditions and events, making them more or less public knowledge. This functional extension of approach to literature has engendered debate among literary critics, scholars, historians, historiographers and practitioners of related disciplines. The reason is not far-fetched. Williams (1925) had defined fiction as a kind of "re-assembling of the parts" of history. However, the ambiguity of this definition is anchored on the postulation of fiction as totally a parody of history. It does not create room for the imaginary, the unreal and the unconscious. For Ikiddeh (2005), every writer and every artist is a historian of his or her time, the unconscious recorder of the events and the mood of his or her society. This definition bestows a historical responsibility on the writer and prescribes unconsciousness as informative sources of history; more so, the interpretation of the mood of the society may necessitate the use of imagination. On the other hand, the level of unconsciousness is exaggerated, because the accuracy of data and documents, figures and facts especially in war experiences requires a high level of sensitivity. Yet Ikiddeh admits that historical incidents provide at a conscious level the material from which creative work is moulded. He goes further to state that a writer who merely reproduces commonly held opinions without an individual imaginative touch would hardly qualify as an interesting historian, let alone a novelist of any grade (Ikiddeh, 2005). Yet that does not mean that an 'interesting historian' must subscribe to 'an individual imaginative touch', but a writer must. Authorial intention defines the differences between an historian and a writer. In addition, aesthetic and stylistic qualities are major factors in this difference.

Most African writers appear to have an unofficial social responsibility or obligation towards their society, because African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment, insisting that there is always a close relationship between African literature and its historical context(s) (Kehinde, 2004). This commitment is premised on the actual realities of the author's society. Gikandi (2001) states that Soyinka was particularly concerned about what he saw as the incurable tension between the literary concerns of writers and what he called an overwhelming pattern of reality. Writers' recourse to realism as an approach to literature remains prominent and preponderant in African literature. The reason is for the fact that they actually see themselves as what Gikandi calls "the self-appointed guardians of the public good". In Lukacs' term, as cited by Jabulani Mkhize (1995), the cornerstone of realism is the acknowledgement of the individual's fate as being inextricably bound to his/her social and historical environment. The authorial reliance on social and historical events gives a particularised definition of the African novel. Kehinde (2004) concurs that this novel is perceived as a socially symbolic act, that is, a reflection of the problems of the author's immediate society.

The intention of our work is not to perpetuate the inexhaustible discussion on relationship between history and literature, such as "Muse as Archivist: African Literature as Alternative History"² but an attempt to show through critical study of selected African literary texts of French expression how writers chronicle wars and conflicts in postcolonial Africa. The fictionalisation of wars and conflicts remains a mirage without alliance with history. By history here, we are referring to all what is *historically attested*, that is, all what is related to dates, events and personalities that had truly existed. Summarily, history is the discourse made on events *and* these events themselves (Haorau, 2001). Narratives of war fall into this generic categorisation because wars are datable events, having temporal and spatial configurations and connotations.

The spatial and temporal composition of a historical narrative such as novel on war can be subjected to systematic modifications, transformations and expropriations; depending on the approach adopted by the writer. The differentiating qualities of authors from typical historians have to do with the fictional and stylistic representation of historical events. Many

African writers of war narratives adopt individual approaches to narration. This manifestation informs the need of looking into different ways through which selected African writers represent their experiences or retell others' experiences in their work. Literary works such as the Ivorian Amadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), the Algerian Azouz Begag's *Le Passeport* (2000), the Rwandan Scholastique Mukasonga's *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008), *Les Inyenzi ou les Cafards* (2006), Veronique Tadjou's *L'Ombre d'Imana* (2000) and Tierno Monenembo's *L'Ainé des ophelins* (2000) have been chosen for this study. These works, published within the new millennium, share homogeneity of thematic preoccupations, but are situated in contexts, marked by social, temporal, spatial and historical differences. They are narratives of war in postcolonial Africa.

Conflicts, insurgences, rebellions and civil wars characterize postcolonial Africa; resulting from political and tribal factors as some direct consequences of Eurocentric colonial balkanization of the continent. There have been civil wars such the Biafran War between the Nigerian State and the former Eastern Region of that country; the Algerian War between the Islamists and the Army, the Liberian War between the Krahn, the Gio and Mano tribes; the Rwandan War between the Tutsi and Hutu; just to mention but few. Other wars are still going on. Thousands of citizens have died or been displaced and/or fled as refugees into neighbouring countries. Most writers in Africa have either been direct or indirect or observers of these wars. Being socially committed, these writers do not hesitate to represent their experiences through their fiction of French and English expression.

