

Remembering Beyond Africanity: Displaying Postcolonial Identities in “African” and “European” Childhood Accounts

Germain Nyada*

Abstract

Based on two works in French and two others in German, this paper shows how memory-related practices in childhood accounts display postcolonial identities. The aim is to question the “Africanity” of African-authored literary autobiographies and to elaborate cross-cultural and cross-historical aspects of literary autobiographies of the 20th and 21st centuries by means of comparative analysis. This is done on the basis of the analysis of narrative techniques and properties that postcolonial theory has defined as characteristic of “African” literature, but which I elaborate in equal measure in the autobiographies treated from Africa and Europe. The literary narrative techniques analyzed are considered postcolonial due to their cross-cultural status. The emphasis starts from the debate on the cultural characteristics of African and European works. The discussion is on the singularity of autobiographical writing in Africa where it developed after its emergence in Europe. It is therefore a question of assessing this assumption in the light of the selected works and of proving that the narrative and writing techniques used are by no means to be regarded as exclusivities of literary texts by authors of African origin. Because of their cross-border and cross-linguistic dimension, *L’Enfant noir* (Guinea), *La Marseillaise de mon enfance* (Cameroon), *Die gerettete Zunge* (Austria) and *Steppenrutenpflanze* (Switzerland)¹ can be associated with postcolonial identity constructions. Other postcolonial textual features discussed in this paper are intertextuality, orality and the representative function of the narrator.

* Germain Nyada, University of Yaounde I. Contact: germain.nyada@ymail.com

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¹ The selected works are: Laye Camara (2006 [1953]): *L’Enfant noir*. Paris: Plon. (*L’Enfant*); Jean-Martin Tchaptchet (2004): *La Marseillaise de mon enfance*. Paris: L’Harmattan. (*La Marseillaise*); Elias Canetti (2005 [1977]): *Die gerettete Zunge. Geschichte einer Jugend*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer. (*Zunge*) und Yusuf Yeşilöz (2000): *Steppenrutenpflanze. Eine kurdische Kindheit*, Zürich: Rotpunkt. (*Steppenrutenpflanze*).

Introduction

I perceive intertextuality, orality and the representative function of the narrator as common motifs or themes in postcolonial writings. They are “postcolonial” due to their frequent occurrence in works from different languages, epochs and settings. Therefore, they are regarded as the “cutting surface” between languages and cultures (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 17). The postcolonial components examined are also dialogue-oriented. In my view, dialogue and exchange forms of all kinds are prerequisites of postcolonial literature. Postcolonial thinking is compatible with the dialogue of cultures even if the question of the “*conditions et des modalités de ces dialogues interculturels*”² (Pageaux 2004: 278) should be raised at the same time. The simultaneous or alternating occurrence of different “voices” within a text excludes the possibility of a hierarchical organization center (Derrida 1967: 409) because this restores balance among the voices.

The selected childhood accounts in this article are Elias Canetti’s *Die gerettete Zunge* (1977), Laye Camara’s *L’Enfant noir* (1953), Jean-Martin Tchaptchet’s *La Marseillaise de mon enfance* (2004) and Yusuf Yeşilöz’ *Steppenrutenpflanze* (2000). The four works share similar features. They were originally published far away from the authors’ place of birth. Each of them thematizes the childhood of the narrator in the homeland. The four works equally stage this age in the field of tension between different cultures and areas. The confrontation of Francophone works from Africa with German-language childhood accounts from Europe also aims at answering the question whether there are no equivalents to postcolonial constellations in Europe. The starting point is that inner-European migrations show a literary situation that could be close to the postcolonial literatures of Africa. In the selected works, the plural identity of each narrator plays a significant role. Migration and/or (post-)colonialism shape each of the accounts. Moreover, the choice of a language other than the narrator’s first language reflects an intersecting and overlapping of different cultural elements.

La Marseillaise de mon enfance tells of events and situations that introduce the reader to the multicultural and social environment of a Cameroonian student in the colonial era. The scene of the staged childhood is the part of Cameroon that was under French administration in the 1930s and 1940s. The reader easily understands the oblique reference in the title of the book to the encounter of different cultural values when the childhood of a Cameroonian is linked to the French national anthem. It is also about France’s national day on July 14, the end of World War II, in short, French sites of memory, both of which were also celebrated in Cameroon and in particular in the then village of Bangangté. Other components of French colonial culture are incorporated and adapted to local customs. The narrator depicts his childhood in this multicultural framework. In doing so, he tries to show how that historical context determined his way of thinking and acting.

