

FECHA DE RECEPCIÓN:

05/06/2014

FECHA DE ACEPTACIÓN:

26/09/2014

ISSN: 1885-446 X

ISSNe: 2254-9099

KEYWORDS

African literature; reading contract; reader type; text; paratext.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Literatura africana; contrato de lectura; tipo de lector; texto; paratexto.

ELENA CUASANTE

e-mail: elena.cuasante@uca.es

# The African autobiographical literature written by women: reading contracts

## La literatura autobiográfica africana escrita por mujeres: contratos de lectura

ELENA CUASANTE

*Universidad de Cádiz*

### ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the idea that the study of literary genres needs to take into consideration not only the formal features of the text but also the different contractual modalities which might appear in their reception. In other words, a text is only part of a specific writing genre when it is recognized as such by the addressee, operation which, although entailing certain theoretical knowledge, has a pragmatic character. It will be the reader who, individually and relying on all the data at his disposal, will decide the reading process which he finds more appropriate. In this paper we will try to show this process by analysing a corpus of autobiographical texts written by the first generation of African French-speaking female writers, a choice which aims to meet at the same time the criteria of cohesion (all the writers share the same social-historical context) and of representation, as we think that our conclusions are transferable to similar corpora, in particular to those which derive from the so called "emerging literatures".

### RESUMEN

El presente trabajo parte de la idea de que el estudio de los géneros literarios exige considerar no solo los rasgos formales del texto, sino también las diferentes modalidades contractuales susceptibles de aparecer en su recepción. Dicho de otro modo, un texto solo se integra en un género de escritura concreto cuando es reconocido como tal por parte del destinatario, operación que, aunque comporta ciertos conocimientos teóricos, es de carácter pragmático. El lector será quien, de manera individual, y apoyándose en todos los datos que tiene a su alcance, decida el modo de lectura que le resulta más apropiado. En este trabajo intentaremos ilustrar este proceso analizando un corpus de textos autobiográficos pertenecientes a la primera generación de escritoras africanas de expresión francesa, elección que pretende satisfacer al mismo tiempo los criterios de cohesión (todas las escritoras comparten un mismo contexto socio-histórico) y de representatividad, pues pensamos que nuestras conclusiones son trasladables a otros corpus similares, en particular a los que se derivan de las denominadas "literaturas emergentes".

Cuasante, E. (2014). The African autobiographical literature written by women: reading contracts. *Ocnos*, 12, 117-127. Retrieved from <http://www.revista.uclm.es/index.php/ocnos/article/view/494>

## Introduction

This paper is based on the idea that the study of literary genres demands not only the consideration of the formal characteristics of the text, but also of the different contractual modalities liable to appear upon its reception. In other words, and independent of its intrinsic properties, a text is only considered to be part of a specific literary genre when it has been recognized as such by the addressee, a process which, although entailing certain theoretical knowledge, has a pragmatic character. It will be the reader who, individually and relying on the data at his disposal, will decide which is the most appropriate reading process. In this paper we will try to show this process by analyzing a corpus of autobiographical texts written by the first generation of African French-speaking female writers, a choice which aims to meet at the same time the criteria of cohesion (all the writers share the same social-historical context) and of representations. We think that our conclusions are transferrable to similar corpora, in particular to those that derive from the so-called “emerging literatures”.

Before beginning the analysis, it is necessary to detail some precise points about the adopted perspective. Just as contemporary literary theory has demonstrated, the reader’s perception of the autobiography is hinged upon the affirmation of the shared identity of the book’s author and its character. Said identity is usually established by way of a specific reading proposal, the known autobiographical pact<sup>1</sup>, that can appear at different points in the work or in its organizational material, that is to say, in the book. Here, we distinguish between the text and what Gérard Genette defines as “paratext” or the combination of information that, though it does not form part of the text, surrounds it: the title, the prologue, notes, the author’s note, interviews, etc. (*cf.* Genette, 1987, pp. 7ss.).

To some extent, the location of the pact informs us of the party responsible for it: the editor may only operate in the paratext, while the author can intervene freely (at least in principle) in the text as well as in the paratext. However, as we will see here in this paper, casuistry is extensive and often creates attribution problems. It is not uncommon to find, for example, works in which the editor, be it because of a question of marketing or pure impudence, introduces reading clues in the paratext that contradict those of the author. Similarly, the same work can be associated with contradictory pacts: an autobiographical pact in the book and a fantasy pact in the interview, just to give an example. Moreover, the range of potential locations for the pact often involves a formal diversity: the pact can appear as an explicit declaration inside of the work, but also as an inference derived from the work’s membership in a specific collection (of fiction or non-fiction texts), as some vague reference made in an interview, etc.

