This conference will reflect on the reciprocal relationship between the press and African literature of the 20th and 21st centuries. From colonial news bulletins to online magazines, via illustrated glossy magazines and daily papers created after the independences, the press has been a decisive mode of dissemination for African writers. Research in literary, social and cultural history has highlighted in recent decades the multiple contact points between the press and literary form on the African continent, though to more a limited extent in francophone contexts (Ricard, 1987; Lüsebrink 2003; Bosch-Santana, 2014; Thérenty 2014; Jaji, 2014; Peterson, Hunter et Newell, 2016). The press published in Africa has offered a significant space to African writers since the end of the nineteenth century. In the francophone context Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink’s pioneering work invites us to reframe early African literary history by expanding the canonical francophone African corpus. Elsewhere, Stephanie Newell theorises the innovation and creativity of authors and their publics in the press produced in British West Africa between 1880 and 1940. Beyond the colonial period, what continuities and discontinuities might emerge in the African press up to the present day?

Our primary focus in this conference will be on the presence of African writers in the press produced on the African continent, and/or aimed principally at an African or diasporic audience. While intellectual journals such as Présence Africaine or Black Orpheus and the South African magazine Drum, have been amply studied (Mudimbe, 1997; Helgesson, 2007; Frioux-Salgas, 2009; Arndt, 2016), newspapers (such as Dakar-matin, which became Le Soleil) and ‘big’ magazines (such as Bingo: l’illustré africain, Awa: la revue de la femme noire, Jeune Afrique, or in English, African Parade and Joe) have only recently begun to be analysed in terms of their interaction with contemporary literary production. These are crucial spaces where debates and social networks leave their trace alongside dynamic exchanges with oral and written literary texts (Frère, 1999).

Inscribed in a politicised public space, how does the press nourish African literary production via its references and intellectual debates, the impulse to entertain, certain rubrics and literary forms (poetry, conte, short stories, serialization), and the interventions of writers as journalists? What are the real and imagined geographical spaces of these publications in terms of their distribution, the location of their readership, their choice of language, and the space they reserve for a cosmopolitan imaginary? How does the ephemeral and often transnational character of the African press modify the inscription of literature in time and space, beyond dynamics of centre-periphery? How might the African press ‘world’ literature differently to the circuits of literary publishing located in the global North?

We welcome proposals drawing on empirical material: a periodical or a particular moment, specific journalists, authors or columnists and their writing styles in the press (and in turn what their subsequent or parallel literary writing might owe to that work in the press); analysis of literary texts presented in these publications in French, English, and African languages. Papers exploring methodological issues are also welcome: how can we study this abundant corpus (archives, digitization, databases, literary analysis, historical and social contextualisation)?

Further possible topics:

- The circulation of models, rubrics, texts (including from one language to another, on a diasporic and transatlantic scale)
- Modes of encounter, exchange and networking between writers, journalists, financiers, publishers
- The role of the press in the promotion, circulation, institutionalisation, and forms of African literature
Social trajectories and presence of African writers in the press: interviews, portraits, literary criticism, journalism

Please send abstracts (300 words) with a title and a short biography (50 words max) to: colloquepresseafricaine@gmail.com by 1 December 2017. The principal language of the conference will be French. We plan to publish a special issue from a selection of the papers presented.

The conference will take place on 19-20 March 2018 at the Université Paul Valéry, opening the second Semaine de la Francophonie. It is organised by Ruth Bush (Université de Bristol) and Claire Ducournau (Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier – RIRRA21), as part of an ongoing project on Popular print and reading cultures in francophone Africa, financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK). The project is in partnership with the Musée de la Femme Henriette Bathily, the Archives Nationales du Sénégal, and the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire-Cheikh Anta Diop.

Indicative bibliography:


