

## African Travel Writing

Between January and March 1956, the esteemed Paris-based literary periodical *La Nouvelle Revue Française* published three brief texts that were presented as the *Journal de route* or travelogue of Nigerien Damouré Zika. The monthly installments, written unselfconsciously in non-standard French, loosely describe what Zika presents as different filming ‘missions’ undertaken in Niger, Togo and the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) with the celebrated ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch. Already one of Rouch’s close friends, Zika would go on to be recognized as a key creative collaborator in the influential ‘*cinéma-vérité*’ praxis developed by the Frenchman. Indeed, the first installment of Zika’s travel diary is preceded by a brief Rouch-penned introduction. It comes as no surprise, then, that most critical commentary on Zika is confined to critical studies of Rouch’s cinematic œuvre where discussion of his Nigerien assistant’s interests tends to highlight acting and technical roles.

In 2007, the French publisher Mille et une nuits published *Journal de route* as a single edition uniting the *NRF* texts and Rouch’s foreword with three other pieces of writing by Zika, and a largely biographical afterword by its editor, Éric Dussert (hereafter all references will be to this edition and translated by me). Despite the availability of *Journal de route* to a wider readership, as well as extensive acknowledgment of Zika’s invaluable cultural contribution following his death in 2009, he has never garnered a reputation as a writer. Admittedly, his imperfect use of French can be disarming, and the challenges this poses for a potential translator most likely explain why the text has not had access to a broad international readership. Moreover, the fortunes of Zika’s text suggest that French readers were never enchanted by it in the way their contemporaries across the channel were by the ‘young

English' (Thomas 1952: 7) of Nigerian Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), the outlandish text with which the residual orality and travel-related structure of *Journal de route* surely deserve comparison. Zika's failure to make a mark on the literary world may also be explained by the small body of work he produced and, as suggested above, its easy incorporation into a narrative about its author's role in the work of Jean Rouch.

In the context of this chapter's examination of Sub-Saharan Africa's seemingly underdeveloped tradition of non-fictional travel writing, however, the significance of *Journal de route* is immense. Crucial is its position alongside a select number of African texts that appear to satisfy the criteria for inclusion within the genre of travel writing widely understood as an account in prose of a journey that, however creative, is authorized by travel that has actually taken place. However, emphasizing the generic 'suitability' of *Journal de route* as a way of bulking up the meagre corpus of African travel writing must not obscure the more pressing critical need to explore the reasons for the paucity of such texts in the first place as well as the scholarly practices that result in them being sidelined or ignored. A key critical value of *Journal de route* in this regard is the way in which it draws attention to what Mary Louise Pratt terms the 'critical mimesis' of contemporary travel writing scholarship whereby a disproportionate emphasis on Western texts reproduces 'the normativity of the primary corpus' (2012: 122). The consequence, Pratt contends, is a critical stance that risks upholding the perspective it seeks to subvert because it too often repeats 'the sequential centripetal-centrifugal movement that sends the metropolitan subject forth to know the world and brings him and sometimes her back to tell about it' (122).

It is important to note that Zika himself identifies his *Journal de route* as travel writing and much of the text's content and structure conforms to the

factually grounded understanding of travel writing just outlined. At the same time, however, *Journal de Route* is not in any way being presented here as 'representative' of an African tradition of travel. Nonetheless, the far too frequent absence of examples of African travel from critical consideration must give pause for thought. My concern in the first section is to address this state of affairs by exploring some of the historical reasons for this whilst simultaneously mapping some of the key accounts that exist. This seam is developed in the second section through a focus on the ways in which Rouch's 'introduction' to *Journal de voyage* highlights certain challenges faced by the mid twentieth-century emergence of non-fictional African travel writing. The concluding section examines the ways in which Zika's *Journal de route* surmounts these obstacles and confidently asserts its own formal identity.