Lastly, it is advisable to remember that, as was mentioned above, the diagnosis of the author or editor is not doubtlessly the final term of analysis

1 In the face of the absence of distinctive textual features able to establish the boundary between works of fiction and nonfiction, in 1971 Philippe Lejeune elaborated the concept of the biographical pact: “In the autobiography it is assumed that there exists a shared identity between the author, the narrator and the protagonist. In other words, the “I” refers to the author. Nothing in the text can prove it. The autobiography is a genre based on trust, a “fiduciary” genre, in a manner of speaking. Precisely because of this comes the writer’s concern with the establishment of some sort of “autobiographical pact” at the beginning of the text with excuses, explanations, preliminary information, declarations of intention, all part of a ritual destined to establish a direct communication “En la autobiografía se supone que existe identidad entre autor, narrador y personaje. Es decir, el «yo» remite al autor. Nada en el texto puede probarlo. La autobiografía es un género basado en la confianza, un género... “fiduciario”, por así decirlo. De ahí justamente la preocupación de los escritores por establecer al principio del texto una especie de “pacto autobiográfico”, con excusas, explicaciones, preliminares, declaraciones de intención, todo un ritual destinado a establecer una comunicación directa” (1971: 24). “Dans l’autobiographie, on suppose qu’il y a identité entre l’auteur d’une part,

et le narrateur et le protagoniste d'autre part. C'est-à-dire que le «je» renvoie à l'auteur. Rien dans le texte ne peut le prouver. L'autobiographie est un genre fondé sur la confiance, un genre... «fiduciaire», si l'on peut dire. D'où, d'ailleurs, de la part des autobiographes, le souci de bien établir au début de leur texte une sorte de «pacte autobiographique», avec excuses, explications, préalables, déclaration d'intention, tout un rituel destiné à établir une communication directe". However, as is a defining feature of intimate literature, the pact is necessary but is not sufficient because it may be that the author, going against what he himself (she herself) affirms, does not faithfully tell the events of his (her) life. So a second criterion must be added to that of identity, that of likeness (which we also refer to as the criteria of thematic coincidence), which will ultimately allow us to lean toward a definite diagnosis (*Id.* pp. 26). Just as Lejeune notes in *L'autobiographie en France*, the autobiographical pact is thus a double pact: on the one hand, the I which narrates and plays a leading role in the story and which refers to the actual person who is the author (the identity pact) and on the other hand, the tale itself which correspond to an authentic circumstance (the fidelity pact, which Lejeune refers to later exclusively as "the referential pact").

that will be placed upon the text at its reception. When the time comes to establish the identity between the author and character, the reader resorts to very diverse information, among which and above all, the onomastic coincidence. In sum, the autobiographical pact is simply made up of a proposal that can only reach definite validity when the reader subscribes to it, or in other words, when it is converted into a reading contract. As Philippe Lejeune (*cf.* 1975, pp. 545) pointed out, the autobiography is just as much a form of writing as a form of reading, as it depends on a contractual relationship which varies as a function of historical time and one of the type of reader. In this sense, the relevance of the referential pact can give way to large differences between the common reader and a more informed one, a connoisseur of the compelling correspondence between the author's story and his or her real life.

The chosen corpus reflects with great exactitude many of these particularities. From its birth, which can be dated to the publication of *Ngonda* by Marie-Claire Matip in 1958, women authored African literature has been characterized by its superb dynamism that, since the beginning of the 90s, has permitted the critics to distinguish different generations of writers who possess specific distinctive characteristics. Of all of these generations we have selected the first, whose most salient features will be herein briefly discussed.

The first of those features is that, for first generation female African authors, writing is an accidental and occasional occupation. There does not exist between these women, at least in principle, an explicit and premeditated desire to create a text that expresses an artistic vision to the world, and much less to create one that might establish their place in the literary panorama. In fact, the majority are authors of just one work, and all hold a main job in order to economically sustain themselves; in order to find the first professional female African writers, one must look to the second generation. Now, from within a purely literary point of view, there exist at least three characteristics which contain important elements that coincide with the writing of the representatives of the first generation, namely: first person narration, which invariably situates the untold story in an autobiographical space; the construction of prototypical feminine stereotypes (the traditional woman, the woman victim, and the emancipated woman) and, finally, the noted theme, that revolves around questions related to the feminine condition, lodged between tradition and modernism.

