

**THE ART OF RE-MEMBERING THE SELF IN ALAIN MABANCKOU'S *THE LIGHTS*
*OF POINTE-NOIRE***

NYABUTO MAXWELL CHUMA

C50/34168/2019

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN
LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2023

DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been submitted for examination or award of a degree in any other university.

Signature 

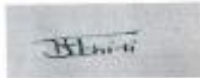
Date 20/09/23

Nyabuto, Maxwell Chuma

C50/34168/2019

This project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

First supervisor:



Signature

Date: 19/09/2023

Dr. Jennifer Muchiri

Department of literature

University of Nairobi

Second supervisor:

Signature 

Date 20/09/2023

Dr. Masumi Odari

Department of literature

University of Nairobi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Jennifer Muchiri and Dr. Masumi Odari for their guidance in this research. You encouraged me when I had lost belief in myself. You showed kindness when I was struggling and for that I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank the staff in the Department of Literature for the wonderful experience. I am grateful to Dr. Bhakti Shringarpure for her guidance in the early stages of my study. I am also grateful to my classmates Dan Kirui, Spourtinah Moraa and Elizabeth Monthe for checking up on me and encouraging me when I was derailing. You were a calming influence and for that I will be eternally grateful. I am also grateful to Dr. Ann Akoth Juma, Prof. Fugich Waqo and Mr. Robert Rotich of Egerton University who encouraged me to pursue post-graduate studies. Thank you, Dr. Ann for checking on my progress even after I had left Egerton. Finally, I am grateful to my family for being present through all my ups and downs. May God bless you all.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mom, Esther Onteri, and my dad, Nyabuto Chuma. Khalil Gibran, in *The Prophet* likens parents to a bow from which children as living arrows are sent forth. I could not ask for a better bow to launch my arrow. I pray my flight gives you happiness.

I also dedicate this work to my daughter, Ciel.

This work is also dedicated to my brothers and sisters: Reuben, Peter, Robert (Doc), Alex, Rachael and Eucabeth. Thank you for the love and support.

In memory of my grandfather, Hezekiah Chuma.

You taught us the value of education. Your lessons are not forgotten.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vii
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Definition of Terms	6
1.3 Statement of the Problem	7
1.4 Objectives of the Study	7
1.5 Hypotheses of the Study.....	7
1.6 Justification of the Study	8
1.7 Scope and Limitations	10
1.8 Literature Review	10
1.8.1 Life Writing.....	11
1.8.2 Review of Literature Related to <i>The Lights of Pointe-Noire</i> and Alain Mabanckou.....	13
1.8.3 Critical Perspectives on the autobiography.....	15
1.9 Theoretical Framework	19
1.10 Research Methodology.....	24
CHAPTER TWO.....	26
THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY	26
2.0 Introduction	26
2.1 Nature of the Autobiography.....	28
2.2 Motives and Functions of the Autobiography	35
2.3 The Nature and Functions of Autobiography as Portrayed in <i>The Lights of Pointe-Noire</i>	37
2.4 Conclusion.....	58
CHAPTER THREE.....	59
ARTISTRY IN RE- MEMBERING THE SELF IN ALAIN MABANKOU'S <i>THE LIGHTS OF POINTE-NOIRE</i>	59
3.0 Introduction	59
3.1 The Setting	60

3.2The Narrative	67
3.2.1 The Complexities of Return as portrayed in <i>The Lights of Pointe-Noire</i>	75
3.3 Plot	77
3.4Paratextual Elements	83
3.5 Narrative Voice	86
3.6Characterization	90
3.6.1Personalities	90
3.7 Conclusion	97
CHAPTER FOUR	99
CONCLUSION	99
WORKS CITED	102

ABSTRACT

The study examines how Alain Mabanckou employs art to remember and re-member the self in his memoir, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Mabanckou is a professional writer and therefore this study examines how he employs creativity to narrate the self. The study also examines how Mabanckou employs various autobiographical strategies to narrate the self. The objectives of the study are to: interrogate the elements of autobiography in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, evaluate the strategies of remembering and re-membering the self employed in the narrative and explore the issues Mabanckou addresses in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. This study is guided by two theoretical frameworks: the theory of autobiography and the theory of narratology. The study is divided into four chapters:- The first chapter forms the background of the study, the second chapter focuses on the nature and functions of autobiography and how they are portrayed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.- The third chapter focuses on how artistry is employed in Re-membering the self in the narrative and finally, the fourth chapter is dedicated to the findings of the research and the conclusion. The findings and conclusions derived from this research rely solely on the text under study.. The study focuses on how selected narrative elements help him communicate thematic issues. The study recommends further study on autobiographies by creative writers to examine how they artistically narrate their lives while addressing issues within their societies simultaneously.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The field of life writing has seen rapid growth in the past century. Paula Fass refers to this growth as a boom (1), memoir boom for instance, arguing that everyone is doing it, even not so famous or popular people. What Fass does not put in mind is the fact that life writing is a democratic genre and the fact that anyone can practice it is evidence of the democratization of the genre. For a long time one term, autobiography, had been used to group all forms of life narratives. The term autobiography was coined at the beginning of the 18th century and it is a combination of three Greek words, “auto” (self), “bios”(life) and “graphia” (writing). Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular the development of his personality” (4). Lejeune’s definition falls short only on the fact that it insists that an autobiography should always be in prose. This is not the case always because there are known cases of personal narratives written in lyrical form such as the Naguib Mahfouz’s *Echoes of an Autobiography*.

Laura Marcus defines the memoir as the narration of a particular set of experiences, and encounters or a specific aspect of the self (3).The memoir therefore, according to Marcus, is a collection of individual or personal memories reslated to particular events and/or experiences in the author’s life. Due to its specificity the memoir has sometimes been compared to travel writing. For purposes of this study, I define the memoir as a retrospective journey archived by an

individual in writing detailing his/her process of becoming as seen through specific experiences in the individual's life. This is the definition that will guide this study.

As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* observe, the life narrator interprets events and situations. He therefore imprints his subjectivity on issues concerning particular historical situations. That said, the life narrator thus tackles two lives. One life is the "real" elements of an individual living in the world that is the social and historical individual with successes, failures and social relationships. The other self is the self experienced only by the said individual which gives rise to a history of self scrutiny. The individual thus in writing their life narratives examines not only their own life but also the lives of those people and events around them.

Life narratives help the writer perform several rhetorical acts such as justifying their own perceptions about certain issues, sustaining their own standing, disapproving accounts of other individuals and settling scores and grudges. This has led to the categorizing of life narratives according to the motives that are central in the work. The motives for writing the story of the individual vary from one individual to another. Subjectivity is one of the core features of life writing. Every individual life narrative is specific to the narrator, who is also the subject in the narrative. Some life narratives may be confessions especially the religious ones as evidenced in *Confessions of Augustine*, a memoir by St Augustine of Hippo. Some may be apologies, exploratory, the egocentric or self-portraiture, transformational, the political and others may be written to pay tribute to important people in the narrator's life. It is not uncommon, however, for one narrative to combine several motives.

My study examined how Mabanckou re-members the events of his childhood in the Republic of the Congo. The study also identified how and to what effect his recalling and ordering of the narrative aided in telling his personal story and those of others. The study identified and discussed the strategies of narrating the self he employed to help him communicate his message efficiently. Elsewhere my study also discussed the thematic issues highlighted by Mabanckou in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

Alain Mabanckou was born in 1966 in the Republic of the Congo also known as Congo-Brazzaville and grew up in a coastal village, Pointe Noire, where his family had moved to decades earlier. He studied law at the Marien-Ngouabi University before he received a scholarship to go to France at the age of twenty-two. He received a post-graduate Diploma in Law from the Paris-Dauphine University and worked for the group Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux for ten years. He is currently a professor of French Literature at The University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA.

He writes exclusively in French. His works, however, have been translated and published in fifteen languages. Several translations of his works have been done in English. For purposes of this study I will use the English translations of his works. His translated novels are *Blue, White, Red* (2013), *The Negro Grandsons of Vercingetorix*(2019), *African Psycho*(2007), *Broken Glass*(2009), *Memoirs of a porcupine*(2011), *Black Bazaar*(2012), *Tomorrow I Will Be Twenty*(2013), *Black Moses*(2017), *The Death of Comrade President*(2020) and *Presence Africaine* (2001). There is also a translated collection of his poetry, *As Long as Trees Take Root in the Earth and Other Poems* (2021).

Mabanckou has drawn comparisons to Vladimir Nabokov in French literary circles. Acting in the same vein of comparison to canonical writers, Mabanckou has been referred to as “the Samuel Beckett of Africa” (The Economist, 2017) due to his unique word play, philosophical tilt and absurd humor that had defined the works of the Irish novelist who is best known for his play *Waiting for Godot* and who was a central figure in what was referred to as the “Theatre of the Absurd” by Martin Esslin (1960). Such comparisons while heavy point to the fact that as an author Mabanckou has deviated from the norm of African writing which primarily centered on ‘writing back’. Mabanckou has breathed fresh air into contemporary African, and Francophone, writing as evidenced in the form and theme of his works. For instance, his novel *Broken Glass* is peculiar in its minimal utilization of punctuation marks. Since he has gone against the traditional culture of writing back, he insists that African writers, and their cousins from the Caribbean, should draw motivation from their local realities since categories such as nation, race, and territory do not fully summarize reality.

Mabanckou is famous for his novels *Broken Glass*, *Blue, Red, White* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. He dedicated himself fully to writing when his first novel *Blue, Red, White* got published. The novel won him the Grand Prix litteraire d’Afrique noire in 1999. The award is one of the major literary prizes of Black Africa for Francophone Literature. The award is presented every year by the Association of French Writers (ADELF) for an original text in French from Sub-Saharan Africa. Since the publication of the novel, Mabanckou has been publishing regularly in prose and poetry. His novel *Broken Glass* originally published in French as *Verre Casse* earned him considerable fame and it got translated to English by Louis Henry Stevenson. *Broken Glass* is a comic novel that revolves around a former teacher Mr Broken Glass as he records the events in a bar that he is now a permanent fixture. The novel has been a

subject of several theatrical adaptations. In 2006 Mabanckou won the Prix Renaudot prize, one of the highest awards in French literature for his novel *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The novel is noted for its deep employment of magical realism through the main character Kibandi and his animal double, a porcupine. His 2009 novel *Black Bazar* set in an Afro-Cuban bar in Paris and it portrays the lives of characters from the many African diasporas of France. At the time of writing this project, Mabanckou has published seven poetry collections, several essays and novels, and a memoir.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire, his memoir, is written twenty-three years after he left the Republic of the Congo, on his return. The narrative was first published in French as *Lumieres de Pointe-Noire* and then translated into English by Helen Stevenson who has also translated some of his other works. The memoir details his return to the Republic of the Congo and the two weeks he spent there. This however does not suggest that the events in the memoir cover only the activities of those two weeks. The memoir, through memory, goes back in time to his childhood and the period of his growing up.