² [“conditions and modalities of these intercultural dialogues”], My translations.

In *Die gerettete Zunge*, circumstances faced by the experiencing self in different cultural areas are also relevant. The narrator tells the reader how he experienced his first manifestation of “mass” in Rustchuk, his birthplace in Bulgaria. More precisely, it is about early childhood in a large family and in an oriental culture. How different languages formed the narrator is also of key importance in this work. The childhood episodes appear alternately in many languages and in different areas, namely Manchester, Vienna, and Zurich. The memories of this past turn out to be a mixture of cultural values from different origins. Canetti also succeeds in giving the reader an insight into the multicultural environment of the experiencing I. In addition, the narrator depicts several people such as his playmates, classmates, domestic workers, schoolteachers, who, like the scenes portray, all symbolize a diversity of cultures. Canetti’s childhood account is therefore a reflection of the narrator on his past. Implicitly, he tells the reader how different cultural values have shaped his personality.

L'Enfant noir is an account of the first years of Laye Camara’s life. This period begins early in the father’s workshop in a small town in Guinea (Conakry) and ends with the departure of the narrator to France. His home environment is like that of Tchaptchet. In fact, at least three different cultural values clash within it: local customs, Islam and the French colonial culture. Using associations of memories, Camara provides the reader with an overview of the multicultural living conditions of a Guinean child in the colonial era. The narrator idealizes these fragments of the Guinean past. In addition to aesthetic pleasure, the author wants to demonstrate the essence of a supposedly ‘African’ culture, as was fashionable by the “*négritude*” movement at the time; furthermore, he tries to prove the apology and enriching nature of his encounter with the colonial school. Without being their *conditio sine qua non*, the different, and sometimes opposite positions in this diversity of perspectives play a representative role. The critic Sonia Lee traces the foundations of *L'Enfant noir* to the “*négritude*” movement. She explains that the years—1947 to 1956—Camara spent in France were very creative and stimulating for his literary production. Camara’s childhood account appeared in a context in which other authors of Afro-Caribbean origin were internationally recognized for their literary skills and qualities. *L'Enfant noir* nevertheless remains a pioneering work as an epic or autobiographical text and especially because of its artistic value in African Francophone literature. By then, Africa’s best Francophone literary production had been in the field of poetry (Lee 1984: 5). The “*négritude*” movement was a response to Western cultural influences. It insisted on supposedly authentic African and Caribbean cultural values. However, this also revealed their dependency on those influences. Migration, ruptures and other globalization-dependent processes of fragmentation cannot be applied exclusively to African authors. The debate about cultural diversity and global hybridization processes brings *Steppenrutenpflanze* in line with other contemporary writings. In this childhood account, the protagonist deals with his experiences as a child in a Kurdish village

in Turkey. Two sociocultural systems are in conflict there: the Kurdish and the Turkish; the latter constantly tries to erase the Kurdish. The tradition of storytelling plays a major role in this area. However, fairy tales and stories that are crucial to the living conditions of the small Kurdish family are suddenly affected by two events: the death of the grandmother, who loved to tell stories, and the arrival of Turkish television and its integration into family life. In addition to the exciting cultural aspects that result from the village life, the reader also encounters experiences of the narrator in a Turkish school. As in *Die gerettete Zunge*, *L'Enfant noir* and *La Marseillaise de mon enfance*, *Steppenrutenpflanze* is about the personal history of the narrator. This factor is one of those contents I consider postcolonial characteristics in childhood accounts. Most Kurdish authors live in exile or in migration. Autobiographical writings play a crucial role in their literary writings. These works have resonated throughout the Kurdish political and cultural landscape.

“Defending and even constructing national identity far from the homeland is one of the most important motives for the writing of autobiographies by Kurds. Apart from personal motives, they write in order to save and develop their national and cultural identity.” (Ahmadzadeh 2003: 2)

Therefore, the attempt to construct a national identity in a foreign country cannot be regarded as a special feature of autobiographers of African origin. Beyond the aforementioned common points, each of the selected accounts performs a representative function that deserves discussion as well.

On the representative function of the narrating self

In the selected works, the multiculturalism of the places where the socialization of the protagonists happens illustrates the representative function that is attributed to the narrator. Individual forms of memory in autobiographical texts are also multicultural. These memories are inconceivable without the earlier family and school life, and religion of the narrators. They are characterized by an intensive cultural exchange. Starting from the presence of several distinct cultural or ethnic groups at school or in the family of the narrators, I assume that the common orientation of self-centered texts is at the same time a postcolonial feature.

According to Olney (1979), and Alabi (2005), the key features of autobiography in the African context are its political character, and its “culture-specific” orientation towards the family and relatives of the narrator. Following this approach, in an autobiographical text from Africa, the self tells more about his own society and relatives than about himself. Autobiographies by European authors, on the other hand, would be purely individual. Other research pieces wrongly combine the origin of the authors or their birth (place) in Africa with their autobiographical productions (Gusdorf 1956; Manschke 1999).

According to Gusdorf, African autobiographies tend to raise the question of the identity and representativity of the self-reporting on himself. In addition, four

other aspects are also typical for “African autobiography”: headings of generalizing meaning such as “L’Enfant noir”, remarks of a universal nature about life in Africa, footnotes in texts and finally, the trend to go beyond the place of birth in favour of a general view of Africa. Regardless of the origin and original cultures of the authors, however, the selected childhood accounts all have these characteristics.

The selected works illustrate the first years of life of the male experiencing self, and this allows an insight into his family life. Furthermore, the works reveal the relationships of the same child to the various communities addressed. In their narrative form, the attempt to let both the individual and the community have their say at the same time shines through. In addition, through the spiritual revival of his childhood, the narrator tries to symbolically rehabilitate his socializing instances which consist of people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, childhood texts unfold postcolonial identities through some popular ways of thinking and through the attitudes of the epochs and communities that are remembered.

The title of the introductory chapter in *La Marseillaise de mon enfance* exemplifies this representative function: “*Elèves du quartier colonial et du village*”. The narrator is concerned with taking the floor on behalf of those former classmates who have not been able to write about their school days. The reader learns that “[*mon récit*] est un hommage à celles et à ceux, combattants et combattantes anticolonialistes camerounais africains [sic] [...]” (ibid. 11)³. The narrator even mentions the names of those schoolmates. In this sense, the cultural diversity that constitutes the past or the experience is revealing in the memory-related or reconstruction-specific time lapse, and in the integration of collectively present and foreign cultural elements into the process of remembrance. This also shows the common orientation of the childhood accounts under discussion.

With Yeşilöz, the reader also has to deal with a narrator whose memories simultaneously identify and delimit several hybrid (Camara 1990: 210) groups and cultural settings, e.g. Kurds, Turks and Americans. The focus changes in that communities, the experiencing self, his family, relatives and peer groups are at the centre of the memories. On a textual level, the reader has a story marked by cultural encounters: it includes the childhood of the narrator, the story of his family as his original community and a variety of social groups. Referring to the oral culture of his home village, the narrating self explains: “*Die ereignisreichen und lebendigen Abende in und vor den Häusern verschwanden mit einem Schlag. Weder ließen wir uns fortan weder Geschichten erzählen, noch spielten wir Verstecken [...]*” (ibid. 120)⁴

³ “[my story] is a tribute to those African Cameroonian anti-colonial fighters, women and men”]

⁴ “[“The eventful and lively evenings in and in front of the houses disappeared suddenly. From then on, we neither told each other stories, nor played hide-and-seek with each other.”]

The Kurdish narrator is pleading against cultural dominance. His statement is a negative consideration of the masterminds of the Turkish macro-culture which is conveyed by television. Therefore, the narrator speaks on behalf of the Kurdish community. This comes to light for his words show the consequences of a foreign television on the inhabitants of his village. The reader can see his prominent role even more clearly when he recalls the persecution of two Kurdish citizens by Turkish authorities. However, the narrator represents both Kurdish and Turkish culture, insofar as he not only belongs to the two, but also speaks for both. In *Zunge*, *L'Enfant* and *La Marseillaise* these characteristics are also present.