Doguiçimi (1938) is centered on the old kingdom of Danhomé, in the present-day Republic of Benin. This Paul Hazoumé's novel appears to be the first African historical novel that is preoccupied with the epic intertribal war in the old kingdom of Abomey. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, like other first generation African writers, exploit pre-colonial and colonial histories, especially nationalistic movements that snowballed into conflicts and wars in his fictions. However, among his works, it is *Weep Not Child* that shows the intensification of nationalist consciousness resulting in the Mau Mau war (Ikiddeh, 2005). Other contemporary post-colonial wars are

being also *narrativized* or fictionalized by African writers. A masterly, haunting new novel from a writer heralded by *The Washington Post Book World* as “the 21st-century daughter of Chinua Achebe,” *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), recreates a seminal moment in modern African history: Biafra’s impassioned struggle to establish an independent republic in Nigeria, and the chilling violence that followed.³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a typical Ibo storyteller, weaves her fiction with the story (not experience) of Biafra War in Nigeria, encapsulated into the authorial intention of healing wounds. Analogous to Adichie’s literary accomplishment are other literary works that attempt to historicise contemporary wars in Africa.

Historicisation of Wars in Contemporary African Novels

The use of social, economic, political and cultural realities as raw materials for plotting of works of fiction, as earlier emphasised, remains overbearing in African literary works. Wars as a social reality, whose effects appear apocryphal, yet cataclysmic in the African societies, has become a strong motif in literary works by African writers. While most of these writers narrate from their personal experiences, some others rely on retold stories of these wars, and yet others take advantage of popular culture and media reports. Azouz Begag, an Algerian writer in Diaspora, captures Algerian post-colonial war in his *Passeport* (2000).

The novel, *le Passeport*, is a narrative of a society troubled by crisis of the state and its abysmal consequences on the Algerian masses. It is the story of a police officer Zoubir El Mouss, alias Zouzou and his patrol team under the command of Ousmane. Instead of fulfilling their professional responsibility of maintaining law and order, they become tools in the hands of their boss, dancing to his whims and caprices, majorly killing and maiming all presumed enemies of the State engulfed in civil war. Zouzou, haunted by his conscience, decides to elope and relocate to France where he was born. The historical context of the work is post-colonial Algeria in the 1990s. The experience of the Algerian war in 1992 and its effects is being fictionalized and historicized by Begag. Algeria has known many conflicts and wars before and after her independence in 1962. It could be said that since sword facilitated Algeria’s independence in 1962, it has not departed from her coast. From the end of the war with France, rebellion and revolt

became established, especially the popular Kabylie rebellion of 1993 which gave birth to coups d'Etat, bombings, civil and cold war, and to a violent and militarized society.

In the novel, the war between the national army and the Islamists (revolutionists) is no longer intense. The narrative gives a chronological succession of this crisis as thus: "le métier m'allait à merveille. Et puis les manifestations de jeunes, la répression, l'armée, la guerre civile, la barbarie, les attentats..."²⁴ (the work was going on well for me. Then came the youth riots, the repression, the army, the civil war, killing, bombing...)

Although the narrator acknowledges the existence of the war, it is actually the last phase in the succession of events that is being lived. Secret killing and bombing characterise this phase. It is normal to find human bodies on the streets, slaughtered or maimed. The mutilated or maimed groan on the streets. Villages are sacked at night. An epidemic of atrocities spread like wildfire with innumerable victims. And worse still, the public cemetery has no space left for burial. Relatives of the dead have to queue because of the geometric progression of the number of deaths. The city of Algiers where the actions take place has a permanent curfew in the evening. The masses are in perpetual fear of death and the unknown. Neither the army nor the police could contend with the insurgent militants and fundamentalists. Night life has been forgotten, only prostitutes and the patrol team's Toyota appear to maintain a constant omnipresence in the city. Zouzou and his group (Simon, Géloule and Karamel) are in constant touch with the disappearing life of the city.