Of the fifteen works gathered from the first generation of female African authors, at least six would be, at first glance, works of non-fiction. In chronological order, they are:

(1958) *Ngonda*, by Marie-Claire Matip

(1975) *De Tilène au Plateau. Un enfance dakaroise*, by Nafissatou Diallo

(1975) *Femme d'Afrique. La vie d'Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même*, by Aoua Kéita<sup>2</sup>

(1976) *Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya. Jeunes filles à Abidjan*, by Simone Kaya

(1983) *Le baobab fou*, by Ken Bugul

(1983) *Un impossible amour. Une ivoirienne raconte...*, by Akissi Kouadio

## Reading Contracts

Below we will analyze the possible reading contracts that can be drawn from these works by way of the two criterions that we feel are most critical, specifically the location of the autobiographical pact and the onomastic relationship established between the author and the character. For this, we will use these four possibilities: Name of character = Name of author; Name of character = 0; Name of character = y ≠ Name of author; Name of character ≠ Name of author.

If we ignore a small biography by the author situated in the front of the book, then the first work on our list, *Ngonda* by Marie-Claire Matip, does not offer the reader any pact which might help guide him or her in his or her reading. The name criterion, which the reader will come to promptly, also causes a transient confusion. The appellation “Ngonda”, which, as is to be expected, is designated to the protagonist of the story, is not actually a proper name (which certainly would have facilitated the reader’s prognosis), but instead is a reference to a stage of life. Here it is as it appears on the first page of the book:

«Hingonda!» chilló mi abuela. Lo que quería decir que el bebé que acababa de nacer y que ella entregaba a la parturienta era una niña. Mi primer nombre fue «Ngonda», que en nuestra lengua significa: niñita. Es un sobrenombre que se les da a todas las niñas pequeñas. (Matip, 1958, p. 4)<sup>3</sup>

The true identity of the person hidden behind the epithet will not be revealed until the story has significantly advanced, on page 36 of the 47 total pages of the book. Only then will the protagonist be identified as Marie-Claire, a reference to the name of the author, which is therefore an unmistakable sign that the story is non-fiction. This late revelation of the protagonist’s identity has immediate repercussions on the reception of the text. In fact, there are many critics, such as Jaccopard and Volet (1992, pp. 17) that take the appellation to be a proper name, thus negating the existence of an explicit pact.

*De Tilène au Plateau. Un enfance dakaraise*, by Nafissatou Diallo is similarly presented to the reader without any type of generic label, as on the book’s cover there only appears a title and the name and photograph of the author. However, this last detail seems to be extremely relevant: the appearance of the photograph of the author on the book cover could implicitly and significantly determine the literary genre of the work, mainly because it is especially frequent in non-fiction texts. This type of detail is called a “visual autobiographical pact”<sup>4</sup> which, in the specific case of *De Tilène au Plateau*, is corroborated by a clear autobiographical pact in the prologue:

2 Although this work forms part of the first women-authored texts published in Africa, we do not use it in our analysis because it does not present any peculiarity worth studying. It is made up of memoirs, which clearly and evidently adhere to the characteristics of the genre.

3 «Hingonda!» s’écrit ma grand-mère. Elle voulait dire que l’enfant qui venait de naître et qu’elle tendait à l’accouchée était une fille. Mon premier nom fut «Ngonda», ce qui dans notre langage signifie: fillette. C’est un surnom que l’on donne à toutes les petites filles”. Las traducciones que aparecen en este trabajo de las fuentes escritas en francés son nuestras.

4 Within the first generation works, this method is used in *Ngonda*, *De Tilène au Plateau* and *Femme d’Afrique. La vie d’Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même*. Apart from our collection, it can be seen in works such as *Collier de cheville* by Adja Ndeye Boury Ndiaye, *Noces d’absence* by Ndine Bari, *Kesso, princesse peuhle* by Kesso Barry, *De vous à moi* by Mariama Ndoye, etc.