### **Invisible Travellers**

Tabish Khair (2005) has conclusively demonstrated the vital input of an African tradition of travel and its textualization to understandings of these practices. However, although *Other Routes*, the seminal anthology of African and Asian travel writing edited by him and others, carefully accounts for relevant pre-1900 examples, it ends its survey on this date on the basis that 'twentieth-century travel accounts by Asians and Africans can be obtained from ordinary public libraries' (15). This is undoubtedly true of V. S. Naipaul, Salmon Rushdie and Vikram Seth, the late twentieth-century anglophone Asian writers to whom Khair alludes. However, the failure of *Other Routes* adequately to account for the first half of the twentieth century, usually cited as the point of insertion into literature by colonized African subjects, appears to suggest there are no 'suitable' examples of non-fiction travel writing from

this era. To paraphrase Hegel's infamous comment, must we deduce from this that Africa is a continent with no modern indigenous history of travel writing?

The French literary historian Roland Lebel certainly thought so. The picture he paints in his 1928 survey of French-language colonial literature makes little room for African practices and narratives of travel. Indeed, his brief discussion of the absence of suitable texts points to the privileging of a particular critical take on the identity of the traveller as well as on travel writing's generic ontology that has not yet been vitiated by more recent scholarly developments:

Quite understandably travel writing is represented by a very small number of texts written by natives. The exploration of the interior is not their responsibility; moreover, they do not yet travel as tourists in the way that we do. Thus, in principle, one finds no report, no travelogue, no memories or impressions of travel by native, French-speaking authors. (159, my translation).

Informing this view of the non-existence of a French-language tradition of travel writing, of course, is the idea that if Africans travelled at all—and this mobility is rarely acknowledged by colonial-era writing on the continent—it is not a practice appropriate to the non-fictional forms of travel writing mentioned. In other words, what Lebel's comments underscore is that the process of determining the generic identity of travel writing is inextricably bound up with privileged European figures and practices of travel. Clearly, there can be no room here for the colonized African who is almost certain to have insufficient material means to devote time to the privileged recreational movement of the early twentieth-century European tourist, and, consequently, to recreate what Michael Cronin refers to as the formal 'horizontal paradigm' of so much Western travel writing that reflects 'the more conventional understanding of travel as a linear progression from place

to place' (2000: 19). Generically speaking, the type of romantic wandering associated by such horizontal travel also underpins what Jean-Didier Urbain sees as the 'agoraphilic standard' (2003: 200) of much Western travel writing. Lebel's arguments concerning exploration suggest that the investigation and documenting of geographical expanse is once again the sole preserve of Europeans and any of its findings irrelevant to 'travelled over' Africans.

Needless to say, the facts are not so simple. For Lebel fails to remind the reader that European exploration of Africa's interior was dependent on the mobilization of auxiliary African personnel who often knew where they were going, or at least how to navigate their way. His comment is thus complicit in reinforcing the mythical image of the colonial travelogue's European explorer (solitary, heroic, male) and obscuring the vital legacy of Africa's indigenous navigational skills as well as the historical diversity of its travel practices.

Leaving aside for the moment the oversights resulting from Lebel's French-centredness, his restricted understanding of travel writing's generic identity also blinds him to the place travel, especially geographically expansive journeys, plays in the francophone African tradition he claims to know. Had he been more open to the ways in which African men in the early twentieth century were engaging in intercontinental travel, for example, he might have recognized that students, many of whom had already moved for their schooling from rural to urban locations within West Africa were, by the 1920s, beginning to make the journey to France in order to pursue their studies and experience the specific type of travel encounter that would soon after shape the seminal texts of Negritude and underpin such key fictional works of francophone African journeys as Ferdinand Oyono's *Road to Europe* (1960) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961). Had Lebel been more attuned to the complex ways in which 'memories and impressions' of travel are filtered and textualized, he might have conceded the relevance of

the journalistic writing of Senegalese political activist Lamine Senghor through which this traveller's encounters with the heady international climate of 1920s 'black' Paris are freighted. This, in turn, might have encouraged Lebel to explore the complex reasons explaining the French capital as point of convergence for so much African-originating travel during the decade when he published his history of colonial literature. Senghor, for example, was one of 140,000 West Africans who travelled to Europe to fight for the French army in the First World War, an experience recorded by his compatriot, Bakary Diallo, in his memoir *Force-Bonté* (1926), published two years prior to Lebel's refusal to acknowledge African practices of travel or their expression in forms that do not come in conflict with his exclusive model of travel writing.