As noted by Marcus, not all autobiographers are writers by profession, though there is a widespread assumption that the literary autobiography best defines the genre, and that the peculiarities of the life story may be less interesting than the ways in which they are remembered or recounted (xvii). In the past critics were deeply concerned with the truth in autobiography. This explains why most autobiographies contained disclaimers and explanations in their prefaces and introductions to discredit accusations of egotism and to project altruistic motivations for writing. However, as Smith and Watson observe, “Former preoccupations of autobiography critics with the nature of this genre’s truth-value or the self’s struggle with identity have been displaced and a new emphasis on graphia has assumed central importance” (30). This therefore

suggests that the study of life writing should not be limited to history alone. Memoirs then are not only concerned with the passage of time but also by how this passage of time is re-membered or re-ordered to create a cohesive story.

The process of life writing is also a process of risk-taking. This is because the subject opens themselves up for scrutiny. As an African author who had deviated from the norm of “writing back” Mabanckou takes a risk in writing about his life because critics may try to find pitfalls in his memoir. However, Mabanckou perks up a graphic picture of a childhood that he has now lost- both culturally and politically. By inscribing his story and turning to his early years in the Republic of the Congo, Mabanckou creates a Congolese site of memory and continues this Congolese narrative in a personal tone.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Re-membering- The term was originally coined by the anthropologist Barbara Myeroff. Myeroff explains that “to signify (a) special type of recollection, the term ‘Re-membering’ may be used, calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one’s life story....” (111). In 1997 Michael White introduced the term into narrative therapy by developing the idea that people’s identities are shaped by what can be referred to as a “club of life” This acknowledges the fact that there are individuals in our life that have shaped our identity. Used in the context of the term thus signifies a special type of ordering the memory of an individual’s life while giving credit to and questioning the individuals and places that inform the individual’s being.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

There exists scholarship on Mabanckou's fiction but there is limited scholarship on his memoir. Studies on Mabanckou as a fictional writer have overshadowed studies on him as a life writer. Strategies of narrating the self and the nature and functions of autobiography are central to autobiographical discourse. However there are no detailed studies on these aspects with reference to Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. This study therefore, is interested in studying how Mabanckou re-members the self through recalling and re-ordering the events of his life. Since the memoir does not occur in isolation, this study also sought how Mabanckou employs his life narrative to portray the picture of his childhood and post-colonial Republic of the Congo in particular and Africa in general.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guide my study:

1. To interrogate the elements of autobiography in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.
2. To evaluate the strategies of narrating the self employed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.
3. To explore the issues addressed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

My study hypothesizes that;

1. The subject employs elements of autobiography in his memoir.
2. The memoirist employs various strategies of narrating the self in inscribing himself into the narrative of the Republic of the Congo.
3. The subject uses his life narrative to address both personal and global issues.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Mabanckou is famous for his fiction and essays. However, his memoir has not received the attention it deserves in literary circles. This has led to issues of definition with some even classifying it as travelogue. Classifying *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* as a travelogue alone understates the quality of this memoir. Studies in the memoir have revealed that one is likely to learn about the author's immediate environment from the memoir than he would do from reading other forms of life writing. This is because of the memoir's insistence on specific events. Through a study of his memoir one will gain valuable information that may come important even when studying his fictional works. A study of the memoir offers a guide into understanding the making of the identity and thinking of a writer who is perhaps the most important in Francophone Literature today. As this study will reveal, there are qualities in his character that justify this study. Present in memoirs is important information and lessons. Through the memoir the life of the individual is recorded and archived. Role modeling has for a long time been one of the key attributes of the self-life writing. A reader can look at the life of the narrator and use it to guide or to improve themselves, picking praiseworthy qualities and learning from the mistakes of the narrator. Autobiographies outlive the narrator and this desire to live forever or to be preserved for posterity has always motivated people to pen down their stories. Charles Darwin, for instance, wrote in the introduction to his 1876 autobiography that it was "an account of his mind and character attempted not only for his own amusement, but also because it may interest his own children or their children" (16). The memoir is a source of historical information depending on the period of its setting and the narrator's role in society and subsequently his involvement in the history of the period.

Life writing has for a long time been studied as an individual's interpretation of events in history and little attention was given to the author's employment of strategies of narrating the self. In recent times this has changed. However, there has not been a detailed analysis of artistry in Mabanckou's memoir. The issue of translation has also made very little material in life writing in Francophone Africa available to English speakers. My study therefore while not the first, seeks to add to the study of life narratives from Francophone Africa.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire is a memoir filled with information that can guide a reader in studying the relationship between artistic writing and the portrayal of culture and history. The narrative strategies employed in the memoir including the shift of point of view make it an interesting read and also peculiar in the sense that the point of view seldom shifts in life writing. Written by an individual who had exiled himself from the Republic of the Congo for over twenty years the narrative adds to the field of narratives of return but from a non-fictional point of view thereby authenticating the issues of return addressed in it. Having grown in Pointe-Noire and then coming back after a very long time Mabanckou becomes like an observer but who has an inside view because he knew what the Republic of the Congo looked like before he left and he can tell the difference between the Republic of the Congo that was then and the Republic of the Congo that is now. Through his gaze we are able to observe the changes and problems that afflict the Republic of the Congo specifically and Africa at large. His act of writing does not only highlight these problems but it also critiques them and shows possible ways of solving them. Being a writer, he employs strategies of writing which advance the issues he addresses seamlessly. The power of his writing strategies as used in this memoir may as well define memoir writing in Africa in the foreseeable future. The richness of this memoir thus necessitates its study.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The study is text bound and any reference to the author's other works is only be done for illustration purposes whenever necessary. That said this study is confined to the interrogation of Mabanckou's memoir and not his prose fiction, poetry or essays. This study avoids cross-referencing the author's fictional works because its primary concern is the author himself and the autobiographical form is best suited in revealing the true identity of the author. This also enables the study to have a sustained and focused discussion of the text with a view of attaining the study's objectives. This study interrogates the author's employment of strategies of narrating the self to portray himself, the issues addressed in the narrative and the narrative's fidelity to the genre of life writing. The study delves deeply into images that define the author's present in the narrative.

1.8 Literature Review

In this section I review three categories of literature: literature on life writing, critical perspectives on the autobiographical genre and literature on the author and the primary text. This include works that touch on the origins, nature and functions of the autobiography, critical works on the field and academic papers and reviews of the primary text. I also review interviews that the subject had given concerning the primary text and his private life. Interviews give him an extended discourse. Extended discourse used in this sense implies that interviews offered him a chance to clarify issues he may have missed in the memoir or make additions on issues he might have missed.

1.8.1 Life Writing

Many forms fall under the big field of life writing. They include autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and journals. Though related to them, the biography is somewhat distant because of the fact that the narrator in the biography is not the subject of the narrative. In some critical discourses all forms of self-life writing have been put under one umbrella term, autobiography. While the nature of the autobiography and its functions satisfy to a certain degree the contents of these other forms of life writing, it is wrong to put all forms of life writing under the category. This is because there are differences, though slight, between the autobiography and these other forms. Marcus points out the distinction between autobiography and memoir as being often drawn, or implied that the autobiography is a sustained and serious self-investigation and the memoir being a more outward facing record of experiences and events. Another critic, Jennifer Muchiri, adds to the distinction of the two forms by noting that the distinction between the two lies in intensity, that it depends on the amount of self-revelation contained in the memoir-the autobiography largely focuses its attention on the self, but the memoir devotes more attention to occurrences around and outside the writer. That said, it is evident then that a reader is more likely to learn more about the environment/society in which the narrative is set from a memoir than they would from an autobiography. The memoirist's story does not happen in isolation but is rather part of a larger story in which the writer and/or his subjects only played a part. This also explains the lack of intimacy seen in the memoir in comparison to the autobiography because the memoir does not bind itself to full divulgence as the autobiography does. Because of its lack of intimacy there have been questions on whether the memoirist should be taken seriously.

Judith Barrington in *Writing the Memoir* goes further to discuss the distinction between memoir and autobiography. She observes that autobiographies emphasize a lot on history and fact whereas memoirs focus on emotional experience and inner character. This points to the fact that the memoirist does not simply tell their personal story but rather tells the story and reflects deeply upon it, trying to decipher what it means in relation to the knowledge he/she holds currently. George Lucacs builds on this when he points out that one of the defining characteristics of the memoir is “the process of judging”. Judging in this case denotes the willingness, by the author, to create and express composite opinions, be they positive or negative. Writing in his memoir *Palimpsest*, Gore Vidal gives another perspective of distinguishing between the memoir and the autobiography. He notes that a memoir is how an individual remembers their own life, while an autobiography is history thus requiring double checking of facts. He further goes on to admit that though there are some memoirs that require fact checking, the facts that require verifying are not as important as those in autobiography.

The memoir and the autobiography also differ on the issue of scope. Other forms of life writing commit themselves to narrating the entire timeline of a person’s life as seen in the biography but the memoir structures itself on one feature of the individual’s life such as faith, disease etc. This has led to problems of distinguishing the memoir from travel writing in some instances. The autobiography narrates the entire timeline of the life of the author up to its narrative present. That said, it is evident then that the autobiography may be restricted by time but not by theme. The memoir however does not purport to detail a whole life. One important skill of memoir writing according to Barrington is the ability to choose a theme or themes that will hold the work together to give it cohesiveness. A well laid theme helps the author to avoid the urge to deviate to issues that have no bearing on the subject at hand.

Elsewhere, readers of memoirs can feel like they are reading a fictional novel instead of factual accounts of the life of an individual. This is because unlike autobiographies, memoirs include issues such as complex dialogue, detailed character descriptions and setting, issues which result in the generation of an engaging narrative like novels. This gives the author flexibility to embellish the story with style, though slightly, for narrative effect. This also explains why autobiographies are mostly written in a chronological order while memoirs usually move back and forth in time.

1.8.2 Review of Literature Related to *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and Alain Mabanckou

Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* keeps on alternating between the present and his childhood before he left for France. Paula Fass has referred to childhood as a favorite site of the memoir (108). This alternation between the past and the present is also affirmed by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall when she refers to memory as "recursive" (440). By recursive Hall argues that memory does not move in a straight line; it is repetitive by the fact that an event in the present might remind one of events in the past. Fass argues that the memoir does create 'personal geography' (111) in that it takes the reader back into the memory of the narrator and the memories of those around him. This journey back into memory captivates the reader as he/she begins to picture physical geographies such as the Pointe-Noire coast line, his mother's house and the Victory Palace Hotel where his father worked.

Kilatu Emmanuel in his doctoral dissertation, *Mystification and Demystification as a Bytrope in Alain Mabanckou's Writing*, explores how Mabanckou's literary works employ the elements of myth in narrative to mystify characters and issues and yet proceed to demystify them as the

narrative progresses. He did this by drawing examples from Mabanckou's works such as; *Blue, White, Red; Broken Glass, Memoirs of a Porcupine, African Psycho, Black Bazaar, Tomorrow I will be Twenty* and *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Kilatu is of the opinion that the employment of the technique of the myth in Mabanckou's works keeps the reader in suspense as he/she keeps on guessing over what would come next in the narrative(s) sustaining the narrative in the process(34). His study while focused on a single narrative technique will guide me as I study the employment of narrative technique in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and how it provides to the generation of theme and cohesion.