No soy ninguna heroína de novela sino una mujer sencilla de este país: una madre de familia y una profesional (matrona y puericultora) a quien las labores domesticas y profesionales dejan poco espacio para el ocio. [...] Hace unas pocas semanas he empezado a escribir. ¿Sobre qué podría escribir una mujer que no posee ni una gran imaginación ni una técnica particular? Está claro, sobre sí misma. Aquí está mi infancia y mi juventud tal y como las recuerdo. En una generación Senegal ha cambiado. Quizá valga la pena recordar a los que vienen lo que fuimos. (Diallo, 1975/97, p. 10)<sup>5</sup>

Logically, the reader expects that this initial pact will correspond to a full onomastic accord between the author and the protagonist. But far from being the case, the reader is surprised that the main character remains completely anonymous until well into the story and, when her name is finally mentioned, it is revealed to have a similar but not an identical onomastic formula. On page 27 the reader learns, in an indirect way, that the protagonist responds to the name Safi and that name, though on few occasions (five in total), is the one that appears throughout almost the entire account.<sup>6</sup> And can we talk about a total coincidence? Our doubt grows when, on page 35, we read in a footnote that some of the proper names in the account have been changed. Although that reinforces the initial autobiographical pact, as it is usually in non-fiction texts that the identity of the characters is hidden, this new information forces the reader to ask himself (herself) if said modification of proper names affects the protagonist, and, if it does, the question of the name designation is at the very least, relevant. As a matter of fact, the reader might even suspect that the person responsible for the note is the editor, and that the techniques used by the author to hide the identity of her characters are very different: among them is the use of the first letter of a name, followed by suspension points - “Señora X...” (*Id.*, pp. 80), “Señora M...” (*Id.*, pp. 83) - and the use of pronouns to refer to characters, as is the case of the protagonist’s first love, whom she first refers to with the personal pronoun “He” (*Id.*, pp. 87; pp. 93; pp. 99; pp. 100) and later, returning to the first system, as “T...” (*Id.*, pp. 101; pp. 106). Given that we do not possess any paratextual information to clear up such doubts<sup>7</sup>, we will have to conclude that this is a case of partial onomastic coincidence, which, thanks to the significance of the autobiographical pact, does not affect the text’s factual nature.

As in the previous cases, *Les danseuses d’Impé-Eya. Jeunes filles à Abidjan* by Simone Kaya does not have a rhematic title.<sup>8</sup> As such, the only form of pact that can be found is the one established by renowned writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane, author of the work’s emotional prologue, which states:

Lo que capta y mantiene el interés de *Danseuses...*, es la visión que se nos da del paisaje africano, sus hombres, su naturaleza, su historia; a través de la mirada y de la sensibilidad de una africana perteneciente a una de esas generaciones a caballo entre la época colonial y las Independencias. [...] Simone Kaya se cuenta al mismo tiempo que cuenta la historia. (Kaya, 1976, pp. 10-11)<sup>9</sup>

5 “Je ne suis pas une héroïne de roman mais une femme toute simple de ce pays: une mère de famille et une professionnelle (sage-femme et puéricultrice) à qui sa maison et son métier laissent peu de loisir. [...] Depuis quelques semaines, je me suis mise à écrire. Sur quoi écrirait une femme qui ne prétend ni à une imagination débordante ni à un talent d’écrire singulier? Sur elle-même, bien sûr. Voici donc mon enfance et ma jeunesse telles que je me les rappelle. Le Sénégal a changé en une génération. Peut-être valait-il la peine de rappeler aux nouvelles poussées ce que nous fûmes”.

6 Also, twenty pages before the final page, Safi’s name changes, though only momentarily, to Saifatou.

7 Quite on the contrary, as indicated by Ormerod and Volet (1994, pp. 63), the true name of the author is Aïssatou, which would invalidate everything that has been analyzed here. Given that the information offered by the rest of the African critics who commented on this work does not seem to confirm this affirmation, we have opted not to consider it in our study. Thus, for us, as for the majority of critics, the name of the author is that of Nafissatou.

8 Here we have picked up the adjective that served Genette to designate titles which make reference not to the theme, but to the genre (*cf.* 1987, pp. 76).

Although a critical review may consider this criterion to be inconclusive, in this specific case the pact's relevance is considerable, and not only because of the author's prestige, but also because of the fact that it appears in the preface of the first edition with the approval of the book's author (*cf.* Coulibaly, 2004). Also, there exists the particularity that the aforementioned preface includes a small biography of the author that confirms without a doubt the parallelism between the events of the story and the life of the author. And those will be the only way that the reader can formulate his reading process, since in the 127 pages that make up the book, the identity of the "I" telling the story is never revealed. *Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya* is the only work in our corpus in which there is complete anonymity of the main character.