Concomitant with a critical mode that reads travel writing, then and now, according to a dominant Western model is a sidelining of non-textual forms that counter perceptions of an invisible or non-existent culture of travel. Diallo's text may well be one of precious few written records of the ordeal of the Great War from an African perspective, but it is not the only account, as Joe Lunn's (1999) work on oral history has demonstrated. Indeed, bringing to light the significance of oral narratives that have transmitted and transmuted the experience of travel from generation to generation must inform any attempt to assert the historical fact of African mobility from what Madeleine Borgomano describes as the 'perpetual movement' (1998: 208) of pre-colonial Africa to the multiple forms of mobility and displacement triggered by colonial and postcolonial realities. In Lebel's case, however, the decoupling of *travel* from *writing* is inconceivable. Possessing as he does the 'literate mind' described in Walter J. Ong's seminal study of oral culture, Lebel is unable to relax travel writing's generic borders to include the 'memories and impressions' of orality. To do so would be 'psychologically threatening, for literates' sense of *control* over language is closely tied to the

visual transformation of language' policed, as Ong suggests, by dictionaries, grammar, 'and all the rest of the apparatus that makes words into something you can "look" up' (1982: 14, my emphasis). When shifted to the context of travel writing, as in Lebel's case, such control is reinforced through the strict application of a regulative generic understanding that is unable or unwilling to make room for oral elaborations of travel, to consider different travelling figures or to account for the ways in which other generic norms—fictional and non-fictional, but also non-textual—can reflect and refract specific traditions and experiences of travel. In this way, Western travel writing has become entrenched not as *a* cultural output connected to adjacent products and phenomena, but as *the* form for expressing the experience of travel.

In this light, my anchoring of the remaining sections in a conventional understanding of travel writing must not be seen as capitulation to a presumed notion of its inviolable place within the cultures of travel. By the same token, the focus on Zika's non-fictional journey narrative is not intended as a defence of this form's aesthetic qualities against any perceived superiority of 'literary' representations of journeys in African fiction. My primary aim is simply to address a critical imbalance that has seen the journey motif in fiction, not to mention accounts of Western travel to the continent, receive far greater scrutiny (see Mortimer 1990). In a related way, however, this urgent critical opening up to non-fictional forms of African travel writing will need to pay closer attention to reading practices, or strategies of promotion, that are aware of the blindspots of Lebel's approach and conscious, too, of the complex introduction into established literary fields of the earliest examples of twentieth-century African travel writing.

### ***African Travel Writing Introduced***

In many respects *Journal de route*'s appropriation of so many of the conventions of non-fictional travel writing evokes a distinct yet rarely commented body of work by a select, and overwhelmingly male group of authors from Sub-Saharan Africa. As the editors of *Other Routes* remind us, this tradition dates back at least to the *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), the firsthand account of his extensive travels by a former slave. Like so many textualizations of African travel writing, slave narratives, of which there is no example in the francophone tradition, are presented by Khair et al as travel accounts hidden behind alternative generic categorizations. In a similar 'recovery' method, Alasdair Pettinger (2001: 74) also evokes the need to bypass set generic boundaries when establishing a history of African travel writing. For him, non-fictional textualizations of African travel are to be found 'scattered across genres [including] autobiographies, novels, poems, official reports.' Included amongst the key examples his method allows him to identify are the 1922 typescript by South African political activist Sol Plaatje describing a trip to North America; sections of Kwame Nkrumah's 1957 autobiography describing the Ghanaian President's experiences in England; and rare female accounts including Angolan-born Eva de Carvalho Chipenda's self-styled 'travel and discovery' in Brazil, North America and Portugal..