The war has an overbearing effect on the economy. The masses purchasing power and businesses are closing for lack of patronage. Hospitals have run out of drugs. The youths are fleeing the country, queuing in embassies for visas and crossing clandestinely to Europe. Zouzou continually feels like a stranger. He will be helped by his girlfriend Dahlia to obtain travelling documents for his return to France. Anonymous allusions are made to some of the great Algerian personalities killed in the text. The fowl says: "C'est moi qui ai assassiné le président."²⁵ (I assassinated the president). And another says: "un écrivain est assassiné devant chez moi" (A writer was assassinated in front of my home). These references are apparently made to the assassination of President Mohammed Boudiaf

and of the founder of Algerian magazine *Matin*, Tahar Djaout, in 1992 and 1993 respectively. Such historicization of fiction does not underscore the personal experience of the author. Azouz Begag, as a diasporic writer, resides permanently in Lyon, France, where he was born and bred by an immigrant Algerian father. Like Ahmadou Kourouma in *Allah n'est pas Obligé*, Begag has a priori knowledge of the described war situation of his homeland. Systematic extrapolation and interpolation characterize his fictional historicization of the Algerian War.

In *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), the child soldier and narrator, Birahima narrates the Liberian War with the sense of an adult observer. The diabolical disease and death of his mother necessitates his displacement and relocation with an 'uncle' who promised to reunite him with his aunt in Liberia. With the promise of the fetishist Yacouba, who becomes his close friend, the poor boy is in perpetual odyssey for his aunt who could not be found alive. The plot of the narrative is ironically structured such that the desired aunt remains out of reach and sight, and the desirous child hero keeps looking for her. The plot between the desired and the desirer is developed into the narrative and experience of war. He eventually sees his aunt, but she died later. Survivalist instinct of the protagonist motivates his ritualistic initiation into child-soldiering, moving between different notorious rebel groups that are at war. From a privileged professional position, Birahima narrates the organised atrocities of war: ethnic cleansing, looting, sabotage and rape that marked the Liberian and the Sierra Leonean wars. To shoot and kill effectively and remorselessly, the boy like other children-soldiers must learn the consumption of different types of stimulants: narcotics and spirits. Though Ahmadou Kourouma as author, is neither Liberian nor Sierra Leonean, he uses his a priori knowledge, unlike Scolastique Mukasonga, to *narrativize* and capture graphically the horrific experiences of the victims of these wars.

Shcolastique Mukasonga applies her a posteriori knowledge as a victim and vanquished to fictionally historicize the Rwandan War, especially its climax of genocide. In *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* (2006), a young girl named Shcolastique Mukasonga narrates her experience and that of her family throughout the war: the displacement of her family from Gikongoro to Nyamata, her primary and secondary education characterised by tribalism

her exile in Burundi, and the assassination of her parents and most of her siblings during the genocide of 1994. The author continues her narrative of war in *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008). The plot hovers around the Rwandan War, but its setting is located in Nyamata where the family relocated to. The Hutu are still in their campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi. The novel, dedicated to her late mother as a means of immortalizing her, focuses on Stefania and the roles that Tutsi women played during the war: the struggle to nourish, shelter, and safeguard their families through subsistent agriculture. Stefania, mother of the narrator Scolastique Mukasonga, is symbolically mirrored as a workaholic, healer, provider, protector, and preserver of traditional values, even during the Rwandan crisis and war. Of all civil wars in postcolonial Africa, the Rwandan War appears to have undergone series of fictional historicization from African writers of both Rwandan and non-Rwandan origins.

In Tierno Monenembo's *L'ainé des ophelins* (2000), the narrative focuses greatly on the after-effects of the Rwandan War and foreign efforts made to rehabilitate victims. Faustin, who lives with his partners in crime, Musinkoro, Josepha, Emilienne, and Tatién, strives for survival after the death of his parents during the war. But their survival comes from criminal activities. He recasts through flash-back his experiences resulting from the loss of his parents during the genocide, his criminal activities, his sojourn at a rehabilitation centre called la Cité des Anges bleus, his escape with his siblings, his escapades with Rodney, his assassination of Musinkoro, his incarceration, the drama of his judgment and eventual death sentence. Though a minor, Faustin's romances with women, wine and crime are compulsive. His riotous life remains emblematic and characteristic of post-war Rwanda. Veronique Tadjó's *L'Ombre d'Imana* (2000) appears to be a compendium of individual testimonies of the Rwandan war general and the genocide of 1994 in particular. From genocide to judgment and imprisonment, the novel recounts short stories of Isaro, wife of Romain, accused of eliminating Nkuranya's family, the incest of Anastase who rapes his sister Anastasie, Karl and his wife Annonciata, gang-raped by militias, the genocide detainees in Rilissa Prison, and other stories. The Ivorian writer makes a historical negotiation between the Rwandan genocide and its effects on the citizenry, showing the degeneration of moral values.