Several works have claimed that "*L'enfant noir* is autophylography [i.e., the life shared by the group]—but it is a variation on the pure African type" (Olney 1979: 59). Characteristic of these investigations is that they equate the supposedly representative function of the narrator in *L'Enfant* with the author's intention. A similar argument is made when Camara is said to have equated the function of the writer in "African society" with that of a traditional historian who mediates the collective memory of the community (Gikandi 1980: 2).

In *Zunge*, the childhood report is linked to peer groups and family. This is expressed through chapter headings. The reader encounters the "*Familienstolz*" in the second chapter. The narrator points to the prosperity of his consumerist relatives, but without directly relating this feeling to his childhood. The lack of a direct reference of the remembered childhood scenes to correlating people is also pronounced in other headings: "*Geburt des Bruders*", "*Das Haus des Türken. Die beiden Großväter*", "*Krankheit der Mutter. Der Herr Dozent*", "*Die guten Jungfern der Villa 'Yalta'. Dr. Wedekind*"⁵. As in the other works, Canetti's childhood memories cannot be separated from the socializing instances of the experiencing self. These also play a decisive role insofar as the life of the child only acquires meaning within these frameworks. The childhood of the self is thus interwoven with side stories. It is cogent to therefore grant the narrator a representative function.

Tchaptchet's and Yeşilöz's childhood texts have titles that allude to an individual childhood from the outset, but this impression vanishes as soon as one is familiarized with the depicted scenes of the past. In *Steppenrutenpflanze*, the reader is confronted with elements of culture. As for general statements about life in "Africa", *La Marseillaise* does not seem to take this aspect into account. The explanations of the narrator about local customs are clearly limited to either the city of Bangangté or to former Cameroonian classmates. The footnotes on certain pages also contain information that does not go beyond the author's country of origin. Statements of this kind are embedded in *Zunge*, especially when the narrator describes facets of the Spanish way of life. On the other hand, Canetti's text contains a glossary in which all non-German words used are provided with explanations. This glossary has the same function as footnotes. In conclusion, the

⁵ ["Birth of the brother", "The house of the Turk. The two grandfathers", "The mother's illness. The Lecturer", "The Good Maidens of the Villa 'Yalta'. Dr. Wedekind"]

characteristics often presented as “purely African” are also available in non-African works. In this sense, they are both cross-border and cross-linguistic and thus postcolonial characteristics.

Because the authors sometimes prefer the childhood perspective in the narrative process, they show a tendency towards a true mimesis of child’s language. Sometimes, they succeed in perfectly imitating the psychological and verbal world of the child. However, it is of course an imitation insofar as the intended reader is the adult. In addition, each author constructs more of the childhood illusion than the past childhood itself. Due to the illusion-promoting effect of the childhood literature, their aesthetic dimension comes more clearly to the fore.

The narrator therefore occasionally withdraws behind the child’s figure. However, this movement is also carried out in the opposite direction. The accounts simultaneously represent the fragmentation of the experiencing and narrating self or the child and the adult. This makes the effect of the rediscovery of childhood on the adult visible. Thus, the reader has a time and identity gap. The fact that the focus is on the two narrative levels demonstrates the attempt to fill or illustrate this gap. Such processes also make an attempt to find the self through another’s eyes and vice versa (Clarke 1995: 53). The ontological search for identity is expanded because the child seeks the individual self in this process and by means of the collective self. Hence the confusion of perspectives.

Intertextuality: Oral and written pretexts

I consider intertextuality one of the postcolonial components. I also relate it to the category of dialogicity (Kristeva 1969; Bakhtin 1979). The term “intertextuality” here is first applied to specific links between individual texts and their hypotexts or pretexts (Aczel 2004: 301), i.e. to those texts that are absorbed and transformed in others; also applied in postcolonial literature, it refers to the fact that all the words that the individual uses when speaking already have a meaning shaped by other people.

Orally oriented presentation methods⁶ are regarded as postcolonial characteristics (Lüsebrink 2004: 9). This is emphasized in the relationship between “writing cultures” and “oral cultures”. Parts of each autobiography under discussion sometimes give the feeling of an oral transmission of childhood episodes. To the extent that every oral narrative situation presupposes communication between narrators and listeners, I consider the oral communication in childhood texts a postcolonial trait because the narrating self does not consider his native language, or values shared by his family to be obvious to the implicit listener.

⁶ In each selected work, the narrating self does not assume cultural elements of his family are obvious to the “listener”. To make them understandable to readers from other cultures and epochs, he provides some childhood episodes with additional explanations. Moreover, words from foreign languages are provided with translations or explanations in the flow of memory.

The reference to the ontological dimension of words or utterances would mean that in addition to the context of emergence of the works, language practices of the narrating present and the thematized past should also be analyzed. On this basis, the text-analytical approach proves to be fruitful. In that approach, aspects such as language, structure, narrative perspective, and intention of the authors are important to consider. Finally, I will explain the relationship between postcolonialism and intertextuality by internalized norms, gender roles, violence and power relations. These are problematized or dissolved in the dialogical process of staging in the aesthetic medium. Furthermore, culture in semiotic terms includes the hierarchically structured symbols formed in the process of communication, that are used in a society and can be grasped through literature. Literature is therefore an important medium and forum for these symbols. I also explain the connection between postcolonial literature and intertextuality through cultural theories that understand culture as a text.

Accordingly, literature functions as a form of media expression that reproduces symbolic orders (Lacan 1966: 288), but also expands, shifts or playfully dissolves some. My purpose is to identify and examine these reproductions, extensions, shifts and playful dissolutions of symbolic orders. The term "text" includes both any real, written text and the mere repetition of what is expressed in the conversation. It is also of interest to observe more concrete manifestations and practices of intertextuality. In a childhood self-narration, embedded statements enable the multi-perspectivity of childhood perception.

Oral pretexts

The selected works consist of numerous pre-formulated statements. Such words can be regarded as pretexts (Compagnon 1978: 364). The narrative is largely fed through them. Also, the memory of such statements is only possible through the effect of the places of memory. The integration of memories not coming from narrators themselves into the ways in which each narrator remembers his childhood thus brings to light an intertextual relationship. He mingles other people's memories with his own memories. Apart from narratives from other characters and isolated statements which the narrator recalls using quotation marks, the reader comes across verbally codified texts. The oral texts reproduced are proverbs and catchwords, prayers and songs.

In *Zunge*, the narrator remembers the "*erste Kinderliedchen*" [first children's songs] he learned in his early childhood in his Bulgarian birthplace: "*Manzanicas coloradas, las que vienen de Stambol' – ‚Äpfelchen rote, die kommen von Stambol'*" (ibid. 26).⁷ Even if the song is not fully reproduced, its title as a paratext is representative of the effective presence of its content in the author's structuration of his memories in the text. Most of the songs mentioned by the narrator are religious songs. Thus, "*Ma-nischtanah*" is presented as the narrative of the exodus

⁷ ["Apples red, that come from Stambol'"]

from Egypt. The word “narrative” is valid for the literary nature of the song. Another song is “*Had gadja, had gadja*” (ibid. 33). The narrator provides a translation of the title: “*Ein Lämmlein, ein Lämmlein*”⁸.

In Canetti’s work, song titles of this kind are succinct examples of the integration of oral utterances in the writing in which they are intertwined. In addition, the reproduction of these titles has an appeal function, as each title arouses the reader’s interest and a series of considerations about the content of the song. Designations of prayers such as the “*Kaddish*” and the “*Totengebet für den Vater*” (ibid. 106)⁹ have the same function as song titles. Fixed oral texts which appear unchanged in the memory associations of the self also include proverbs. The self repeats a saying of his mother: “*die Liebe geht durch den Magen*” (ibid. 91)¹⁰. By this, the mother meant that her cousin was loved by her husband because of her cooking skills. Catchwords are the last category of statements that are repeated without any change. The memory of the self in the pre-war period in Vienna in 1914 is illustrative. Apart from songs against “*den Feind*”, to which the protagonist only alludes, many hate phrases are available: “*„Serbien muss sterbien! Jeder Schuss ein Russ! Jeder Stoß ein Franzos! Jeder Tritt ein Britt!”*”¹¹ (ibid. 114) or “*„God save the King”*” (ibid. 113).