Anna- Leena Toivannen in *Uneasy "Homecoming" in Alain Mabanckou's Lumieres de Pointe-Noire* studies *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* as a travelogue. She is of the opinion that the text foregrounds the traveler's identity dilemma as is the case with most post-colonial travel writing. The narrator therefore is at a loss trying to negotiate their identity from two axes- the native versus tourist. Toivannen also discusses how the narrator tries to destabilize the centrality of the travelling I/eye and the confinement of his white girlfriend who is the photographer to the margins of the book. Toivannen thus studies the narrative entirely as a narrative of "dark return" which, according to Srilata Lavi in *Home and the 'failed' city in postcolonial narratives of 'dark return'* , "can be a useful lens to view how expatriated writers represent their travel to disadvantaged postcolonial urbanscapes, 'failed cities', where they once belonged" (1). Her study will guide me in my study when I will be studying the autobiographical subject and his characterization and interaction with the people and the environment around him when he returns to Pointe-Noire.

Kate Prengel, reviewing the narrative in wordswithoutborders.org refers to the narrator's account of his formative years as claustrophobic. According to Prengel, "reading the first chapters of *The*

Lights of Pointe-Noire is like being trapped inside the mind of a frightened child; they are full stories about his mother's superstitions"(1). Prengel observes that Mabanckou offers heavy dialogue but does not bother to comment on it. He creates an effect of tight control by repeatedly interrupting his accounts of painful reunions by weaving stories about his childhood. He therefore puts himself in a defensive crouch and for the duration of the narrative the reader remains in his hands. This goes further to point to the fact that despite the narrative being a memoir the author is in artistic control and this is something I intend to discuss.

Noticing the shift of focus from his first week, Prengel in Wordswithoutborders.org refers to Mabanckou as "an unusually generous memoirist" (1). This is partly due to the vast information the narrator offers the reader through his travel to the past and him comparing it to the present. My study evaluates the information given about Pointe Noire, the Republic of the Congo or Africa in general by this "unusually generous" memoirist. This will help me discuss the issues addressed in the narrative and how the narrator does this through the use of strategies of self-narration.

Kirkus, (2015), reviews *The Lights of Pointe Noire*. He describes the memoir as "a tender, poetic chronicle of an exile's return" (66). This points out to the language embellished in the writing of the memoir. On the same note, *The New Statesman* describes the memoir as a thoughtful, lyrical meditation on homecoming that artfully exposes the paradoxes of a narrator torn between his new life and the roots of his childhood- and a worthy addition to a rewarding body of work.

1.8.3 Critical Perspectives on the autobiography

James Olney in *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature* investigates the intentions and functions of autobiographies. He argues that life writing should display artistic and

deliberate creativity for it to have the element of appeal to readers. His arguments will help me in examining artistic elements in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

Ker Conway in *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* observes the risk taking nature of the autobiography in the sense that the autobiographer invites the reader to share the most personal and often times, embarrassing experiences of their lives that may relate to the readers' own lives. This risk taking process appeals to autobiographical truth, though subjective, which invites the readers to reflect on themselves(14). The fact that the author risks embarrassment by exploring negative events in their life will help my study in investigating the slips between fiction and truth in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. John Sturrock defines truth as "an inter-subjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of life" (29). The shared understanding may be evident in the effect that the narrative has on the reader. For instance, some narratives may arouse pity or empathy from the reader. Sturrock's assertion will help my study in differentiating elements of autobiography and elements of fiction in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

Henry Indangasi argues for artistry in *The Autobiographical impulses in African and African American Literature* where he explains that the autobiography does not just recount a writer's life story but also employs creativity to bring out truth. Indangasi recognizes the artistry of autobiography when he observes that the autobiographical subject through creativity brings out a higher truth. Indangasi observes that through the employment of literary features such as suspense, parallelism and flashbacks the autobiographer reshapes the facts of his life. Indangasi's arguments are important to my study because the mentioned artistic elements make up part of the creative artistry I investigate in my study.

Muchiri in *Women's Autobiographical writing in Independent Kenya* investigates the female autobiographical voice in independent Kenya and discusses the social issues female writers express in comparison to their male counterparts. She also makes a point of discussing the relevance of artistry in autobiography. She observes that autobiographers' employment of aesthetic craft in the telling of their stories is deliberate. According to Muchiri then, it is important to consider aspects of art such as theme, characterization, the plot etc. when studying the autobiography as a literary form. Her arguments guide my study in interrogating how Mabanckou employs artistry in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and to also identify the themes he advances in the memoir.

Muchiri in *The Intersection of and History in Kenyan Autobiographies* observes that the autobiography “the autobiography allows writers to not only narrate their life experiences but also to weave their personal stories into those of their societies and nations” (7). According to Muchiri therefore, to read an autobiography is to read the self as narrated by the autobiographical subject as well as to examine the history of the subject's society. My study will seek to examine how Mabanckou tells the story of his Congolese society while telling his own story.

Simon Munga in his MA Project titled “Self Inscription in *Becoming by Michelle Obama*” investigates gender, race, class and narrative technique. Munga asserts that “an autobiographical narrative is not an accidental wrapping of stories together that capture the growth of the subject, but an artistic construction and arrangement of events and sections that conform to literary expectations— or rather, the strategies that elevate it as a work of art” (89). His study in narrative technique will guide me when I investigate how Mabanckou employs narrative techniques in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

Nyantino Bernard in “Representation of Memory in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Dreams in a Time of War* and Wole Soyinka’s *Ake: The Years of Childhood*” discusses how Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong’o narrate their childhood experiences. He inquires how the memory of childhood configures the awareness of the two autobiographical subjects as individuals and their communities at large. He studies Ngugi’s and Soyinka’s employment of certain fields of memory to retell their childhood. These fields include the family, their respective countries’ colonial history, school and use of pictures to authenticate their claims. His study, which centers on memoirs, will guide me in studying how memory is artistically employed in the memoir, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

Since my study is concerned with the study of the author’s model of the world I took it upon myself to study Charles Njanjo’s MA project “A Critical Analysis of the use of Space in *Aminata Forna The Devil that Danced on Water*”. Noticing the minimal use of space as a tool for literary criticism and stylistic criticism’s dependence on aspects of journey motif and symbolism Njanjo shifts to focus on space. My primary text focuses on a character who can be labeled a traveler as evidenced in his crossing of continents, from Africa, Europe and finally America. My study will therefore investigate the influence of geographical space and ideological space on the subject. I will focus on how living away from the Republic of the Congo influences his view of the Republic of the Congo in particular and Africa at large and how he views the ideologies of those that remained in comparison to his.

Jeniffer Otieno in “Autobiographics in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Dreams in a Time of War; Childhood Memoir* and *In the House of the Interpreter* argues that “autobiographies portray certain qualities that show them as works of art.”(vii). She goes on to assert that life writing is a

creative work by the subject. Her thinking will guide me in investigating artistic elements in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

The literature review reveals a dearth in studies of Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* and his use of narrative strategies to not only tell his personal story and that of the Republic of the Congo but also stay true to the nature and functions of the genre of life writing.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Two literary theories provide the framework for this research: the theory of autobiography and the theory of narratology. The term narratology is credited to the Bulgarian-French historian Tzvetan Todorov. He introduced the term in 1969. The German historian Wilhelm Dilthey is credited for the development of the theory of autobiography. The theory of autobiography is interested in the nature and functions of autobiography while the theory of narratology is interested in the study and analysis of texts. As Charles Berryman Observes "at the beginning of the past century Georg Misch was almost alone in devoting his scholarly life to the study of autobiography (13). Before then the discipline was ignored or considered not worth studying.

The first appearance of the word autobiography in a title was in the 1832 edition of *The Autobiography of William Shepard*. Before then life writing went by different terms such as memoir and confessions. Wilhem Dilthey has been hailed as the father of autobiographical criticism. In 1883 he made the proclamation that "autobiography is "the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life confronts" (85). In so saying Dilthey gave credit to the instructive or role modeling role of the autobiography. In 1981, which is fairly recent, Albert E. Stone described the study of autobiography as an important new field, for

scholars and critics (17). About fourteen years later in 1995 Robert Smith in his study *Derrida and Autobiography* remarked that, “The theory of autobiography has become a very well-trodden terrain. So much so, in fact, that there are now not only many theories of autobiography, but there is also a growing number of theories of those theories” (51). This shows the advancements autobiographical theory has made in such a relatively short time.

The theories of autobiography are critical to my assessment of the nature of the memoir, autobiographical memory (individual and collective), autobiographical truth and the influence of the fields of identity formation on the subject. The tenets of the theory of autobiography include intentionality, the motives for writing the narrative, the ethics, memory and autobiographical truth. These concepts lie at the centre of understanding and interpreting artistry in any autobiographical work. Dilthey emphasizes on unity of plot and coherence, factors that are understood in terms of relations of parts to the whole. Unity and coherence according to Dilthey can only be achieved through interaction with certain elements of form like plot, characterization, setting and voice.

Writers of autobiography are propelled by the urge to write the self. While doing this, the autobiographical subject must offer a truthful recollection of their lives. Most autobiographers include disclaimers in the introduction to their autobiographies to show that their writing was not motivated by mercenary intentions. The principle of intentionality, according to Linda Anderson in *Autobiography*, connects the author, narrator and protagonist. This is because an autobiography with mercenary intentions may lose coherence evidenced through cohesion of the narrative and discredited through a historical analysis of the narrative.

Smith and Watson in *Reading the Autobiography* define autobiographical truth as the inter-subjective exchange between the narrator and the reader aimed at producing the meaning of life. Their definition goes hand in hand with Philippe Lejeune's assertion that life writing is a pact between the reader and the writer, a pact strengthened by truth in this case. Roy Pascal opines that the element of truth can only be established through intensive study. How a writer orders/ remembers his stories largely contribute to the idea of truth. This ordering contributes to unity in the narrative hence truth. Muchiri argues that truth is evaluated through seriousness of personality and intention of writing. She goes on to give three standards of truth; subjective truth, that is the unique truth of life as it is seen and understood by the individual; historical truth, that is the truth that can be verified through history; fictional truth, that is artistry. Muchiri goes further to observe that truth is cultivated through cohesion for instance in the consistency of narrative voice.

Selectivity is another aspect that the autobiography relies on. The autobiographical subject deliberately selects what to include or exclude from the narrative. This selectivity determines where and how the autobiography starts and ends. For instance, some memoirs detail the life of an individual up to a certain age. Some may begin from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood.

Memory and experience are also central in the theory of autobiography. A life narrative is highly dependent on memory since it is a process of the subject recollecting lived experiences. The autobiographical subject has authority of experience because he has lived the experiences he is talking about. Muchiri argues that "the experience presented in the autobiography is not merely personal but an interpretation of the past and the author's in a culturally and historically specific

present. Autobiographic narrators therefore do not predate experience, but instead they come to be through experience” (46).

Mark Freeman in *Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative Inquiry* describes autobiography as, “the best of its kind when making an inroad into enquiring the potent attributes as well as the big challenges of narrative inquiry, or at least that part of narrative enquiry that looks to the entire lives as an important tool for understanding the human condition”(55). Freeman’s assertion suggests the ability of the autobiography to help the reader understand the human condition and to point to the universality of the human condition. However, he is wrong when he suggests that it looks to the comprehensive lives because it is not possible to look into the comprehensive life of an individual. The autobiography details the comprehensive life of an individual as per the moment of writing the story. It may also detail a certain part of the individual’s life.