Ultimately, however, *Journal de Voyage* belongs to an even more select group of African texts that wear the generic label of travel writing with none of the awkwardness Pettinger ascribes to the examples he introduces. One of the earliest instances of the more generically 'straight-forward' travel writing found in Zika's text is Ham Mukasa's *Uganda's Katakira in England* (1904), an account of a Ugandan dignitary's visit to Great Britain for Edward VII's coronation. However, it is during the era of decolonization that this form of travel writing really threatens to flourish. From Michel Kpomassie's *L'Africain du Groenland* (published in 1981, this Togolese cult classic in fact



describes a journey that took place from 1958-66), to Nigerian J. P. Clark's *America, Their America* (1964) and Ivorian Bernard Dadié's three accounts of journeys to Paris, Rome and New York in the 1960s (*Un Nègre à Paris* (1959); *Patron de New York* (1964); *La Ville où nul ne meurt* (1968), the belated appropriation of this genre is not coincidental. Rather, this assertion of a travelling African subject position reflects a context in which Africa prepares to take its place in the world with a literary confidence to match its wider political and economic aspirations. By 1974, V. Y. Mudimbe's *Carnets d'Amérique* continues to evince elements of the self-assurance and authority traditionally associated with the form adopted. However, the potential for a new African mobility and its textualization is by now overshadowed by the increasingly corrupt political conditions from which many of these travellers originate as well as, crucially, the support and financial generosity of their Western hosts. The result is the apparent mid 1970s stalling of the sense of possibility offered by the broadening lens of this travel writing development.

Despite the growing confidence of the narrative voice that can be detected in this mid twentieth-century collection of texts, all of them remind us in one way or another that African access to travel writing—and the travelling practices traditionally endorsed by the genre—was not uncomplicated and frequently required some form of backing or support by metropolitan insiders. At times, this simply means material assistance. This is the case, for example, with the above-mentioned texts describing US-bound travel, which are the result of sponsored travel for educational and/or political reasons. Even Kpomassie's Greenland journey, which is self-financed to a significant degree, is dependent at moments during its eight-year duration on the practical and financial assistance of European mentors. It must be stressed, too, that if Zika travels 'expansively' throughout West Africa, his ability to cross borders is not a form of leisure activity but carried out in the employ of a more materially privileged European. Indeed, this link

between travel and labour is a recurring feature of African fictional and non-fictional textualizations of travel, and its foregrounding reminds us of the way in which travel's material reality is often elided in Western narratives. Worryingly, too, it emerges that the issue of financial dependence can compromise the African traveller's ability to provide a full and honest account of his border crossings, a fact controversially illustrated in *America, Their America* by J. P. Clark whose unsparingly critical views of the United States resulted in a sponsored period of study at Princeton being cut short in 1963.

It is the original paratextual apparatus of Zika's *Journal de route*, however, that points to a different but equally significant form of 'sponsorship' for the African writer aiming to negotiate the borders of genre and establish him/herself as a travel writer. According to Éric Dussert, Jean Rouch's first wife, Jane, initially typed up Zika's manuscript and secured its publication with the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Whatever the case, the appearance of the first installment of the Nigerien's travelogue in 1956 alongside a piece by Nathalie Sarraute is unquestionably a cachet denoting serious potential if not *the* arrival of a new writing talent within the literary establishment. Yet *Journal de Route's* framing by the prestigious periodical also suggests that an initial institutionalized selection process has guaranteed this manuscript's successful 'introduction'. Although it is unclear who has added the footnotes in the original text that translate and explain certain terms from Zika's native language, the notion that they were required at all must also be seen as part of the text's introduction to a metropolitan readership. Rouch's presence in the form of his allographic introduction further reminds us that Zika's travelogue is governed by yet another layer of patronage that, if not necessarily divesting *Journal de route* of its rhetorical authority, calls into question the full extent of its subject position's independence. By the same token, reading Rouch's preamble as part of a

more widespread framing practice by metropolitan intellectuals of mid-century African writing suggests that the ethnographic filmmaker's motivations may be less about introducing Zika into the literary scene than announcing himself as actively shaping—or '*controlling*' as Ong might see it—a new literary and cultural direction.