*Le baobab fou*, by Ken Bugul, contains some curious peculiarities. At his (her) first approach to the book, the reader (or, at least, the inexperienced reader) finds that he (she) is missing any type of clue to help guide in his (her) interpretation: no rhematic title, no prologue, no introductory note. There is just, in very small lettering on the spine of the book, the words: "African Lives". This piece of information, which very well may go unnoticed, will be expanded upon on the last page of the book, where there appears the following note: "The African Lives collection is only open to true stories about the authors and the only imaginary information that they might contain is the result of elaborations by the author to add substance to cultural baggage. ("La colección Vidas de África está abierta únicamente a relatos reales de los autores y lo único imaginario que puede contener es el resultado de una elaboración del autor como sustancia de su bagaje cultural")<sup>10</sup> (Ken Bugul, 1983/96, pp. 183). Implicit in the character of the collection, and therefore proposed by the publisher, the autobiographical pact was confirmed by the author in an interview with Bernard Magnier: "I don't know how to tell stories, my imagination is always the result of events that have been truly lived, heard, tested, felt" ("Yo no sé contar historias, mi imaginación es siempre el resultado de los acontecimientos realmente vividos, oídos, probados, palpados") (1985, pp. 154)<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, and as noted at the beginning, the writers themselves sometimes offer contradictory information. In a more recent interview with Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, Ken Bugul seems to refine his opinion:

Los críticos y periodistas han sobrevalorado la dimensión autobiográfica. Bueno, digamos que yo soy un poco responsable de ello. Los periodistas me han preguntado si todo lo que había escrito en *Le baobab fou* era verdad. Yo les respondí: una parte importante es verdad, otra está novelada. Lo que es cierto es que perdí mi virginidad y que fumé marihuana. (2002, p. 105)<sup>12</sup>

*Le baobab fou* is, in addition, a work written under a pseudonym. Behind Ken Bugul hides Mariétou Mbaye Bileoma, who, obligated by her publishing house to camouflage her identity<sup>13</sup>, chose for herself an alias charged with significance:

9 "Ce qui attire et retient l'intérêt dans la lecture des *Danseuses*..., c'est la vision qui nous est donnée du paysage africain, ses hommes, sa nature, son histoire; à travers le regard et la sensibilité d'une Africaine appartenant à une de ces générations en position charnière entre l'ère coloniale et l'ère des États indépendants. [...] Simone Kaya se raconte donc et par la même occasion nous raconte".

10 "La collection Vies d'Afrique est ouverte seulement au récit du vécu des êtres et ne peut comporter d'imaginaire que celui qu'aura élaboré l'auteur comme substance de son bagage culturel".

11 "Je ne sais pas raconter des histoires, mon imaginaire part toujours de choses vécues, vraies, vues, entendues, goûtées, touchées".

12 "Les critiques, les journalistes l'ont un peu montée en épingle [la dimension autobiographique]. Bon, disons que je suis un peu responsable de cela. Les journalistes m'ont demandé si tout ce que j'avais écrit dans *Le baobab fou* était vrai. Je leur ai répondu: une grande partie est vraie, une autre est romancée. Ce qui est sûr c'est que j'ai perdu ma virginité, fumé de la marijuana, etc.". Curiously, Ken Bugul partly blames the criticism when it is the criticism that most insistently speaks not of the autobiography, but of the novel.

13 According to some critics, such as Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana (2000, pp. 116), the choice of this alias originates from a possible superstition held by the author. Between 1981 and 1982, the year of the publication of the work, two of the most charismatic women of the Senegalese literary panorama passed away: Mariama Bâ and Nafissatou Diallo. The superstition that the death of both women had been caused by the evil eye (triggered by envy and the social rejection of their work) could have partly influenced Mariétou Mbaye Bileoma to choose a protective pseudonym. Nevertheless, the author has denied those rumors on repeated occasions and has pointed to the publishing house as the only entity responsible for the contrivance.

14 "En wolof Ken Bugul veut dire «personne n'en veut». Lorsqu'une femme, qui a eu beaucoup d'enfants morts-nés, a un nouvel enfant, elle l'appelle Ken Bugul, pour le faire échapper à ce sort-là. Ce sont des noms symboliques que l'on donne ici, en Afrique. Si l'on dit «personne n'en veut», Dieu lui-même n'en voudra pas donc il ne le tuera pas; les esprits n'en voudront pas donc ils ne le voleront pas; les humains n'en voudront pas donc ils ne lui feront pas de mal. Et ceci permettra à l'enfant de vivre". (Cfr., en este mismo sentido, D'Almeida 1994, p. 25).