Georges Gusdorf in his work *Conditions and Limitations of Autobiography* suggests that “autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist” (30). Gusdorf acknowledges the role of individuality in the crafting of the narrative of the self. He goes on to argue on the necessity of writing the individual story saying that each individual matters to the world, each life and each death since the testimony of an individual about themselves enriches the common cultural heritage. However as Sidonie Smith observes, Gusdorf equivocates when he says this because it is ironical that despite the foundations of life writing being the individual the knowledge relayed is communal or collective since an individual does not exist in isolation. According to Smith the normative definition of autobiography lies in the “relationship of the autobiographer to the arena of public life and

discourse” (71). My study thus will seek to study how the individual’s being is informed by the collective.

James Olney in *Metaphors of the Self* suggests that direct first-person testimony in previously unexplored areas provides the reader with immediate entry into experience otherwise foreign and inaccessible. As he goes on further to observe, there has been a shift of attention from bios (life as historical span, as life course, as biography) to autos (life as the unfoldment and realization of the self). He credits the opening things up and turning them to a philosophical, psychological and literary direction to this shift.

Katherine Nelson in the *Self and Social Functions: Individual Autobiographical Memory and Collective Narrative* observes that the cultural and social milieu within which they are situated determine the functions of life stories. According to Nelson then, the personal and the cultural are both functionally and culturally related (1). She makes this claim in relation to the relationship between memory as an individual function and narrative as the medium of shared memories, collective memories and fictional creations (1). Nelson’s views will help me decipher the motives and intentions of *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

William Spengeman (1980) traces the forms in regard to the shifting ideas about the nature of the self which he sees in terms of history, philosophy and poetry (xiii). Each of these ideas defines a stage in the development of the genre; “Historical autobiography” takes a sort of self-knowledge based upon a true and solid account of the past, “Philosophical autobiography” occurs when a changing self occurs that is determined by present and past circumstance, finally “Poetic autobiography” comes into being when the self is represented only through the performance of symbolic actions. These views by Spengeman were a response to the gaps left in the field of the

study of autobiography by early critics such as James Olney. His views will be important to my study as I try to examine the growth of the autobiographical genre.

The theory of narratology is concerned with the study and analysis of text. Proponents of the theory argue that making up a narrative are components called the fibula. These elements include the characters, events, time, space and point of view or focalization. Characters occupy a central role in a story according to narratologists. The story thus takes place in a space detailing the events around the characters. Narratologists argue that narratives are presented in different media and language is only one of them. This will help me situate the place of paratextual elements in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Paratextual elements are elements outside the story that may be included in the memoir to support or corroborate the author's claims. In this context, photos are the paratextual elements whose importance in the narrative I will situate through the use of the theory of narratology.

According to narratologists, all narratives tend to have gaps. These gaps can be detected through omissions and silences. Selectivity is one of the tenets of the theory of autobiography. While the memoir is selective and chooses particular events in the author's life, the theory of narratology will help me investigate these gaps and try to understand why Mabanckou chooses specific events in his life and leaves others out.

1.10 Research Methodology

This study relies on textual analysis for interpretation. It begins with a close reading of *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* which formed a foundation for this research. A study of the principles of theory of autobiography guide my analysis of the primary text since they help me identify and appreciate the nature and functions of autobiography in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. The theory

of narratology also guides my study in studying the employment of strategies of narrating the self in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. I then carry out library research for past research projects discussed in the literature review. An interaction with the works of critics who have undertaken studies in this genre guides my study. Information from electronic sources is also utilized in my study.

My analysis of the text informed my conclusions. This was so because textual analysis takes precedence over the opinions the writer made after the publication of the memoir. This is also the case with interviews he gave concerning the narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the nature and functions of autobiography. It defines key terms in life writing such as memoir and autobiography. It also draws a line between the two terms showing their similarities and differences. The chapter also discusses the basic characteristics of the genre while giving the motives and functions of the memoir as portrayed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. The memoir is a non-fiction narrative based on the personal memories of an individual (the author). The memoir makes factual claims about the author. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the origin of the term memoir to the French term ‘memoire’ which means a written account giving the facts of a case under consideration. The case under consideration in this case is the life of an individual, the memoirist. That said, the memoir should not be taken as an historic account of events in a certain time. This is because the events narrated in the memoir are factual as per the author.

It is difficult to draw a clean line in the distinction between the memoir and autobiography as Roy Pascal observes in *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. This is because according to Pascal, all autobiographies are in some regard memoirs and there is no memoir without some autobiographical information (5). Both forms of life writing are based on individual experience, are arranged chronologically (in most cases) and are reflective. The difference between the two lies in the author’s general attention. The author’s attention in autobiography is towards the self while in the memoir it is on others. However, as Muchiri observes, the “memoir is more popular because it purports to offer an insider’s perspective on a sphere to which the common reader

ordinarily has little access” (60). This is because of its specificity. The memoir tends to give more information about a specific event/time in the writer’s life. As a result, Muchiri goes further to observe that the memoir lacks intimacy because it does not focus more on the author’s feelings, memory or motions as the autobiography does(63).

William Zinsser in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* defines the memoir as a portion of a life (21). The memoir is a portion of a life because it is unlike the autobiography which details the autobiographer’s life from birth to achievement/fame. The autobiography does not omit anything significant. The memoir, in most cases, ignores most of the life and focuses on a particular event or time. The memoirist thus takes the reader on a journey back to a corner of his life that was remarkably vivid or intense. Smith and Watson argue that “ a biography or autobiography tells the story of a life while the memoir tells a story from a life” (198). This is important because in so doing the memoirist narrows the lens achieving a focus that cannot be achieved by autobiography. The memoir therefore is a “window” into the narrator’s life.

Pascal observes that a memoir’s attention is put more on others than the subject. While reviewing the autobiography of William Butler Yeats, in *W.B Yeats- Ireland’s Grand Old Man*, Leonard Strong observes that “...it is probably better to take these papers not as an account of the man who was all the time a poet.... But as a record of people and things he thought important” (439).This points to the fact that the memoir gives accounts of not only the people but also the places and objects the author values. This may include people, events and places he interacted with at a certain point in his life that he considers life changing. These people, events and places are centres of identity formation for the memoirist.

Noticing the memoir's hesitancy to define the confines between the public and the private, the subject and the object, Nancy Miller in *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* refers to the memoir as fashionably postmodern (2). This is because Miller observes that the memoir has led to a change on the people who engage in writing about their life. Some people who engage in writing the memoir are not successful or role models in society as were the case in the past. Miller does not sit alone in questioning the memoir's legitimacy since as Marcus observes, critics in the nineteenth century were worried that the 'vulgar' would engage in writing autobiography demeaning the value of the genre and that of the 'legitimate autobiographical class' (31). The legitimate autobiographical class were those with a reputation or with something of historical importance. These social distinctions were carried across literary distinctions. The memoir as a result occupied a lower order than the autobiography because it lacked the 'seriousness' displayed in the autobiography.

2.1 Nature of the Autobiography

The autobiography is an example of a bildungsroman story, that is, a coming-of-age story. This is because, in most cases, the autobiography focuses on the growth (psychological, physical and moral) of the protagonist (the autobiographical subject) from childhood to adulthood. Change is central in an autobiographical narrative. The subject in an autobiography grows from a point of innocence to experience. The centre of interest in life writing is on the self. This however does not negate the role of the outside world in life writing because it is through the interaction with the outside world that the personality finds its specific shape. The life narrative constructs a coherent story out of an imposed pattern of a life. It identifies specific periods and stages of an individual's life and defines the relationship between them and the making of the individual that is at the time of writing. An autobiographical writer takes a specific point of view from which

they interpret their life. This point of view may be their social position in society, the achievements they own or their current philosophy.

Life writing is dependent on memory. Memory contains experiences. As Anderson observes, "...memory exists beyond time and comprehension: it is greater than what it contains. It is transcendent" (108). Transcendence in this case means that autobiographical memory surpasses or goes beyond the times and experiences of the autobiographical subject. Autobiographical memory attempts to bridge the gap between whom the subject was and who they are now. Life writing thus is a process of recollecting and re-collecting. The subject engages in a process of remembering past events and putting these events in order to give rise to a coherent story. Life writing does not only reconstruct the past but it also interprets it. It brings together the scattered pieces of personality through memory and then proceeds to interpret them. Through memory the past reality is reflected upon and its specific social configuration brought into view.

Memory is both a source and an authenticator of autobiographical acts. Smith and Watson observe that, "... in the act of writing, the writer becomes both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembering and contemplation" (1). The autobiographical writer depends on memory and recollections to reconstruct and interpret their identity. Since the past can never be fully recovered, narrated memory offers an interpretation of the past. Memory does not replicate events of the past but rather records them.

Memory is contextual in the sense that the autobiographical writer tends to dedicate themselves to specific experiences that are important in their own view. Therefore, the remembering acts occur at specific sites and in specific circumstances. The writer thus selects what they consider important in the interpretation of their life and ignores what they do not consider monumental.

This selection is affected by the motive of the autobiography and it is important in assessing truth.

A good memoir catches a distinctive period in the life of the writer and their society. It is thus also a work of history. Memoirs have a tendency to dedicate themselves to particular events in the subject's life. The memoir thus is a personal history that attempts to articulate the historicity. It places the self relative to time, history, culture and change. As Leonard Strong observes, "It is true of all autobiographies that, I think, that they have in them, in some measure, the germ of a description of the manners of their time" (424). This points out that life writing reflects or communicates to varying extents the history of the period that the writer focuses on.

Memory is an active process. This is because the writer in the process of remembering actively reinterprets the meaning of the past. The writer uses memory to attempt to return to the sources of their outstanding achievements. In so doing they try to recover/restore what has been lost. Some memoirs fall into the category of travel books. As travel books they put the author's "I" into motion, not permitting a fixed perspective, and re-viewing "home" from the eyes of a stranger.

Remembering is a collective activity to a certain degree. Remembering is an activity situated in cultural politics. There are communities of memory that inform our everyday life: familial, ethnic, racial, religious. These communities have developed distinct occasions, rituals and practices of recalling. Different technologies aid particular communities in their acts of remembering. These technologies include writing and electronic materials such as computers. The life narrator employs different ways of accessing memory. The sources of memory can be personal or public. The personal sources include dreams, photos, family stories and genealogy.

The public sources include historical events and collective rituals. The choice of a way of accessing memory is informed by its relevance to the life narrator's project, their audience or the aim of writing. While remembering therefore, the life narrator has to take into account those on whose behalf they are remembering.

Memory can be evoked by the senses. As a result, it is implicated in materiality. The senses of smell, taste, touch and sound may bring to surface a long forgotten memory. The evoked memories are encoded by objects or experiences or events that are monumental to the writer. For example, a certain object or smell might remind someone of a traumatic event in the past. The senses therefore act as a trigger which initiates the remembering act. This goes further to demonstrate the activeness of the process of remembering.