Genre and Technique in African War Narratives of Francophone Expression

All the narratives of war in African novels of French expression show unanimity of dependence on history as raw materials for fictionalizing experiences of Africans before, during and after post-colonial civil wars. However, they deploy different narrative techniques, distinguishing their creative spirit. On the one hand, thematic uniformity characterizes all narratives of war, especially as writers attempt to fictionalize war experiences in Africa. Inter-tribal vendettas and politics, ethnic cleansing, killings, looting, child-soldiering, rape, hunger, mass migration and displacement, and refugee problems are mirrored as both causes and effects of civil war in Africa. On the other hand, differences are seen in stylistic and generic representations of these wars. It has been remarked that some of the writers depend on a posteriori knowledge, others on a priori knowledge, as either to have experienced or as observers the of wars. Their source of literary raw materials informs the stylization of their fictionalized histories or historicized fictions.

Azouz Begag, author of *Le Passeport*, adopts the social-realist approach, unveiling cloudy representations of social classes in war-infested society of post-colonial Algeria. This fact informs the historical perspective of his fiction, though covering historical personages and periods with ambiguity and ambivalence to give illusion of reality. He appropriates and expropriates the history of war, using allusions to navigate between the past and present and creating a network of information that helps to explain the poverty, insecurity and misery in Algeria. His protagonist, Zouzou may not be Lukacs' typical hero that sees social transformation as inevitable, but he is a problematic hero (Souiller and Troubetzkoy, 1997), yet realistically emblematic of his young generation. Sociologically, four groups are dominant in the narrative: Zouzou's abused professional group (Dahlia, Simon, Geloule, Karamel), Osmane's aristocratic group, beggars and children-hawkers' group, and the warring faceless militias' group. The language of the author is pro-masses; it shows a mastery of French *langue populaire*, full of vulgarisms, clichés, and local colours, mixed with *langue courante* put in narrative perspective. He uses *putes/putain* instead of *prostituées* (prostitutes), *flic* for *policier* (policeman), *missive* for *lettre*

(letter). The first-person narrator is Zouzou who relies on reminiscences and hallucinations, as memories of failed dreams, aborted hopes and desires are evoked. The novel's historical perspective, popular language, and other devices link it to realism, socially manifest, but not magic like that of Ahmadou Kourouma.

The novel, *Allah n'est pas obligé*, exposes the phenomenon of child-hero in contemporary war narratives in African writing. The experience of the Ivorian-born writer, Ahmadou Kourouma who fought as volunteer in the French Army from 1950-1954 in Indonesia, impacts on the narrative techniques of the author. Generally, Kourouma mixes fiction and reality in his writings (Udousoro, 2005); however it is in *Allah n'est pas obligé* that the literary intercourse between fiction and facts is well pronounced. The plot is weaved around the eternal search for an aunt, a search that turns out to be an odyssean adventure, analogous to Voltaire's *Candide*⁷ in *Candide*. The realism is historical, yet magical and linguistic. The author employs magical realism in the beginning of the narrative (the witch's spell on Birahima's mother and the Kamajors' impenetrable body of amulets), and ends with realism married with historical facts. Such type appears to be hyperrealist that permits the deployment of recognizable historical personages and their real appellations. Historical names such as Doe, Taylor, Johnson and El Hadji are identifiable literary characters described by Kourouma as "quatre bandits de grand chemin" of Liberia as Foday Sankoh, Johnny Koroma, and others are of Sierra Leone. He goes further to describe the then African leaders (Compaore, Houphouet-Boigny, Kadhafi, Sani Abacha, Eyadema, etc. as "dictateurs" (dictators) who are implicated in Liberian and Sierra Leonean Wars. The child-narrator's tone is highly judgmental and provocative, his narrative prowess and devices question the tenderness of his claimed age and immaturity.