15 "Le pacte [autobiographique] si bien signé a cependant un

En wolof Ken Bugul significa « aquel que nadie quiere ». Cuando una mujer que ha perdido muchos bebés tiene un hijo, le llama Ken Bugul para evitarle así este destino. Son nombres simbólicos que damos aquí, en África. Si se le pone el nombre de "aquel que nadie quiere" Dios tampoco le querrá y no le matará, los espíritus no le querrán y no lo robarán, los humanos no le querrán y no le harán ningún mal. Todo esto permitirá vivir al niño. (Magnier, 1985, p. 153)<sup>14</sup>

In any case, and as Lejeune stated in "The Autobiographical Pact", the pseudonym is no more than a name that differs from that of her married name, which the author uses to publish her works (in other words, that which is known as a pen name) and which, therefore, does not alter the question of the author's identity (cf. Lejeune, 1975, pp. 24). As long as the name on the cover, pseudonym or not, refers to the author and coincides with the protagonist, there is complete onomastic coincidence. Still, it should be acknowledged that, as noted by Jaccocard and Volet, this information may not be within the grasp of all readers, and therefore may radically change the reading process of the particular work:

El pacto claramente propuesto posee sin embargo un codicilo capaz de acabar con su validez: Ken Bugul es tan solo el pseudónimo de una senegalesa llamada Mariétou Mbaye. Sin esta información, el lector puede estar tentado de cerrar su bolígrafo sin llegar a firmar el pacto. Si ken Bugul no es el nombre de un escritor real el pacto parece claramente roto (1992, p. 19)<sup>15</sup>.

In *Le baobab fou*, in addition to being apparent in the text (the subheading of the first section of the book on page 8 reads "Ken's Pre-history ("Pre-historia de Ken") even though it will not be until page 33 when, in the section named "Ken's History ("Historia de Ken"), the author's complete name appears), the shared identity of the author and the protagonist is confirmed by the paratext. When asked about her relationship to the protagonist, Mariétou responded: "(...) I think that every author has a kinship with his or her main character. In this particular case, the author and the protagonist are one ("[...] creo que todo autor tiene un parentesco con su personaje. En este caso en concreto, autor y personaje son uno sólo" (Magnier, 1985, pp. 154)<sup>16</sup>. Thus we can conclude that the main character of the work's factual nature is doubly confirmed.

This heterogeneous group of reading contracts and onomastic variables is completed, at last, with *Un impossible amour. Une ivoirienne raconte...* by Akissi Kouadio. As has become the norm, we will find no rhematic title on the cover, and the only reference we can count on is the editor's commentary in the initial section of the text.

Las páginas que siguen son el fruto de catorce entrevistas grabadas con Akissi Kouadio. Marie Trudel, socióloga quebequesa, se asoció rápidamente a nosotras. Claro está que he contribuido a la construcción de esta obra pero no habría visto la luz sin la maravillosa complicidad que se estableció rápidamente entre Akissi y Marie y que ha permanecido existiendo. El papel de Marie ha sido determinante. Este libro Akissi lo

deseaba con todas sus fuerzas desde hacía tiempo: “será la forma, decía ella, de librarme de mi pasado”. Ella quería también compartir con sus hermanas africanas un pasado a veces doloroso y a menudo trágico. (Kouadio, 1983, p. 3)<sup>17</sup>

The autobiographical pact is reinforced in a note at the foot of the page that, as in *De Tilène au Plateau*, informs the reader of the modification of some proper names, in this case a change which affects the protagonist and the author as well: Akissi Kouadio is a literary pseudonym. We do not know the true identity of the person hiding behind the pen name, but, as with Ken Bugul, the shared identity is established to the extent that both the author and the protagonist respond to just one name.

Another very different question is that of the genuine author of the work. The introductory note leaves this subject open: we know that *Un impossible amour* is the result of some recordings in the care of the editor, but we do not know if it was the author herself who later converted those recordings into a written document. In this way, the Akissi Kouadio case presents many similarities to one of the first works in the history of African literature written in French: *Force-Bonté* by Bakary Diallo. Published in 1926, this autobiographical text was the combined result of the work of the “author”, Lucie Cousturier, and the editor, Jean-Richard Bloch. As noted by Bernard Mouralis, in the prologue of the book (written by Bloch) there exists a grave contradiction: Bloch attributes the work’s authorship to Bakary Diallo, but just after he provokes doubt in the reader by with his commentary about Diallo’s limited knowledge of the French language, which has caused many critics to bring into question the author of the work (*cf.* Mouralis, 1997, pp. 109-110). The same criticism can be applied to Akissi Kouadio, who, according to the little information we possess, barely attended school (*cf.* Ormerod et Volet, 1994, pp. 87). In any case, even if it is an autobiography by proxy, this does not influence the final diagnosis of the reader, who unhesitatingly opts for a factual interpretation of the text<sup>18</sup>.