On the one hand, Rouch's positive embrace of Zika's cultural difference suggests it forms part of what Richard Watts (2005) sees as the epistemic break instigated shortly before by Sartre's better-known preface to the 1948 *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*. Indeed, the refusal to mould or colonize the text that this position suggests is clear when Rouch's preface is compared with the stark colonial asymmetry of the relationship between Ham Makusa's 1904 account of the travels of *Uganda's Katikiro in England* and its 'Introduction' by Harry H. Johnston, which is used by the British colonial administrator to 'set right the Negro author of this book' on a number of points (xii). At the same time, however, Rouch's apparent radicalism, like that of Sartre six year's earlier, is attenuated somewhat by a discursive position that is more accurately described as being 'caught between colonial and postcolonial epistemes' (Watts 2005: 87). For even if Rouch's mediation of the text avoids the condescending attitude of colonial texts, or the more obviously ambiguous position of Sartre as described by Watts, it must unavoidably 'retain the small degree of critical authority necessary to write the preface' (Watts 2005: 90). This, then, highlights Rouch's insider knowledge and suggests that African travel writing cannot yet stand independently as a guide to places travelled because its signifying practices themselves require the reader to be guided by a Western interpretation.

In his preface, Rouch does not explicitly draw attention to the other interpretative frame relevant to Zika's text: genre and its uses. However, a small number of striking metatextual interpellations of *Journal de route's*

generic form suggest, at least implicitly, that Zika has been made aware of the formal codes evoked by the title of his travel narrative and is explicitly demonstrating his ability to recognize and reproduce them. In one instance, for example, Zika's humorous tone cannot quite hide his exasperation with Rouch and Roger Rosfelder (another well-known member of Rouch's entourage) when the two Europeans 'disappear' without explanation as their African assistants deal with a punctured tyre. Addressing what may be either or both of the culprits directly through the travelogue, Zika demands, 'Well then, give us the reason for your absence to improve the famous diary *you're always looking for*' (35, my emphasis). It should be noted also that Rouch taught Zika to read and write French and this may well support what can already be inferred from the text's self-reflexive moments: Rouch is actively encouraging his African friend and assistant to try out this textual form.

My aim in raising this point—that must remain at the level of conjecture for now—is resolutely not to dismiss the value of Zika's text or to suggest that demonstration of his mastery of travel writing codes is evidence of a deferential gesture. On the one hand, the pair's friendship is confirmed by Zika above and was repeated by him throughout his life. Certain allusions in *Journal de route* to unequal conditions for Africans and Europeans—in terms of travel and working arrangements—also suggest the Nigerien's dissatisfaction with this, a position that becomes unambiguously manifest when he voices his disapproval of the master-servant relationship of a particular English professor with his African 'boy' (34). There can be no suggestion either of any domineering role for Rouch in the conception of *Journal de route*. Zika's diary writing could be read, for example, as an exercise to support language acquisition. Even without corroboration, it is also possible to see how a 'commissioned' travelogue in this context might form part of what Diane Scheineman describes as the French filmmaker's project of 'shared anthropology' that 'may be said to represent Rouch's

attempt [...] to replace his monologic view of authority with more dispersed voices of authority' (185).