The language of the novel is postcolonial; the author does not abrogate but appropriate French language in a bid to represent African indigenous realities. His 'négrification'⁸ of French language remains a postcolonial weapon used by postcolonial writers to 'write back' to the centre from the periphery. Ayeleru (2002) observes that *Allah n'est pas obligé* is a network of neologism, transposition, code-mixing, and intertextuality. The author's use of words is *heterolinguistic*⁹ and *interlingual*;¹⁰ one is the

presence of foreign idioms under whichever forms and as well as varieties of language in a given text, and the other is a phenomenon in foreign language users and learners; it is not always composed of correct forms and rules proper to the system and norm, but of grammatically incorrect forms and non-conforming rules in the foreign language. In his bid to represent realistically the ignorance and analphabetism of his child-narrator, Kourouma ends up creating his brand of French language, subjected to the whims and caprices of local dialect and its proverbs or idioms. This transgression of French language does not only show his linguistic realism, but depicts his literary revolutionary tendencies. It represents graphically the effects of war on Birahima, whose future and destiny has been truncated by Liberian and Sierra Leonean Wars. The use of child-narrator in African war narratives appears to authenticate and validate the source of experience; his/her innocence gives an air of reality to narration. It is also a child who narrates in Shcolastique Mukasonga's works.

Mukasonga's two novels, *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* and *la Femme aux pieds nus*, belong typically to the autobiographical genre. Like Kourouma, she represents hyperrealistic descriptions of the Rwandan War from her personal and family perspective. Her real name and those of her parents (Stefania) and siblings (Andre, Alexia, Antoine, etc.) are maintained without transformations or modifications for the characters in her novels. Her protagonist remains Shcolastique Mukasonga, herself. The plot of war is weaved around the narrator's infancy and adulthood, showing the chronological structure of her growth from childhood, to adolescence and adulthood. The family ambiance is broken by conflicts and war, causing her family to migrate or relocate to other Rwandan villages. *Inyenzi* unveils the beginning of tribal hostilities between the Tutsi and Hutu, during the 50s, and how the Tutsi are displaced from Bugesera region in the 60s. The narrator, Mukasonga as a child narrates how his family got displaced. *La femme aux pieds nus* is dedicated to her late mother, also a victim of genocide. However, both are autobiographical as already emphasized. Marcelle Marini (1990) like many critics believes that autobiographical writing is the rewriting of infancy and of history that we all attempt to rework throughout our existence. Oriaku (1990) justifies its classification as a literary genre because it, firstly, selects a segment of an author's life

which is already a deformation of reality; secondly, as a fiction, it presents the illusion of the totality of life; and thirdly, it uses imagination to organize the selection of events formally without synchronized relationship, recalled from the memory. Mukasonga's works reveal an overwhelming presence of local colour, used to represent indigenous realities.

The biographical works of Shcolastique Mukasonga are a compendium of indigenous expressions which she struggles to explain in French. Words such as *ubunyano/cérémonie de naissance* (New-born baby ceremony), *inzu/logement sacré* (sacred chamber), *umuganura/fête du sorgho* (sorghum feast), etc. are used to enhance cultural descriptions. A dictionary of authorial language can be developed from both texts with its translation into French. Although Mukasonga mourns the death of her family members (only left with two survivors) and countrymen/women in both texts, her second novel *La femme aux pieds nus* remains a feminist project, aimed at trumpeting and (re)valorizing the exploits of Rwandan women during the war. The image of a Rwandan woman is that of tripartite responsibility of a provider, protector, and preserver. Mukasonga's narrative does not follow the journalistic perspective of foreign writers of Rwandan genocide, such as Tierno Monenembo's *L'ainé des ophelins* and Veronique Tadjo's *L'Ombre d'Imana*.