Statements from special occasions also appear in *Zunge*. Among the texts of this series are some statements of the narrator himself. He reports on his own words. This brings an intertextual process to view, whereby the narrating self distances himself from the experiencing self. He tells from the point of view of the adult who looks back: “*„Agora vo matar a Laurica!” – Jetzt werde ich Laurica töten!”*” (ibid. 114),¹² “*„Little Mary is my sweetheart!”*” (ibid. 59) or “*„Paul était seul à la maison”*” (ibid. 67)¹³. The narrator tries to trace the statements of the experiencing self back to their respective original contexts. He highlights the integration of these words from childhood into his narrative process by reproducing each excerpt in its original language. Through this foreign-language marking, the narrator also shows to what extent he differs as a speaker or writer from the toddler described in the text. The last form of intertext in *Zunge* is the acquisition of memories of other people and their reproduction in direct speech. A figure remembering the past is depicted in the memories of the narrator. For example, he talks about his mother who was remembering words spoken by her long-dead husband. Intertextuality thus works on two levels, insofar as an oral pretext is

⁸ [“A little lamb, a little lamb”]

⁹ [“Prayer for the late father”]

¹⁰ [“The way to the heart is through the stomach”].

¹¹ [““Serbia must die! Every shot a Russ! Every kick a French! Every kick a Brit””]

¹² [“Now I’m going to kill Laurica!”]

¹³ [“Paul was alone at home”]

integrated unchanged into a staged narrative process which is itself incorporated without change into a frame narrative.

In *L'Enfant*, the narrator regularly lets his characters speak directly. His conversations with relatives or friends are staged as dialogues. Statements or words by others are thus reproduced directly. Through such dialogues which have the value of direct speech, the narrator distances himself from the past and considers himself a different person. Regarding oral pretexts, two songs appear in *L'Enfant*. The first is the "dougá", a mysterious praise song sung by a griot to the father of the experiencing self working in his workshop. The song's title is followed by explanations about the circumstances under which it is sung. Even if it has a descriptive function, this song is incorporated into the narrative process in its oral form.

The second song appears only through one of its stanzas which is repeated as a small intermezzo in the memory stream of the narrator: "*Coba! Aye coba, lama!*" (ibid. 136). The song is to be sung by selected candidates for the initiation rite and exists only in oral form. It is integrated into the narrative process. The presence of songs as external texts is marked in the narrative by the Malinké language. Camara also reproduces memories of other people verbatim. The passage where the narrator's father reports on his first meeting with the family's totem is an example of such oral pretexts in other oral pretexts. The oral pretexts in quotation marks also include isolated points of view of the narrator. These have two essential forms. Either they refer to a previous conversation, or they are an inner monologue from the childhood of the narrator. Finally, many stereotypes are also reproduced in a catchword-like manner. The narrator explains, for example, that he was able to dance with his girlfriend because "[...] *comme tous les Africains, [nous avons] la danse dans le sang*" (ibid. 186)¹⁴. If this word is read as interdiscursive, it is also to be regarded as an attack launched on colonial discourse.

Forms of pretexts that make visible the effective presence of an oral text in *La Marseillaise* are of a twofold nature. First, it is about songs and catchphrases with a fixed form. Second, it is about isolated statements or texts that were uttered on certain occasions. These include the narrator's own statements, the words of other characters, speeches, radio reports and forms of expression that are meta-linguistically commented on or explained and integrated into the narrative. As keywords, all the phrases that cheered on the hometown football team of Bangangté can be mentioned: "*'Aigle – Roi des airs'; 'Sous-marin – Au milieu de la mort'; 'Tornado – Roi des sports'; 'Panthère – Prince de la forêt'; 'Caïman – Six heures'*" (ibid. 80).¹⁵ Catchword-like pretexts also appear in the memories of the narrator when he draws with phrases on which the audience praised the local chief:

¹⁴ ["like all Africans, [we have] dancing in our blood"]

¹⁵ ["'Eagle - King of the air'; 'Submarine - In the midst of death'; 'Tornado - King of sports'; 'Panther - Prince of the forest'; 'Caiman - Six o'clock'"]

“‘Panthère’, ‘Noble des eaux’, ‘Maître de l’univers’, ‘Ami du Sultan Bamoun’, ‘Corne de taureau’” (ibid. 61)¹⁶.