Life writing is anchored upon the assumption that the life narrator tells the truth about themselves. The writer of an autobiographical text is characterized by utterances they make in the text. As a result, it is not easy for them to lie. Life narratives may contain facts but this does not imply that they offer factual accounts of a particular period in history, person or event. The truth they offer is subjective. Lejeune argues that "two things indisputably distinguish autobiography and, by implication, a wide range of life narratives, from the novel: the "vital statistics" of the author, such as date and place of birth and education, are identical to those of the narrator; and an implied contract or "pact" exists between author and publisher attesting to the truth of the signature" (21). Life writing therefore according to Lejeune is a contract requiring the life narrator to tell the truth about their life. Truth in autobiography is categorized into historical truth, subjective truth and fictional truth.

Historical truth is truth that can be proved by history. The autobiographer cannot escape history as they re-member their life. As a result, their personal story converges with the history of others; individuals or collective groups. The claims an individual makes especially about roles they played in particular historical events can be verified by historical documents. Subjective truth is distinctive since it is the truth of life as is seen and appreciated by an individual. The sincerity of the writer (evaluated through his intention and seriousness) is used to cross-check subjective truth. Muchiri defines fictional truth as an autobiographer's deliberate employment of aesthetic craft when telling their story (52). Fictional truth in autobiography then judged on the basis of fidelity to art.

Cohesion fosters autobiographical truth. Cohesion in a narrative can be evaluated through the consistency of the narrative voice, character depiction and events. Life writing is a risk taking process. The life narrator airs their story to the public and this leads to the risk of bringing intimate personal stories and secrets to the public. Life writing therefore is a handshake between the writer and the reader. The courage to talk about oneself also aids in the cultivation of autobiographical truth. Paratextual elements such as letters, photographs and speeches also aid in cultivating the truth since they authenticate the life narrator's claims. This is also the case with autobiographical claims such as date of birth. By linking the narrative to the autobiographer's life paratextual elements guarantee its authenticity.

Experience is a key feature of autobiography. Experience is the practical contact with and observation of events. Autobiographical experience is an interpretation of the past and of the autobiographical narrator's place in a culturally and historically specific present. Joan W. Scott in *The Evidence of Experience* defines experience as "a process... by which subjectivity is constructed" (32). Through experience an individual becomes a certain kind of subject and owns

certain identities in society. The subject therefore does not have experiences but rather experiences constitute the subject. Autobiographical subjects therefore do not come before experience but they are made out of experience. Experience therefore cannot be predated.

Muchiri argues that experience is authoritative since it is the primary source of evidence asserted in life writing (47). It is on the basis of experience that readers are invited to consider the life narrators a uniquely qualified authority. According to Muchiri, authority of experience serves an assortment of rhetorical purposes: It compels the reader's belief in the narrative's authenticity; it validates autobiographical claims as truthful; it offers a justification for writing and publicizing the narrator's story; and it invites the reader's belief in the habitual truthfulness of the narrator.

Claims to authority of experience can be both implicit and explicit. Implicit claims can be as obvious as the writer's name on the title page. This is the case for public figures and celebrities. Their names on the title page announce credibility. Implicit claims to authority of experience assure the reader of the authority the writer has to tell his story. They also assure the reader that he will find the story a credible revelation. Explicit claims to authority of experience can be made by individuals outside dominant culture. These can be made by individuals who are unknown. Their lack of public status marginalizes them. Such appeals are made on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, religion or nationality. In such cases then a "voiceless" narrator is given voice. Authority of experience is negotiated since not all experience is given recognition or legitimacy. The public figure is easily bestowed the 'authority' of experience unlike the marginalized voice. As a result, authority of experience is negotiated through engagement with skeptical readers who may also be hostile to the narrator in some instances.

Selectivity is a key feature of the autobiography. The motive of the autobiographer determines what he reveals and what he conceals. Abbs argues that “an author deliberately selects what to include in their autobiography” (8). The memoir is also selective since it selects a “corner” or a period of in the life of the autobiographical subject and narrates about it. This may be traumatic experience or a period in the life of the writer that had a huge impact on him as a person. The reader can observe silences, omissions and consistencies in the story. These can be used to evaluate the truth in the story and also assess the credibility of the narrator. The autobiographical writer is consciously aware that he is narrating his story to an audience. The audience in this case is the reader. As a result, the autobiography takes the form of an oral testimony.

Autobiographies written by black people and Africans are important in providing communal experiences for the communities of the narrating subjects. As Stephen Butterfield observes in *Black Autobiography in America*, black autobiography cannot simply be categorized as a “kind of manual of how to achieve power, wealth and fame” (8). It is crucial to know that by writing a personal memoir, African-Americans do more than simply summarize their lives or direct their readers on how to behave themselves. Rather, black autobiographies often provide their African-American readers with a sense of group identity and attempt to give meaning to their existence. According to Butterfield the self in black autobiographies is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group, giving back the iron of its endurance fashioned into armor and weapons for the use of the next generation of fighters (5). The appeal of black autobiographies is in their political awareness, their empathy for suffering, their ability to break down the division “I” and “you”, their knowledge of oppression and discovery of ways to cope with that experience, and their sense of shared life, shared

triumph, and communal responsibility. The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self (4).

2.2 Motives and Functions of the Autobiography

Motives determine the type of autobiography. The autobiographical act is triggered by the motives of the autobiography. It is not uncommon for an autobiography to combine a variety of motives. However, it is not possible to find a common motive in different life stories. Some autobiographies are confessions. In this type the autobiographical writer writes to unburden himself of a feeling of guilt. Crime autobiographies are an example of confessional autobiographies.

Other autobiographies are exploratory. In this case the autobiographical narrator uses his story to investigate his unexplained behavioral patterns. There are also autobiographies that are apologies. In the apology the autobiographical narrator attempts to declare or justify their actions and choices at particular moments in history or in their lives. Autobiographies are also egocentric. They aim at self-portraiture. The autobiographical writer believes that through their experiences and achievements, their story is worth telling.

Some autobiographies are stories of transformation or achievement. They are a result of a change of environment in the writer's life, the attainment of an ambition or an undertaking, the endurance of something intense like disillusionment, war, serious illness or injustice and some are a result of the realization of a mission. A maturing of the philosophy of life of the narrator may also trigger the writing of the story of the self. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in *This Child Will be Great* writes to inscribe her achievement as the first female president in Africa and the fulfillment of the prophecy by her grandfather that she would become great.

There are also autobiographies motivated by politics. The political autobiography gives the writing subject the opportunity to justify his decisions and also sell his ideas to the reader. It also extends his discourse in the sense that it gives him the opportunity to clarify issues or utterances he made in the past that may have been misunderstood.

Other autobiographies offer tributes to important people in the autobiographical narrator's life. They include forms such as patriography or the writing of fathers. These types of autobiographies function as biographies since they focus a lot on another figure other than the subject. Ken Wiwa's memoir *In the Shadow of a Saint* focuses on the life of his father, Ken Saro Wiwa, Nigerian human rights activist who was killed during the reign of Sani Abacha.

Autobiographies employ special artistry or creativity. This is the case with life stories written by professional writers. Unlike the autobiographies written by individuals who are not writers by profession, the autobiographies of professional writers employ style in narrating their life stories. This is the case with the primary text of this research. The late Kenyan writer and critic Binyavanga Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write about this Place* is an example of a special artistry autobiography.

Autobiographies perform several functions both to the narrator and to the public. For instance, they fulfill the writer's desire to be heard. They give the autobiographical writer a voice. Individuals with no voice get to be heard through writing. Through this they get the chance to define themselves against stereotypes held by others. The autobiographical act also helps the autobiographical narrator establish and clarify the connections between the individual and their society. The autobiography also enables the writer to justify perceptions. It also helps them uphold their reputation, reinvent a desirable future and convey cultural information.

Some autobiographies are therapeutic. As Muchiri observes, “Autobiographical acts can be therapeutic both for people suffering from traumatic memories and for readers” (70). This is the case for individuals narrating traumatic experiences such as rape, female genital mutilation and war. They are survivor stories. This is because the autobiographical subject survived dehumanizing events. Through writing the autobiographical subject is able to come to terms with their pain. The reader is also able to relate their own experiences with those of the narrator. As a result, the autobiographical narrative becomes a form of therapy both for the writer and the reader.

2.3 The Nature and Functions of Autobiography as Portrayed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*

There are several features present in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* that make the narrative a memoir. This study examines some of these features to examine the extent to which the narrative is autobiographical in both form and content. I do this through a critical analysis of the text with guidance from the theory of autobiography.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire employs the I- narrative voice. The I-narrative voice indicates that the narrator is talking about himself and relaying events that he was involved in or heard from sources he quotes in the narrative. The I- narrative voice gives the narrative credibility by cultivating truth and imploring the reader to believe in the narrator since he is the primary source of the events in the narrative. The life writer therefore is both a witness and an actor who remembers the events through introspection and retrospection. The narrator therefore owns the events in the story by making it about himself. Mabanckou begins his memoir by admitting that he had misled people into believing that his mother was alive for a long time. He writes the narrative to correct this wrong. “For a long time I let people believe that my mother was alive. I

am going to make a big effort, now, to set the record straight, to try to distance myself from this lie, which has only served to postpone my mourning” (1).

From the illustration it is evident that the memoirist is about to divulge events about his life that he has never exposed before. These are events he owns because he took part in them as an individual. He has postponed mourning his mother for a long time and now he wants to expose why.

The I- narrative voice is limited by the fact that the narrator, who acts as an eyewitness, can only know and bring to light what he only sees and what is on his mind. He cannot see or feel everything. Mabanckou remedies this by introducing dialogue and reported speech. When he is about to leave for France, his mother remarks that her cousin, Adele, was right. He does not remember who this cousin Adele was. His mother goes on to tell him that she was a nasty gossip that his mother used to tell him about when he was younger. This dialogue aids the narrator in talking about events he himself did not participate in. He credits his mother for relaying the events before his birth to him. The events include the prophecies of Adele.

In some instances, the I- narrator attains omniscient status and deciphers what goes on in other character’s minds. He relays the events in his mother’s mind on the day he was born:

She looked on me as an extension of her existence, the ray of hope at the end of an infinitely long tunnel. I was the indisputable sign of the immortality she imagined she would finally achieve the day I emerged from her womb in a run-down building in the maternity hospital in the Mouyondzi district, that both torrid and glacial night of 24 February 1966, while the moon struggled to lighten the darkness and the cocks were already crowing at the new dawn. Scarcely able to believe her own happiness, which even the memory of the disaster with my father could not

spoil, she anxiously placed her feverish hands on my chest to check I was still breathing,..(16).

This shows that the narrator deciphers what was going on in his mother's mind. This is impossible and thus shows the I-narrator attaining omniscient status.

Elsewhere when referring to the city of Pointe-Noire, Mabanckou says that he is walking through a city that has obsessed him for so long and that has borne the weight of his ingratitude (99). He gives the city human attributes besides talking about the fact that it has borne his ingratitude. In the penultimate chapter titled 'Farewell My Concubine' he refers to the city as a concubine. This further illustrates the fact that the narrator is able to decipher the resentment bears him without the city actually telling him so. The narrator in this case becomes all-knowing because he can tell how the city feels about him. The above illustrations portray the narrator negotiating the limitations of the I-narrative voice by becoming omniscient and reading the feelings and thoughts of his mother and those of his city.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire employs several ways of accessing memory. These include tracing his family's genealogy, dreams, photos, dialogue and taking journeys back to places he frequented as a child. These places were part of his fields of identity formation.

Mabanckou traces his family's genealogy through their history of migration from Louboulou to Pointe-Noire. He says that his family came from a village called Louboulou in the Bouenza district. At the beginning of the twentieth century his grandfather, Gilbert Moukila, became chief of Louboulou. His Grandmother was called Henrietta N'Soko. His grandfather was polygamous and he had twelve wives and over fifty children. Gilbert Moukila lived to the age of a hundred and twelve. His uncle Albert was the first to leave Louboulou and settle in Pointe-Noire. He worked for the National Electric Company. When he was set up in Pointe-Noire he invited the

rest of the family to Pointe-Noire starting with his younger brother Rene. His mother was the only member of the family to come to Pointe-Noire without the help of Uncle Albert. This further illustrates his mother's character as a strong independent woman. His mother was trying to forget the narrator's biological father who had left before he, the narrator, was born. The family settled in one street and his uncle had the authorities name it Rue de Louboulou in honor of the village his family had come from.

Through tracing his family's genealogy, the narrator remembers. This remembering also helps him situate himself as part of a whole. His interaction with each family member reminds him of early interactions he had with them as a child. He remembers the communal life they lived and the many people who frequented uncle Albert's house hoping to get some money from him. He also remembers the times he spent with his twin cousins Gilbert and Bienvenue. When he meets his uncle Jean-Pierre Matete he remembers the time he visited the Bouenza district as a child. By tracing his family genealogy Mabanckou also honors and immortalizes them.

Dreams are important in remembering. As Edward Pace observes in *Dreams and Narrative Theory*, dreams are a story telling instinct (1). Dreams create new stories where they did not exist. They extend the plot and reveal events. James Fosshage in *The Dream Narrative, Contemporary Psychoanalysis* argues that dreams reveal the dreamer's innermost concerns explicitly or metaphorically (251). Fosshage goes further to argue that an individual dreams of their innermost concerns: attempts to resolve conflict, to self-regulate, to regulate affect, to envision, reinforcing threatened patterns of organization, to preserve new experience and to integrate new learning (253). Mabanckou employs dreams in his narrative. He says that in his most troubled dreams his mother turns her back on him so that he does not see her tears. It is these troubled dreams that keep the feelings of guilt in him. As a result, he makes the decision to

write this memoir to come to terms with her death and to mourn her properly in the process. This dream about his mother communicates his innermost concerns. He feels that he betrayed her by leaving and never coming back when she was alive. He fears she might be doing the same in his dreams.

On his return to Pointe-Noire he dreams that he had grown wings and flown over the Mayombe forest to Les Bandas where his mother had bought a large field of manioc and maize. His mother had also built a hut in the field. In the dream, his uncle Jean-Pierre Matete asks him to do something about the field. This was because Les Bandas was no longer a village; a motorway went there, en route to Brazzaville. This dream helps him remember his mother's field in Brazzaville. Since he does not have sufficient time in the narrative present to visit the farm the dream is his way of visiting it and including it in the narrative. The dream is also an immediate response to the realization that his mother's land was being stolen gradually by their neighbor. He knows that that a conflict would arise if he had confronted the neighbor about the land. The dream therefore is an attempt to avoid and resolve conflict by doing something on the land in Mayombe to avoid a similar case.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire is filled with nostalgia and retrospection. He fondly recounts his journey to Louboulou as a child. He remembers an event that he claims he will never forget that happened while he was in Louboulou. His uncle took him hunting and they had an encounter with deer. His uncle prays before a hind and stag. Later that night Mabanckou dreams about the hind and stag but this time they are accompanied by a younger one with a human head that resembles him. His uncle Matete interprets the dream for him the next day. He came to learn that the hind and stag are his family's totemic animals. They represent their animal doubles. He swears to his uncle that he would never eat deer meat and he keeps that promise even as an adult.

He also gives a sample of his urine to his uncle to take back to his animal double back in the forest. Nielsen in *Dream Images: A Call to Mental Arms* observes that indigenous animist societies believe dreams represent a separate world, parallel with real waking life (1). The dream therefore represents a parallel life in Mabanckou's existence. In a parallel life, Mabanckou's family is a family of hinds and stags. By keeping the promise Mabanckou proves that he has not lost his identity and belief in his society's ways of life. He still identifies with the deer and respects the belief so much that he gives a sample of his urine to be taken back to his animal double.

Memory can also be evoked by the senses. When he goes back to visit his Lycee, Mabanckou claims that he has a feeling of inconsolable apprehension. This feeling reminds him about how he felt when he first joined the Lycee. It reminds him of how he was dressed on his first day to the Lycee and the extra attention his mother took polishing his shoes. It also reminds him about the feeling of alienation he had after joining the Lycee; "I remember how I felt in this Lycee, as though I had been parachuted into a different world, nervous like a little fledgling, lost among other species of flying creatures whose wings are already properly formed" (125). This also shows the feelings of (un) belonging he had. It also traces the sources of the solitude stance he took while studying in the school.

Mabanckou attaches photos in his narrative to provide credibility to the narrative by supporting his claims. He attaches a photo of himself, his mother and Papa Roger sitting in a chair. He says that looking at the photo in the present he cannot help but notice that his mother dominates the picture. The photo goes on to prove that his mother also dominated his life since her memory keeps haunting him. He also attaches a photo of the street sign of Rue de Louboulou. This is done to validate his claims that the street was named after the village his family originated from.

He also attaches a photo of his father's work card from the Victory Palace Hotel. This supports his claim that his dad worked in the hotel. To prove that his encounter with the prostitutes in the Three-Hundreds is not fictional he attaches a photo from the newspaper article in which the prostitutes aired their complaints.

The memoir relies on personal experience. *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is based on Mabanckou's reflections. He retrospectively recounts the mystery of the miracle woman up in the sky. The miracle woman had laid down her life and taken upon herself the sins that came about as the result of the heedlessness of man. The miracle woman made this sacrifice a season after famine and drought afflicted most villages in Southern Congo. The famine was so bad that there was a rumor that in some tribes people fought for carcasses of the dead to be sure of at least a week's food. The old woman was blamed for the afflictions that befell the villages because she continued to sell food despite the drought and famine. To end the scourge the woman was sacrificed. With this sacrifice, the moon disappeared for a month and reappeared with a woman carrying a basket on her head.

The myth of the miracle woman is an example of folklore. Folklore plays a critical role in the narrative. Chelule in *Folklore and Identity in Joe Hamisi's Selected Works* defines folklore as a broad term used to refer to the expression of conventional knowledge, cultural practices, and expressions passed through word of mouth, imitation and demonstration, and custom (1). Folklore is associated with cultures with no written language or before the languages had gotten a written form. Folklore is expressed orally through forms such as folktales, legends, songs and proverbs.

Folktales play varied roles in society. Aili Nenola in *Gender, Culture and Folklore* argues that folklore, like written expression, is a tool for the maintenance or the challenge of the status quo prevailing within a society (23). Folklore therefore plays two roles. For instance, the women in the myth of the miracle woman disagree when the men decide that a woman has to be offered as a sacrifice to appease the divine wrath. The men counter this argument by arguing that it is only women that have the power to appease the divine wrath. The men were not given these powers. As Nenola further observes, myths are anchored in sacred history (27). They, therefore, cannot be questioned. Myths therefore justify the present reality, the reality of female oppression in the case of *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, by giving it a sacred origin. Due to its sanctity, the present cannot be questioned because it has the authority of a “historical explanation” from some time in the sacred past.

As mentioned above, folklore has also served to challenge the status quo. Huang Mei in *Transforming the Cinderella Dream: From Frances Burney to Charlotte Bronte* argues that folklore has functioned as a double-edged narrative because it has reflected both the woman’s subordination and her sense of individual dignity and self realization (11). Folklore therefore has shown instances of female advocacy in some instances. For instance, the myth of the miracle woman may be seen as a satirical attack of patriarchy and men’s control on women. The myth tells of how all men were scared to sacrifice themselves for the community. It also shows how a plenary of men alone decided to give a woman as a sacrifice. The story challenges the status quo by highlighting the plight of women in a male controlled society.

The portrayal of women in folklores is a subject of wide debates. Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will: Man, Women and Rape* opines that folktales stress the idea of woman’s victimization (3). Women are the victims in most folktales. Femininity is portrayed as evil. Women in folklore

are often times portrayed as witches. Folktales therefore portray the ways societies tried to silence women. The miracle woman in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is labeled a witch due to the mysterious source of her food. It is only women who can be offered as sacrifices because they were born with these powers. This however is a scheme to kill a woman instead of a man. The life of a woman is not considered important therefore. The women in the narrative are not weak; they are rather brave as evidenced in the women refusing to be offered as sacrifices. The miracle woman also shows her bravery by offering to die for the rest of humanity.

The myth of the mystery woman also shows the critical roles women have taken in society. Women are portrayed as bringers of life, and sadly, the ones who end it. Women, for instance the miracle woman, have sacrificed a lot for humanity. The myth also shows the foresightedness of women: it is the miracle woman who makes the 'announcement'. In the myth, women represent everything. They represent life and death. They also represent abundance and scarcity.

Mabanckou reflects that despite living away from his country for twenty-three years he still believes in the myth of the mystery woman. He observes that belief still remains intact in him and he has come to rever it so much that it resists the lure of reason. This is because he still believes the myth as an adult the same way he did when he was a child, experience and knowledge have not helped him discredit the myth. This is because the myth is anchored in sacredness. Reflecting on the life of his mother and the sacrifices she made for him he cannot help but feel that she has replaced the miracle woman in the moon. He puts his mother's sacrifices on the same pedestal as those of the miracle woman because to him that is what his mother was- a miracle woman who gave everything for him.

The memoir is noted for its tendency to include the stories of others in the story of one individual. One can learn more about the important people and events in the narrator's life from the memoir than they would do from other forms of life writing. Mabanckou does not limit himself to discussing himself in the text. He dedicates sections of his book to people who informed his life. By writing about them he pays tribute to them. These characters and people are still in existence. By writing about real characters and places he gives the narrative authenticity.

Mabanckou pays tribute to his mother. The narrative is dedicated to her memory. He writes to come to terms with her death and the fact that he lied about her death to people. He gives reasons for missing her funeral. First he still harbored a fear of corpses from childhood. When he left the Republic of Congo his mother was full of life and he feared seeing her lifeless body. As a child he believed that the dead first wandered the earth for a few weeks before departing. Before their final departure the dead haunted the living especially the children who had seen their bodies during the funeral rites. He wanted his last image of his mother to be that of her smiling face, that was full of life. Secondly, Mabanckou feared hearses as a child since they believed that the deceased peered out of the hearse to memorize the faces of those staring at them. The dead later haunted those faces they memorized. As a result, he sought an alibi; claiming that he lacked funds for the journey home. This however did not take away his feelings of guilt. He could not bear looking himself in the mirror for he could see the reflection of his ingratitude. Thirdly, Mabanckou misses his mother's funeral because he is still in denial. He has not come to terms with her death. He is still denying the fact that she is death.

By paying tribute to his mother, Mabanckou confesses his transgressions. He confesses that he has been lying about her existence. He also confesses that he willingly elected to miss her funeral. The memoir thus serves as a confession also. He confesses receiving calls from his relatives informing him of his mother's death. He also confesses refusing to receive the phone because he had not come to reality with her death and he was not planning to attend the funeral. By so doing, Mabanckou admits his guilt. He feels guilty for choosing not to attend his mother's funeral.