Monenembo and Tadjo belong to group of foreign writers and intellectuals sponsored by *L'Association Arts et Médias d'Afrique* during operation "Ecrire par devoir de mémoire" to Rwanda after the genocide of 1994 (Delas, 2002). This journalistic trip apparently has influences on narrative techniques of these writers. *L'ainé des ophelins* and *L'ombre d'Imana* are literatures of journalistic testimonies, products of an attitude of a journalist who must ask questions, interview people and take notes. Hence, Veronique Tadjo's work is more or less a collection of personal testimonies of survivors, full of authorial commentaries characteristic of journalists. This Ivorian writer multiplies in the first and second parts of her work impressions, travel notes, records of discussions with genocide survivors, yet having understood the need to raise her tone by three apologues encapsulated in the middle of the narrative. Such a mode, affirms Delas, is closer to journalistic testimony. In the true sense of the word, only "la colère des morts", "Sa voix" and "Anastase et Anastasie" have

some elements of a narrative. Contrarily, Tierno Monenembo's *L'ainé des ophelins* has a better literary plot or structure, because like Boubacar Boris Diop, he chooses fiction in order to represent better the Rwandan genocide. He is happy to see the world through the eyes of his hero, who is typically a (disoriented) child. Such narrative is *homodiegetic*. The choice of a child-narrator authenticates the story, yet deconstructs Western propaganda against Africa. Faustin, the narrator/protagonist, feeds the excited crew of BBC journalists with lies about Rwandan genocide. His claims are not verified or confirmed by these journalists who are only interested in transmitting or broadcasting such lies to Europe and America. As part of the visiting African writers and scholars to Rwanda after genocide, Monenembo would have used his journalistic findings as springboard in *narrativizing* his fiction, modeling and modifying testifiers' experiences.

Conclusion

Representation of traumas of war appears to be a trope adopted by all the writers examined to make a critique of numerous civil wars and conflicts characterising postcolonial Africa. A common denominator remains the implicit or explicit condemnation of these wars and the intercourse between facts and fiction. However, the Algerian writer, Azouz Begag stands distinct in his approach of social realism, different from hyperrealism of the Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma and partly from Rwandan Scolastique Mukasonga. Autobiographical, Mukasonga's works are the only products of a posteriori knowledge, since the author has a personal experience as survivor and victim. Others depend on journalistic sources from popular culture and sponsored facts-finding trips, although such historical elements are subjected to literary interpolations and extrapolations. The writers' unanimous deployment of first-person narrator, exemplified by 'je' attempts to validate firsthand or secondhand experiences which impact on authorial choice of genre and narrative techniques. However, Mukasonga's self characterization and nomination remains a brand of autobiographical writing in African literature. Azouz Begag's autobiographical novel, *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986) similarly presents such setting. Both Azouz Begag and the protagonist named Azouz of the novel grew up in a shanty town outside

Lyon, almost entirely inhabited by Algerian or Kabyle immigrant workers, in which the language and culture were predominantly a mix of Algerian, Kabyle and *Arpitan*. Although all texts analyzed differ in genre and style, however, they adopt a narrative technique that attempts to investigate the devastating effects of civil wars in Africa. Yet, it can be said that authorial intention of the Begag, Kourouma, Mukasonga, Tadjou and Monenembo is judgmental and hypercritical without ambivalence.

End notes

- 1 See "French Literature" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2009
- 2 Theme of Ibadan International Conference on African Literature, held between 3 to 6 July, 2008 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria where African literature was seen as Alternative to history.
- 3 See http://www.kachifo.com/order/product_details.php?item_id=126, 27/4/2009
- 4 Azouz Begag. *Le Passeport*. Paris: le Seuil, 9
- 5 *Ibid.* 74
- 6 *Ibid.* 97
- 7 A major character in *Candide* (1758) who spent his time in unprecedented voyages, motivated by destiny and human activities and in his bid to find her lover, Cunégonde. For further reading, see Voltaire. *Candide*. Paris: Larousse, 2002
- 8 A term used by Laditan, O. A. in his "la Litterature Autrement: Le Souffle Africain ou la Negrification de la Langue Francaise dans Allah n'est pas obligé d'Ahmadou Kourouma" *Ibadan Journal of European Studies*. No. 3, April 2002, 79-91
- 9 The adjective is coined from Grutman's concept of 'heterolinguisme' as defined by Jean-Marc Mourra, *Litteratures Francophones et Theorie Postcoloniale*. Paris: PUF, 1999, 74
- 10 The adjective is coined from Bill Ashcroft et al's concept of 'interlangue' which was defined as it relates to postcolonial literatures by the French critic, Jean-Marc Mourra, (*Ibid.*) 81-82

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