## Conclusion

If, by way of recapitulation, we now combine the two aspects that have been analyzed (the location of the pact and the onomastic coincidence between the author and the main character), we obtain the following result:

codicille susceptible d’en effacer la teneur: Ken Bugul n’est que le pseudonyme d’une Sénégalaise du nom de Mariétou Mbaye. Fort de ce renseignement, le lecteur est tenté de remettre le capuchon sur son stylo sans ratifier le pacte. Si Ken Bugul n’est pas le nom d’un auteur bien réel, le pacte semble bel et bien rompu”.

16 “ [...] je crois que tout auteur a une parenté avec son personnage Dans ce cas précis, l’auteur et le personnage ne font qu’un”. Mariétou Mbaye Bileoma would conserve the literary pseudonym Ken Bugul in all her posterior productions. In spite of the important autobiographical charge of all of her works, complete onomastic coincidence is never given. In *Cendres et braises* (1994), the author’s second book, there is partial onomastic coincidence: the similarity between the name of the protagonist (Marie Ndiaga Mbaye) and the author’s real name is clearly obvious.

17 “Les pages qu’on va lire sont le fruit de quatorze entretiens que j’ai eus au magnétophone avec Akissi Kouadio. Marie Trudel, sociologue québécoise, s’est rapidement associée à nous. J’ai certes contribué à la construction de cet ouvrage, mais il n’aurait pas vu le jour sans la merveilleuse complicité qui s’est vite établie entre Akissi et Marie et qui ne s’est jamais démentie. Le rôle de Marie a été déterminant. Ce livre, Akissi le souhaitait passionnément et depuis longtemps. “Ce



Name of Character →	≠ name of author.	= 0	= y ≠ name of author	= name of author
<b>Location of Autobiographical Pact ↓</b>				
<b>Text</b>				
<b>Paratext</b>		Simone Kaya: <i>Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya. Jeunes filles à Abidjan.</i> (1976)	Nafissatou Diallo: <i>De Tilène au Plateau. Un enfance dakaroise.</i> (1975)	Akissi Kouadio: <i>Un impossible amour. Une ivoirienne raconte...</i> , (1983)  Ken Bugul: <i>Le baobab fou.</i> (1983)
<b>Missing Pact</b>				Marie-Claire Matip: <i>Ngonda.</i> (1958)

The main advantage of this graphic representation is its clarity, which allows for the extraction of immediate conclusions about the reading contracts that the first generation African female authors proposed in their various works.

In the first place, note the fact that the autobiographical pact, with the exception of the *Ngonda* case (in which the pact is absent), is invariably found in the paratext. To this it can be added that, of these four cases, there is only one (*De Tilène au Plateau*) in which the said pact is directly taken on by the author; in the other works we read declarations by editors and critics, whose veracity is not always so easily established.

So opens an indeterminate space that is confirmed by the scope of the protagonist's nomination. Of the five analyzed texts, only three respect total onomastic coincidence between the author and the main character (*Ngonda*, *Le baobab fou*, *Un impossible amour*); the other two, *De Tilène au Plateau* and *Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya*, constitute, respectively, one case of partial identity (name of character = y ≠ name of author) and one case of total anonymity (name of character = 0), a situation which is compounded by the fact that the task of identifying the character cannot be done immediately. Further, the cases of total onomastic coincidence only reveal themselves as such belatedly, as if the authors were not in a rush to unveil the identity of the "I" telling the story, remaining anonymous for a fairly long time. Remember, for example, the case of *Ngonda*, in which the name of the narrator protagonist is not revealed until page 36 of the 46 total pages in the text. In *Le baobab fou* and *Un impossible amour*, the name of the protagonists appear relatively early on, but in the form of a literary pseudonym which disorients the reader by holding back the real identity of the author.

Thus we can affirm that first generation African female writers mainly tend to establish hybrid reading proposals. On the one hand, they propose, or rather they implicitly accept, an autobiographical reading pact, while on the other hand they hide, modify, or delay the work of creating a shared identity

serait, disait-elle, un moyen de me libérer de mon passé...". Elle a voulu aussi partager avec ses jeunes sœurs africaines un passé souvent douloureux et parfois tragique".

18 Effectively, as is noted by Lejeune in "L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas", the collaboration of a third party in the writing of an autobiography does not usually affect, even if it is explicit, the type of contract proposed in the work (cf. 1980, pp. 246).

between the author and the protagonist. The contrast between the accuracy of the narrated story and the imprecision in the narrator's voice leads us to believe that the authors want to tell us a real, personal experience, but do not want to fully reveal their relation to that experience.

In our opinion, this fact should be interpreted from the social reality in which the act of writing was written. For first generation female African writers, the appropriation of the published word was in itself a courageous act, and even more so when we note that their intention was often to expose a situation of marginalization and oppression. Under these circumstances, a text did not necessarily have to be made up of an open attack against the system to be considered subversive, rather, the complaint operated on a simple testament of reality. Considering this, it is not surprising that the authors chiefly tended to act with relative discretion, avoiding reading processes that would leave clear evidence of the truth of what was told.

Finally, the hypothesis that we defend here is corroborated by the parallel evolution of the reading processes of the works from this period and their degree of commitment to a critique of reality. Between 1958, the date of the first of the works from our collection, and 1976 the intended reading process is primarily factual, the authors are not afraid to be recognized as such since they are practicing a type of intimate writing that is uncritical of the society in which they participate. It is after 1975 when we begin to notice a growing tendency toward riskier views and criticism of the situation in which the African woman finds herself<sup>19</sup>: without trying to make direct complaints, these works present a much less idyllic feminine universe than that presented by their predecessors, a tendency which squarely coincides with a total adherence to the narrative genre, a genre which, by giving the responsibility of telling the story to a fictitious entity, allows for the transmission of riskier content without directly implicating the author<sup>20</sup>. This evolution culminates in 1983 with *Le baobab fou* by Ken Bugul, where for the first time there appears simultaneously an evident autobiographical pact and a direct complaint about the condition of the woman in African society.

## References

- Coulibaly, B. (2004). Simone Kaya, pionnière des Lettres ivoiriennes. Le roman d'une autre «Aventure ambiguë», en *Les rendez-vous de l'Afrique sur internet*. Retrieved from [http://www.Africatime.com/ci/popup.asp?no\\_nouvelle=119673](http://www.Africatime.com/ci/popup.asp?no_nouvelle=119673)
- Brodziak, S. (2004). Motifs autobiographiques et interculturalité dans deux romans sénégalais: *Une si longue lettre* de Mariama Bâ et *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* de Ken Bugul. En Bererhi, A. (coord.), *L'autobiographie en situation d'interculturalité* (pp. 373-388.). Blida: Éditions du Tell,

19 As is well known, the United Nations declared 1975 the International Year of the Woman.

20 Cf. Brodziak, 2004, pp. 384-387.

- D'Almeida, I. A. (1994). *Francophone African Women Writers. Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Diallo, N. (1975). *De Tilène au Plateau. Une enfance dakaroise*. Dakar: NEA, (1997).
- Genette, G. (1987). *Seuils*. Paris: Seuil.
- Herzberber-Fofana, P. (2000). *Littérature féminine francophone d'Afrique noire*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Jacomard, H. & Volet, J.M. (1992). Pacte autobiographique et écrivaines francophones d'Afrique noire. *Présence Francophone*, 41, 9-26.
- Jeune Afrique Magazine*. (1984). n° 1206, 72.
- Kaya, S. (1976). *Les danseuses d'Impé-Eya. Jeunes filles à Abidjan*. Abidjan: INADES.
- Kéita, A. (1975). *Femme d'Afrique. La vie d'Aoua Kéita racontée par elle-même*. Paris: Présence Africaine..
- Ken Bugul. (1983). *Le baobab fou*. Dakar: NEA.
- Kouadio, A. (1983). *Un impossible amour, une ivoirienne raconte....* Abidjan: INADES.
- Lejeune, Ph. (1975). Le pacte autobiographique. En *Le Pacte autobiographique* (pp. 13-45). Paris: Seuil.
- Lejeune, Ph. (1980). L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas. En *Je est un autre. L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias* (pp. 229-316). Paris: Seuil.
- Magnier, B. (1985). Ken Bugul ou l'écriture thérapeutique. *Notre Librairie*, 81, 151-155.
- Matip, M.-C. (1958). *Ngonda*. Douala, Librairie au Messager : Bibliothèque du jeune Africain.
- Mongo-Mboussa, B. (2002). La passion de la liberté. Entretien avec Ken Bugul. *Notre Librairie*, 142, 104-106.
- Mouralis, B. (1997). Autobiographies et récits de vie dans la littérature africaine. De Bakary Diallo à Mudimbe. *Cahiers de littérature orale*, 42, 105-133.
- Ormedod, B. et Volet, J.M. (1994). *Romancières africaines d'expression française. Le Sud du Sahara*. Paris: L'Harmattan.