Mabanckou pays tribute to his mother because of the sacrifices she made to provide for him as a single mother who had interacted with tragedy. Two of her kids had died at birth. She never thought Mabanckou would survive. This was made worse by the fact that his dad had left her before he was born. She therefore had to fend for herself and her son on her own. She had made the journey from Louboulou to Pointe-Noire on her own and eked a living out of selling groundnuts and bananas in the Grand Marche. She wanted to forget Louboulou so she decided to live as a woman from nowhere in Pointe-Noire. The birth and the survival of the narrator symbolized immortality to her. As a result, she made sure he never lacked. She never exposed her problems to him though deep down he could tell that she faced occasional challenges in her trade. He therefore feels guilty for not attending her funeral and lying about her death. To make up for it, he immortalizes her in writing.

Mabanckou also pays tribute to his stepfather, Papa Roger. Papa Roger and his mother had what Mabanckou describes as an unsealed union. The narrator describes his relationship with Papa Roger as both intimate and distant. Intimate because Papa Roger was always watching him and accompanying him every step of the way, distant because the narrator never knew anything about Papa Roger's family. Papa Roger was shorter than his mother and they seemed a comical

pair as evidenced when Papa Roger stood on his toes to kiss Maman Pauline. It was out of respect to Papa Roger that the narrator stopped making fun of dwarves and short people. He felt that if he made fun of dwarves he was also making fun of his father. His uncle Mompero encourages the narrator to honor Papa Roger since he took him and his mother in. To uncle Mompero, the narrator and Papa Roger's lives are evidence that adopted children are not doomed to fail.

Papa Roger worked at the Victory Palace Hotel as a receptionist. He brought with him French magazines which he read aloud to the narrator. When they encountered a difficult word he wrote it down and sought its meaning in the dictionary at the hotel. Through these reading sessions he fostered the reading spirit in the narrator. The narrator also observes that Papa Roger was very punctual and through him he learnt to be punctual. His mother observed that Papa Roger was the most punctual man in the world. Papa Roger was not his biological father but he nurtured Mabanckou and instilled in him the values of hard work and punctuality. He instilled a love for storytelling in the narrator. As Mabanckou states, they (Mabanckou and his mother) always looked forward to stories that Papa Roger brought from Victory Palace. The stories were a routine of his life. This routine was broken once when Mma Ginette's father came from France and disrupted the atmosphere of the hotel. Mabanckou says there was an air of gloom in his home following the 'intruder's' arrival and the stories dried up. After the intruder was dealt with, they returned back to the storytelling they loved. By listening to Papa Roger, Mabanckou developed his own story telling skills. This then shows that Papa Roger was instrumental in Mabanckou becoming a writer.

It is through Papa Roger that Mabanckou first noticed the inaccurate representation of Africa in Western media. This subsequently informed his writing as an adult. Papa Roger observed that French magazines gave little attention to African issues because they considered African countries 'tiny'. When his father ended an affair with a woman called Celestine the narrator says: "Papa Roger returned to coming home on time, sitting in a corner to read the weekly magazines from Europe, and exclaiming at the French for forgetting to mention our country, because it was only 'tiny'(41). Papa Roger therefore taught the narrator to question from a young age the portrayal or lack of portrayal of African issues in Western media.

The narrator also pays tribute to his uncle Mompero. Uncle Mompero was a carpenter and the narrator loved to help in his shop when he was younger. It was his uncle who built their house. Uncle Mompero was a constant presence throughout his life. He considered himself the narrator's third father and claims he completes the trinity of the narrator's life. Uncle Mompero does not have children of his own. As he says he was not meant to have children of his own. Rather, he was put on earth to protect the person his sister (Maman Pauline) loved the most (12). That person is the narrator. As a child, Mompero held the narrator's hand through the night when the narrator was scared of the dark. After the passing of Maman Pauline, Uncle Mompero takes over as the doyen of the family. Just like Maman Pauline before him, no one challenges Uncle Mompero's authority (11). Mompero bears a strong resemblance to the narrator's mother. In him, he sees the ageing face of his mother had she lived to be as old as his uncle. Uncle Mompero was a central figure in Mabanckou's life. He filled the gap that was left after Mabanckou's biological father left.

The narrator also tells the story of his grandmother Hellene and her husband Old Joseph. Grandmother Helene had also come from Louboulou just like the rest of her family. Unlike most members of the family she still carried the communal life of the village with her to the city. She still believed in the communal raising of children and she still carried with her the innocence and trusting ways of villagers. She believed that she would die when an old angel came to take her.

The narrator includes his name on the cover of the narrative. The name is a signifier of identity. The name also lays claim to authority of experience. Alongside the name appear two titles of literary awards he has been nominated as a writer. The awards are the Winner of English Pen Award and a finalist in the Man Booker International Prize in 2015. The inclusion of these awards is meant to give the narrative credibility and to negotiate authority of experience. Readers familiar with the awards may choose to read his memoir in order to trace the development of such a reputable writer.

Mabanckou does not arrange his narrative in chronological order. The narrative goes far into the cultural past during the time of the great famine when the sky and earth quarreled. He refers to a time beyond the text. This time is comprised in part by cultural myth. As Katelo observes, life narrators anchor their narratives in their own temporal, geographical and cultural environment (16). As a result, life narrators inevitably refer to a world beyond the text. This world may be made up of folklore, dreams and subjective memories. Mabanckou narrates about the myth of the miracle woman and the sacrifice she gave to save the people of the villages of Southern Congo. He says that the woman continued her existence in the moon. He still believes in this myth and he pays homage to the miracle woman. He also writes about the belief in animal doubles. By writing about the culture of his people, he preserves it. By writing about his community's history, Mabanckou also owns it. He becomes a representative of his people.

Through introspection Mabanckou comes to terms with the decisions he has made in life. He divulges intimate details about himself which are intimate. For instance, he exposes the fact that he believed his sisters existed and they lived in Europe. He refers to his belief in the existence of his sisters a mythomania. He does admit that his exaggerations about the stories of his sisters were both absurd and abnormal. He would be heard talking to himself when he was sent for paraffin. He spent so much time with them in his head that he saw them opening the door to their house. This mythomania is an intimate detail of his life which he has never exposed before. He wished to have siblings like his friends. Though he had step brothers and sisters, he wished his mother had other children of her own. He made imaginary brothers and sisters in cardboard cut-outs (146). He also narrates about his platonic relationship with a girl named Alphonsine. His uncle, Grand Poupy, used to encourage him to write her letters. As he admits, he was too shy to talk to her. He stammered whenever he saw her. So he wrote her letters instead. Much to Mabanckou's shock, Grand Poupy ends up marrying Alphonsine.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire is the narrator's search backwards into time to trace the becoming of the self. Mabanckou traces the beginning of the urge to leave his country back to high school. He sought to be invisible among a crowd. This was impossible since he was taller than most of his classmates. The teacher of chemistry on noticing his height asked him to sit at the front row so that he can hold up the test tubes for the others to see. Of his experience in high school he says:

I had just turned sixteen and, unlike some other pupils of my age, who had started to gang up on their parents, my own adolescent crisis expressed itself in a voice which whispered that Lycee' would prise me away from my family, because it was at Lycee that they started to pick out the pupils who would leave one day, to go far from their country never to return. This feeling was heightened by the presence of the Atlantic Ocean just behind the school campus and the wind blowing in the

coconut trees in the quadrangle. The constant presence of the sea, of polish seamen with their crude tattoos,the Beninese fishermen, excited by a good catch, and the albatross startled bythe height of the waves and the ships at anchor in the port with their worn-outsails gradually drew me away from the town. Deep down I dreamt of leaving,though I didn't know where, or how, or when... . (126)

The above illustration shows the narrator tracing the beginnings of his desire to leave. It shows how living in the coastline informed this desire. It also shows a fickle knowledge he had that if he left he would never come back or if he did it would be after a very long time.

The narrative also shows the beginning of his philosophical thinking. While at the Lycee Victor Augagneur, Mabanckou and his classmates noticed that the janitor, Dipanda, and some other workers of the school who had been working for the school before the whites left blamed the school's failures on the black administrators. They adored the institution's past when the school was run by white administrators. Mabanckou knew that the school workers conveniently forgot that Victor Augagneur, after whom the school is named, had contributed to human rights abuses in Africa. When Victor Augagneur was promoted into the leadership of French Equatorial Africa he imposed the press-ganging of all able-bodied men along the route of the Congo-Ocean railway line to supply labor for its construction. As a result, over twenty thousand people lost their lives constructing this railway line while thousands of others were left mutilated and maimed. As he observes then, it would not be an exaggeration to label Victor Augagneur a perpetuator of modern slavery. This is because during his tenure as leader of French Equatorial Africa people all over the Republic of the Congo left their land to hide in the bush to avoid the certain death that working in the construction of the railway promised. The narrative then searches back in time to see the birth of Mabanckou's philosophical thinking.

Life writing also depicts the maturation of the narrator's philosophy of life. It tries to show the narrator's philosophy as at the time of writing. Mabanckou is not an exception since through the narrative the reader is able to decipher Mabanckou's feelings about many issues. For instance, through the narrative one can tell his opinion on exile and returnees. He views returnees as people who wear masks when they come to Africa just to remove them on return to Africa. This is evident when he reacts to a colleague who labels his nieces and nephews as living in a paradise of poverty, like most Pontenegrins. Mabanckou feels that this friend, like most people who have lived in exile for so long, has accepted the image of Africa presented in Western media. In Africa therefore his friend plays a role; portraying the belief that Europe holds the keys to the salvation of Africa. As Mabanckou observes, his friend does not realize that his belief of a comfortable life in Europe holds no attraction to his nephews and nieces back in rue du Louboulou. This shows that Mabanckou's philosophy of life in the narrative present has matured from that of the high school student who dreamt of going far away to Europe.

The narrative also serves to show the narrator's attempt to understand his life. He tries to find answers for the events in his life. The narrative helps him justify his choices and actions. For instance, the narrator believes his life had been laid out for him through the prophecy of his aunt Adele. She had prophesied that Maman Pauline would never have children of her own. She went further to add that if Maman Pauline had a child it would probably be one child who would leave for a foreign country leaving Maman Pauline to die alone in a hut like a person with no family. The fact that his mother dies alone while he is in France and that he does not come back for the funeral further strengthens his believe in Adele's prophecy. The prophecy therefore is a justification of his absence during his mother's funeral and for his prolonged exile.

Mabanckou writes himself into the culture of his people by writing about it. Through his memoir he traces the movement of time from the time before his birth up to the narrative present. He begins his memoir by narrating a myth about a miracle woman who gave her life to save the community. He shows his community's strong belief in myths. He also shows that long before the introduction of Christianity his people had a god they believed in. It is this god that intervened when the sky and earth were squabbling. Because he was living in the sky God sided with the sky on this disagreement. As a result, drought and famine struck the earth. When human existence was on the verge of extinction the miracle woman was offered as a sacrifice thus saving the villages of Southern Congo. As an adult Mabanckou reveals that he still believes in this myth. The myth is an archive of his people's ways of life. By writing about it, he archives it for future generations.

