



## **Literatures in African Languages: Production, circulation, reception**

Thursday 29 and Friday 30 September 2016  
Paris, INALCO, Auditorium

### **Call for papers**

Oral and written literatures in African languages, often published locally, are seldom known internationally, in spite of a production which is far from being negligible and could even be considered as important in some languages such as Swahili, Hausa or Yoruba. Albert Gerard already proved the importance of this production some years back in his book (*African Language Literatures*, Three Continents Press 1981), which, although limited to written literatures, still identified more than a thousand book publications. The variety of formats and multimedia circulation patterns equally proves the vitality of these literatures while making them more accessible and giving them a new lease of life. The aim of the online Encyclopedia of literatures in African languages (ELLAF) project is to remedy this lack of visibility and initiate research in this field. This project, covering both oral and written literatures, is currently at the pilot phase with a first sample of eleven languages which will gradually extend to other continental languages. The conference on “Literatures in African Languages: production, circulation, reception” is meant to wrap up this first stage.

### **1. Production**

Papers regrouped under that heading will focus on the various circumstantial aspects which motivate and accompany this specific field of production, be it oral or written. They will be expected to focus on:

- *A causal order*: are productions in African languages the result of individual initiatives, or do they respond to a pre-established programming (for example, ritual calendars and/or oral ceremonies)? Are some of them ordered by an organisation or an institution: NGO, cultural or educational services, etc.? Are some of them expected to serve specific campaigns defined beforehand (e.g. the development of national languages)?
- *A moral order*: who produces these works? What is the status of the various enunciators of oral literature (specialists, non-specialists, professionals?), and that of authors of written literature? What are the modalities governing this production? Without mediatisation (in the case of primary orality)? In mediatised format (book, CD, radio, television...)? What kind of format corresponds to the various types of works? What are the preferred genres?

How much does the analysis of textual modalities of these productions help to induce the target which creators more specifically look for? What are, in terms of literary communication, the implications of the conditions of production on the literary texts, whether in an oral or in a written context? What are the roles of digital publishing and online circulation of texts?

## **2. Dissemination**

Papers grouped under this second heading will focus on the publishing formats of the works: who are the publishers (books, records, CD/DVD, online) of oral or written works created in an African language in Africa or elsewhere? What is the role of the neo-orality in their circulation? To what extent is it possible to induce a difference of target between publications in African language only and bilingual publications (African language / European language)? What is the number of copies produced for these respective publications? What are the distribution channels suited to the various formats: bookshops, libraries, street bookstores, special networks (associations, schools, universities, etc.), and internet? To what extent are works in an African language translated? Into a European language or several of them? Into an African language or more?

## **3. Reception**

Papers grouped under this third heading will focus on the way these works in African languages are received and perceived by the public (readers/listeners/viewers). Can this public be quantitatively/qualitatively identified? What are the critical bodies who speak about it (newspapers, journals, radio or television programmes, websites...)? In what terms? Is there a difference in the treatment given to literary works in African language by a writer already known worldwide for his works in a European language ((Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Boubacar Boris Diop...)) and others? Apart from their lack of visibility, literatures in African languages may equally suffer from a lack of esteem, when compared with African literatures in European languages. Critics blame them for their excessive didacticism (edifying literature) or ideology (thesis literature), two qualities which ethnocentrist European critics of literature do not consider compatible with literary creation. Textual analyses of works in African languages will be able to go beyond prejudice to examine the literarity of those works and the legitimacy of their aspiration to get included in world literature.

Although papers may choose to focus on any of the three lines of research described above, transversal studies are always possible and even encouraged. One could envisage a study on publishing houses specialised in African literature, while another might choose to consider a particular work from production stage to publication and examine its textual properties, to offer a reasoned analysis of its reception by critics. The updating of the sociological settings concerning the modalities of production and circulation of this literary field will only be of interest if it contributes to the revealing of the specific textual nature of the works. This conference will address similar issues around the coexistence of oral and written literature in local languages in other cultural zones.

### **Scientific Committee:**

Ursula Baumgardt, Jean Derive, Graham Furniss, Xavier Garnier, Lee Haring, Abdoulaye Keita

The deadline for the reception of proposals is September 30, 2015 at  
[colloqueellaf@gmail.com](mailto:colloqueellaf@gmail.com)

Attach an argument in French or English (max. 2000 signs, spaces included) and a short biographical information to the abstract.