The reader receives no indication of whether the keywords of the first series were originally formulated in French or are translations. However, that these buzzwords were created in the *lingua franca* cannot be ruled out, due to the multiculturalism of the city inhabitants. Moreover, those phrases addressed to the local ruler are translated from Bangangté, since the communication between the population and the chief took place in the local language. Songs are the second form of fixed oral repetitions in the narrative weave. The first song is the title for Tchaptchet’s childhood lyrics. Furthermore, stanzas of other songs are reproduced without any reference to their respective titles. Since song titles and song verses are *pars pro toto*, i.e. parts that stand for the whole, then the same function can be entitled to them.

The narrator also repeats in direct speech a report that he claims to have heard on the radio at the time. Some parts of his reflections also appear as metatexts. He claims: “A ce type d’enseignant, nous proposons que les représentants de la nation décernent un titre prestigieux, celui de ‘Chevaliers de la science et de la lumière’” (ibid. 73)¹⁷. Statements of this kind interrupt the remembrance. In addition, they have a function that consists in the narrator taking a clear position on the past. Discourse elements, time changes, changes in tenses and language levels are indications of changes of voice and perspective. The two perspectives also overlap.

The narrator points to the presence of the local language in French. He thinks that some of the words reproduced are his own verbatim translations. Therefore, an attempt was made in the local community to counteract the linguistic manifestation of colonialism. The fact that forms of expression from the youth are also repeated by the narrator and given explanations shows how deeply the present intervenes in every attempt to reconstruct the past. The present models the past childhood and controls one’s understanding of it, insofar as this phase of life can practically not be restored.

Steppenrutenpflanze offers a much richer supply of statements. These are essentially entertaining and funny stories that are explicitly told either by the narrator or other characters. The narrator remembers his grandmother who is a skillful storyteller. She is the bearer of many stories, including the bride’s story, which, despite its fragmented structure, functions as the longest and most important internal narrative and as a “prehistory” of the narrator. Internal narratives also have the function of a retarding factor insofar as they constantly interrupt the course of memory or narrative and symbolically complement it.

¹⁶ [“‘Panther’, ‘Noble of the waters’, ‘Master of the universe’, ‘Friend of the Sultan Bamoun’, ‘Bull’s Horn’”]

¹⁷ [“To this type of teacher, we propose that the representatives of the nation award a prestigious title, that of ‘Knights of Science and Light’”]

Finally, oral pretexts include reproduced conversations and reports on respected films on television. The analysis of the insertion of statements from other people into the narrators' memories shows that the repetitions are of a different nature. They consist of everyday statements, words and buzzwords, prayers, songs and speech excerpts. They come from the diverse languages the experiencing self was confronted with. Its authors are members of the family or the religious community, schoolmates, friends sometimes even the narrator himself. The presence of these heterogeneous and sometimes multilingual and discursive parts of the text in childhood scenes forms an intertextual fabric.

Written pretexts

The existing written texts observable in the accounts are intertextual references of different nature. They are also regarded as postcolonial characteristics. In *L'Enfant*, the Koran remains the only essential written source clearly stated. The self already alludes to the Koran when he tells of occasions on which many village women had pieces of jewellery made by the father. These occasions are the Islamic festival of breaking the fasting at the end of the Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice. A further allusion to the Koran appears when the narrator tells of Marabouts, regarded as God's mediators. However, the word "Koran" appears only in connection with the preparations for the very first journey of the experiencing self to Conakry. Even if the Koranic texts which the invited Marabouts have pronounced for the blessing of the experiencing self are not reproduced, their presence becomes perceptible by the fact that they are mentioned.

In contrast to Camara's and Yeşilöz' childhood texts, *Zunge* and *La Marseillaise* have a variety of written pretexts. Canetti and Tchaptchet write about their childhood texts at the age of 70. Through their childhood review, they do not pursue activist or political goals. Their purpose is rather to share the peculiarity of their family's story. This is said to have prompted the authors to present their childhood in more detail in the production of their texts. In contrast, Camara and Yeşilöz can only mention written texts that come from the cultures they (un)consciously accuse of being hegemonic.

In *Steppenrutenpflanze*, the main source of the Muslim faith is only alluded to at first. These allusions are also the memory of the Islamic festival of breaking the fasting and the Feast of Sacrifice. These allusions stand symbolically for Koranic sections. The most tangible repetition, however, is a Koranic verse: "*Allahü ekber, allahü ekber ...*" (ibid. 54). The narrator integrates this invitation to a ritual obligatory prayer which in Islam is read aloud only by a muezzin into his memory process. By repeating this phrase, the temporal distance between the remembered childhood eye view and the narrative present is shortened. This illustrates the attempt to both remember childhood and to revive this past.