In the final analysis, the question of texts commissioned and written to form transcends any conditions that might explain Zika's decision to write his travelogue as well as the complex and rightly lauded polyphony of Rouch's work. Instead, I see them as returning us to African travel writing's historic 'invisibility' by underscoring the tradition's complex reliance on a system of patronage and raising the question of how many 'suitable' and 'unsuitable' manuscripts did not survive the process leading to publication, and why (and whether any can be recovered). The notion of writing to form also raises another potential obstacle for African (and diasporic) travel writing as it appears to re-emerge slowly in a contemporary context from the hiatus that, as mentioned above, began in the early 1970s. For if non-fiction travel texts by Africans are to avoid being read and promoted—and potentially commissioned for commercial reasons—in a reductive manner, they must ensure that they do not go down the path of reproducing an aesthetic code that constitutes its own form of anthropological project and simply transforms the immobile travellee into a reified travelling representative of a 'same but different' form of otherness.

### **African Travel Writing on its own terms**

In Africa as well as elsewhere, electronic genres are unquestionably transforming travel writing. The 'Invisible Borders' project (<http://invisible-borders.com>), to take one very successful example, demonstrates how a new generation of African-born photographers, visual artists and writers can collaborate to produce previously unimaginable accounts of travel across the continent. For those with internet access, blogging and micro-blogging also

look set to give voice to a whole range of travellers whose experiences might otherwise have passed beneath the radar. In South Africa for example, Mzansi Girl ([www.mzansigirl.com](http://www.mzansigirl.com)) blogs largely, but not exclusively, on domestic travel. Readers are also invited to interact with her on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, where, as he blog explains, she aims to ‘curate great African-related content’.

In addition, examples of printed accounts of inter- and intra-continental travel by African and diasporic authors attest to a continued desire to engage with and develop travel writing traditions on the continent. At times, the results appear more conventional in terms of form. This is the case for example with Noo Saro-Wiwa’s *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2011), a journey back to the Nigeria where she was born and where her political activist father ken Saro-Wiwa was executed. It is also true of the growing body of work by South African Sihle Khumalo, whose intra-continental travelogues—*Dark Continent: My Black Arse* (2007), *Heart of Africa* (2010), *Almost Sleeping My Way to Timbuktu* (2013)—imply a desire to provide an ironic African perspective on some of the more iconic journeys of nineteenth-century European writing on Africa.

The apparent conventionality this new wave of non-fictional travel writing suggest that we still await a distinctively African adaptation of the form, one that addresses and overturns the genre’s strong associations with the colonial past. It would be wrong, however, to look to the future alone for an African travel writing that asserts itself on its own terms and demands a critical space that is respectful of its practices. Rather, the time is ripe to consider Damouré Zika’s *Journal de route* because its distinctive use of genre is a timely reminder that understandings of travel writing’s generic identity, and its ongoing evolutions, need systematically to be counterbalanced with critical recognition of the alternative routes it has taken in the past.

As noted earlier, in certain key respects, not least its title, *Journal de route* introduces itself as a suitable text for inclusion within a strictly defined understanding of travel writing. References to reasonably accurate dates (that can be cross referenced with Rouch's filmography) emphasize that the text is a factual account of the author's engagement with real places. The travelogue's sense of progress over time is complemented by a sense of movement across space thanks to subheadings that list the villages and cities of defined itineraries. There is ample evidence, too, of the author's reactions to landscape, society and culture as filtered through his own cultural perspective, and, at times, prejudices (the less than flattering portrait of Syrians (32) is an example, as is his statement that 'nothing works in the Gold Coast' (32)). Finally, there is the self-reflexive embedding of form used to draw the reader's attention to Zika's efforts to fulfill generic expectation or to apologize when this fails to materialize. Typical of this is the moment when, having recounted a story full of innuendo about an unscrupulous *marabout*, Zika personifies his travelogue and explains: 'The travelogue is unkind, it tells even the worst secrets. Travelogue apologizes to readers for this passage' (53).

