

Recollections of Migration: Testimonies and Dialogues. A Reading of West African Migrants' Life-stories Published in France (1970s-2000s)

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The aim of this paper is to provide a critical reading of life-stories written by or with immigrants from West Africa in France and published since the 1970s, of which I will offer a tentative survey. The analysis of key print texts will focus on the modes of writing and narrative strategies, detailing the various authoritative forms of the texts, often written by or with a researcher or journalist. Though the common claim of these texts is to provide direct access to migrants' voices, collaboration is integral to these processes, as will be apparent through the analysis of key elements such as the signature, the presentation, and the editing work acknowledged in accompanying texts. I will discuss these distinct ways of "writing together".

Recent collections print and online seem to testify to a turn toward a more documentary approach. At the same time, telling one's life has become part of the administrative process of being entitled rights, as a refugee or even as legal migrant: how then can the biography depart from the justificatory stance associated with such processes? Are current forms of narration closer to modes of speaking rooted in the migrants' background or migratory experience?

A last set of questions will consist in locating material traces such as letters by migrants in the texts, and questioning the way the published texts rely on or ignore these documents. I will explore the hypothesis that these texts could provide alternative narratives, and link this perspective with my current ethnographic research with migrants from Mali in France.

Though dealing with a specific emigration in a national space, this paper will try to open up lines of comparative discussions with other migrations and national settings in Europe.