With Tchaptchet, written pretexts are excerpts from books or from the local newspaper. A signpost, along with sentences from the narrator's school time

dictation are also added. The books whose excerpts appear in the narrative are above all the Bible and a former textbook. Mention is also made of the titles of the novels read at the time. However, the syllabary of the *Medu-mba* language is the only written pretext that is reported in detail. Even though there is no excerpt of it given, one cannot lose sight of the fact that its detailed description with information about the editors, place and year information compensates for the textual deficit. Through the description of the syllabary, there is a strong sense that this book is memory-generating for the depicted childhood. The narrator explains: “... *il fut plus facile, pour nous qui connaissions déjà la langue française, de maîtriser le contenu du syllabaire et d’écrire en peu de temps des textes en notre langue maternelle.*” (ibid. 53)¹⁸.

In *Zunge*, allusions to explicitly declared adoptions of written pretexts are more numerous and diverse. Moreover, it emphasizes books and songs that are present in the work through their respective headings or excerpts. Finally, one has the names of authors, who have the same appeal function as the book and song titles. By mentioning the names of writers, musicians and composers, the reader is encouraged to think about their works. The narrator presents his very first reader repertoire as follows: “*Nach ‚Tausendundeine Nacht‘ kamen Grimms Märchen; Robinson Crusoe; Gullivers Travels; Tales from Shakespeare; Don Quijote; Dante; Wilhelm Tell*” (ibid. 52)¹⁹.

Musical works are also among the texts that are quoted: “(…) *Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart und Schubert*” (ibid. 242). The pieces of music of these composers appear symbolically through their names. Titles of literary works also appear in the narrative. Examples are excerpts from classical productions such as “*Baudelaires ‚Les Fleurs du Mal‘*” (ibid. 151) or Dickens “*David Copperfield*” (ibid. 192). The narrator also reproduces verses of “*Seegedicht*” (ibid. 301). On closer inspection, the narrator uses this compiled repertoire to give the reader a sense of the protagonist's identity and how it developed. Regarding the narrated childhood, the texts and works cited become meaningful and structuring factors that support the process of remembrance.

Conclusion

The analyzed narrative techniques form an insightful interface due to their application in *L’Enfant noir* (1953), *La Marseillaise de mon enfance* (2004), *Die gerettete Zunge* (1977) and *Steppenrutenpflanze* (2000). As shown, these works are by authors of different cultural and historical backgrounds. The discussed changes from sections of reality to the representation of childhood have a reference to dialogical, communication-promoting and exchange-related

¹⁸ [“... it was easier for us, who already knew the French language, to master the content of the syllabary and to write texts in our native language in a short time”]

¹⁹ [After ‘The Tales of the Arabian Nights’ came Grimm’s Fairytales; Robinson Crusoe; Gullivers Travels; Tales from Shakespeare; Don Quijote; Dante; Wilhelm Tell]

processes. Parallels to postcolonialism can be drawn from such procedures. In view of intersections between the quest for identity and cultural interactions and the narrative techniques analyzed, the selected works show considerable overlap with postcolonial writings. Thus, it would be inconsistent to regard oral narrative techniques as a peculiarity of literary texts by authors of African origin. The orality of works appears more as cross-linguistic, cross-border and cross-cultural. Orality as a generation-by-generation transmission of information is even stronger in the two childhood accounts in German. Insofar as communities are included in the process of remembering, the textual significance of the family and relatives can rather be regarded as the corollary of postcolonial literature. From the investigation of already existing statements and writings into the memories, it appears that oral pretexts occupy a considerable position. Insofar as the expressions of the socializing instances are multicultural, their reproduction or reconstruction can be regarded as another postcolonial feature. Moreover, the processes described represent an identity construction resulting from cultural (ex)changes. Due to their inherent capacity for change, cultures are to be considered both spatially and temporally because the cultures in which the experiencing selves are represented differ from those from which the childhood is remembered. The fact that the space in between is the exciting place of childhood negotiation and identity construction therefore seems self-evident.

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