These startling moments of *mise en abyme* are a key indicator of the independent relationship to form and content of *Journal de route*. The above example underscores the inimitable way in which the text flags up its 'conformity' in travel writing terms as it simultaneously pushes the boundaries and allows 'unsuitable' content to infiltrate. Tellingly, however, Zika, as travel writer, absolves himself of this infringement and suggests that it is the inherent flexibility of genre that permits these developments. At other times, however, this generic noncompliance happens in a less knowing way. A brief entry towards the end illustrates this. Entitled 'The visit to the top of the mountain' (55), it suggests the reader is to be treated to a variation of the promontory descriptions of much colonial and postcolonial western

travel writing. Mary Louise Pratt has identified these 'master-of-all-I-survey' moments as a specific 'interaction between esthetics and ideology' (1992: 205) that gives meaning to journeys, and, in a colonial context, underlines the European's intellectual authority to interpret and the political desire to master. Transposed to a postcolonial context, Pratt sees the traveller 'as still up there, commanding the view, assigning it value, oblivious to limitations on their perceptual capacities' (220). In *Journal de route*, the unnamed mountain and the stone construction atop it are presented as a site that 'has to be seen' (55), although there is no indication of who has ascribed it this value. Zika goes on to describe an arduous trek where the party of travellers must deal with dense, overhanging trees, biting ants and a less than competent local guide. The sense of tense expectation in the short passage is both palpable and recognizable as the reader awaits the traveller's 'discovery'. Zika, however, confounding all expectation, abruptly informs us of a return to the travellers' base before they set off once more. The final comment on the expedition, 'at last, there's the top of the mountain' (55), gives no indication of whether the summit has been reached physically or just perceived.

Moments such as this, where content seems almost redundant in light of *Journal de route*'s apparent generic objective of describing and interpreting places visited, become noticeably more frequent in the final section of the text. Subtitles that earlier had underlined spatial progress through references to places visited, no longer fulfill this function. Thus, one subheading referring to a neighbourhood in Lomé in fact describes a moment of anger and frustration for Jane Rouch before segueing into an imaginary conversation where the narrator questions her about possible reasons for this. In the following episode, this develops into a presentation of a friend and fellow member of the travelling party, Illo Gaoudel, who has just been suggested as a possible cause of Madame Rouch's anger. His habit of 'entering into people's private lives' (41) then becomes an excuse to reproduce a letter



written by Gaoudel accusing Zika of fathering an illegitimate daughter and requesting him to forward material support. Zika's response, also reproduced, provides dates that prove this is impossible and concludes by sending best wishes to the young woman 'who gives birth after a month. I congratulate her. In a year's time I wish her twenty-four instead of twelve girls' (43).

These kinds of textual practices, as well as the inclusion of a small poem to a mouse, the insertion of subheadings that read like proverbs, and the uplifting final entry where Zika imagines his family's joyous reaction to his imminent return home, are a significant part of what makes *Journal de route* so distinctive. It would be wrong, however, to see the text's progressive shift towards them as a definitive move away from the generic identity of its title. Although there is no room here to do full justice to its modes of expression, even a restricted focus reveals that what we are dealing with is a specific type of generic hybridity resulting from the place the text occupies between orality and literature. This, then, allows the easy wit of *Journal de route*, its repetitions, proverbs, knowing 'performance' of genre, and even its redundancies to be identified as emerging from an oral culture where 'experience is intellectualized mnemonically' (Ong: 36).

More than anything, *Journal de route* exudes a sense of its travelling author's self-confidence and gently mischievous character. The result, I believe, is not the type of discursive conflict so frequently said to characterize postcolonial African writing but a far more unusual example of harmony that enables Zika to bridge and merge very different formal traditions without denying the value of one or the other. An unexpected reversal underpinning *Journal de voyage* may explain this congruence. As Zika begins his journey, and his language betrays the 'errors' of its 'youth', his text reveals an explicit preoccupation with demonstrating knowledge of the generic rules being used to support an introduction to writing. As the journey progresses, his language

could be said to mature towards a type of linguistic conformity. With this development, however, comes an approach to writing that no longer seems to need the support of clear rules of genre. In conclusion, I would like to suggest that this confident use of genre as a guide or support for playful experimentation rather than a form of straitjacketing is the lesson to be learned for travel writers, travellers and critics seeking to find their own way.

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