Mabanckou also reveals that his people were animists. He vividly remembers a trip he makes to Louboulou as a ten-year old boy. His uncle Matete takes him hunting in the forest. While there he meets his family's animal doubles, the hind and stag. After leaving the forest he has a dream about the hind and stag only this time they are joined by a young deer that resembles him. His uncle interprets the dream to him. He tells him the hind and stag represent his grandfather and grandmother. His family therefore does not hunt or eat deer. This is because if they do a member of the family would die. His family only hunts squirrels and anteaters because those are the prey given to them by the ancestors. They have to get special dispensation from dreams to eat the other animals. This is because the other animals represent dead members of their family who have left this world but who still live in the next. If one breaks this rule and eats or kills his family's animal double, he loses the part of life called blessing or luck. This animism is part of his community's culture that he writes himself into by participating in its rites. When he comes

back he offers a sample of his urine to his uncle. This is done so to prove that he still believes in his community's culture and also to restore his covenant with his animal double.

Mabanckou also writes himself into the history of his nation by highlighting aspects of its history. History serves as a source and authenticator of his memory. He traces the history of his country through the years of oppressive colonial regime under Victor Augagneur. He says that it was under the French rule that human rights were abused in the Republic of the Congo. However, contrary to expectations, the Congolese kept French names for most of their monuments. The country had a nationalist policy that was against mental colonization. For example, the high school he attended was named after Victor Augagneur. Away from Pointe-Noire, in the capital Brazzaville many roads and streets are named in honor of French soldiers and politicians such as Jean Bart, Francois Joseph Amedee Lamy and Felix Eboue. The Marchand stadium in Brazzaville is also dedicated to Jean-Baptiste Marchand who led the "Mission Congo-Nile" expedition which aimed to reach the Republic of the Congo before the British and set up a colony South of Egypt. The expedition however failed due to the strength of the British army in the region. In Pointe-Noire, the Adolphe-Sice Hospital was named after the French military doctor, Eugene Adolphe-Sice. The narrator's family had a complicated relationship with the hospital since they believed that no member of their family admitted to the hospital survived.

The narrative also discusses the philosophical changes witnessed in the seventies and eighties, the Congolese war and the narrative present characterized by poverty, joblessness and government corruption. For instance, Marien Ngouabi came to power in the country in 1968 with the Marxist-Leninist regime. Education was among the areas most affected by these regime changes. As the former corridor supervisor of his lycee observes, the lycee was a snapshot of the

history of the town of Pointe-Noire, the whole country and even the whole of Africa. This is because the history of independent Congo-Brazzaville and the rest of Africa was a turbulent history, punctuated by coups and counter-coups and philosophical changes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo regime changes are noticed through the change of names of the Lycee. The Lycee was called the Lycee Victor Augagneur before independence, then changed to Trois Glorieuses Secondary during Marien Ngouabi's reign because Ngouabi was against 'mental colonization'. In 1977, Ngouabi was assassinated by his own supporters and the new regime adopted Ngouabi's "Scientific socialism" though they mixed it with some tropical capitalism. As a result, by 1981 the school had again changed its name to Lycee Karl Marx. The school reverted to its original name, Lycee Victor Augagneur in the eighties after the narrator had graduated.

The influence of the political history of the nation on education could also be noticed in the teaching of languages in the country. English and Spanish were considered the languages of the capitalists and were thus banned. In an effort to foster communism, some people studied Russian while others gained study scholarships to Russia. The narrator notes the irony of the fact that French was not banned despite it also being the language of the capitalists. The regime treated French as a Congolese language.

The Lights of Pointe-Noire also mentions the history of Congo-Zaire under Mobutu when the country's currency, the Zaire, fell to an all-time low when compared to the CFA Franc. Mobutu had a policy of authenticity and he created the Zaire on a whim. This resulted in inflation that caused the Zaire to be inferior as compared to its sister country's currency. This caused prostitutes to cross the Congo River and affect the prostitution economy in Pointe-Noire. Their standard price of three hundred CFA Francs led to the naming of a neighborhood in Pointe-

Noire, the Three Hundreds. People living in this neighborhood, however, preferred to call it the Rex district in tribute to the Cinema Rex that was located in the neighborhood. The name Three Hundreds has stuck despite the change of price over time.

The narrator mentions historical events to collaborate his autobiographical claims. For instance, he says that when he was about nine years old, a fight happened between his father and his mother's love interest. The crowd cheering on the fight sung "Ali Boma Ye!" in reference to the fight between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman that happened in Kinshansa. This collaborates his accounts of his birth because if he was born in 1966 he would be nine in around 1975. The fight between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman christened the rumble in the jungle happened in 1974. This then validates his claims.

By writing about his country's political history Mabanckou writes himself into the history of his nation. He does this by showing instances where the nation's political history affected him directly. For instance, he says that while at the Trois Glorieuses Secondary School they were made to learn the nation's anthem by heart. He uses the pronoun "we" to show that he was part of one united group that was made to learn the anthem by heart. By using the pronoun "we" he also displays a sense of belongingness by showing that he was part of that group and he belonged in it. As a witness of the political changes in his country at this period, he relays and archives the history of his nation.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discusses how Mabanckou has crafted his narrative in respect to the dictates of the genre of life writing. He does this through employing features such as the I-narrative voice that he indicates that he is writing about events he witnessed, took part in or heard from sources he credits. To negotiate the limitations of the first person point of view, Mabanckou gets information from outside sources such as the people he interacted with in his life. He also makes the first person narrator omniscient in some instances.

To access memory, Mabanckou traces his family's genealogy and uses each individual he remembers as a point from which he (re)members. He also employs dreams in some instances to help him re-member. Dreams help him access places and moments he could not access in reality. He also attaches paratextual elements to help him remember.

Life writing is centred on truth. Mabanckou employs many strategies to help him authenticate his work as a true revelation of events in his life. For example, the historical events he mentions can be validated from other sources outside the text. He mentions exact dates such as the date of his birth and the ages he was when certain events occurred. This can also be confirmed from within and out of the text. Paratextual elements again help authenticate the claims he makes in the memoir.

The memoir helps Mabanckou archive not only his story but also the culture of his community and the history of his nation. This is because through the memoir he tells the cultural beliefs of his community such as their myths and practice of animism. He also retells the political upheavals in his country during the period of his youth. The memoir helps Mabanckou pay tribute to important people in his life. It also helps him trace the beginnings of his life philosophy and also point out its maturation.

CHAPTER THREE

ARTISTRY IN RE- MEMBERING THE SELF IN ALAIN MABANKOU'S *THE LIGHTS OF POINTE-NOIRE*

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the examination of artistry in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Mabanckou employs unique markers of artistry that identify *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* as an autobiographical work. In this chapter therefore I identify the aspects of art and evaluate how they are employed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* to sustain the narrative and to offer credibility to the narrator's claims. In this study the aspects of art investigated are: setting, narrative, plot, characters, the employment of paratextual elements and finally the narrative voice. Setting in autobiography contextualizes the concerns that the narrator addresses in the narrative in terms of time, place and culture. This study, therefore, examines the setting of *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* in terms of place, time and culture without neglecting the physical environment that events narrated in the story took place. The study is also concerned by the narrator's ordering of events to constitute the narrative whole that is *The Lightsof Pointe-Noire*. This ordering of events is discussed in the examination of the plot. In characterization the study examines how Mabanckou remembers and re-members the characters that shaped his life. These characters discussed are both personalities and non-personalities. Paratextual elements are employed in the narrative to offer credibility and this study will identify and examine the paratextual elements employed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* by Mabanckou. Finally, the narrative voice and its consistency or lack of consistency will be examined here since it will be central in the examination of truth in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

3.1 The Setting

All narratives have a setting. The location of events in a narrative can be deduced where indicated or implied in the reader's imagination when not indicated. When location is not indicated the reader imagines the scene. The imaginary place maybe vague but events have to be located. This highlights the importance of setting in narrative. Setting sets the mood, affects dialogue, influences characters' actions, mirrors the narrative's society, foreshadows actions, and even plays a limited role in the narrative. Setting also provides the framework for the issues addressed in a narrative and it may also invoke catharsis or an emotional release. The setting in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is important because it also determines the character of the narrator.

Muchiri observes that the setting of a literary text is essential to the value of the narrative because it provides a physical, historical and cultural context that enhances the reader's understanding of characters and actions (36). Muchiri goes on further to argue that literary writers use the setting of their story to create a reality that their readers can experience, whether it is one they actually know, or one they must imagine. Therefore, the setting of Mabanckou's *The Lightsof Pointe-Noire* enables the reader understand the actions of the characters in the narrative. That said then the social and physical geographies of the characters influence the choices they make. This is also true for the historical events occurring during the life of the characters in a narrative.

The memoir relies heavily on memory. The duration of the memoir and life writing is, generally, a long period of time. In narratology, duration is the span of time in which events in are narrated. The narrative present of *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* spans three weeks during which the narrator had come back to the Republic of the Congo on a workshop and elected to visit Pointe-Noire, the

town he grew up in and to come to terms with the death of his parents, especially his mother who had a significant influence on his life. The events of the narrative present therefore occur in the year 2012, twenty- three years after he left the Republic of the Congo, seventeen years after the death of his mother and seven years after the death of his father. The events in the narrative present are thus held in opposition to the past, comparing the positive and negative change that occurred in the period when the narrator was away.

Through the use of flashback, the narrator recounts his time growing up in the coastal city of Pointe Noire. Through the exposition/ back story the narrator puts his current story in context. The back story which is the myth of the woman who gave up her life in order to save the people on earth shows that the narrator's society is a society that believes strongly in myth as evidenced by the fact that he still believes in these myths despite leaving Pointe-Noire for twenty-three years. The narrator through internal monologue reveals that he still pays homage to this magical woman and does not intend to stop.

Most of the action in the narrative takes place in the coastal city of Pointe-Noire. Mabanckou details his life growing up in the city and the houses they occupied. He reveals that his family came from Louboulou among the Bembe people. His grandfather, Gregoire Moukila was the chief of Louboulou from the early 1900s. His mother motivated by the desire to start a new life after the father of her baby runs, moves to Pointe-Noire. Mabanckou exposes that the street they live in named Rue De Louboulou was so named through the corrupt efforts of his uncle Albert Moukilla. Uncle Albert was the first member of the family to arrive in Pointe-Noire and he worked with the National Electric Company. Through his efforts several members of the family came to Pointe-Noire and he helped them settle.

The narrator also gives details of the various homes they lived in while in Pointe-Noire. This includes the period they rented in Fonds Tie-Tie, when they house-sitted in Uncle Rene's house and finally when they bought their own place in Voungou Quartier. He details the change of land ownership from communal to individual in the 70s and the plot his mother bought in 1979. His uncle Mompero helped his mother build a wooden hut there. The hut had two bedrooms and a sitting room. The narrator had one room to himself while his parents shared the other room. His uncle Mompero had a bed placed in the sitting room where he slept. When his mother's cousin, Grand Poupy, and his father's niece, Ya Nsoni arrived, Mabanckou ceded the control of his room to the latter. He shared beddings placed on the floor with Grandy Poupy. It is in this hut that the narrator's life was informed through interactions with his mother, father and Grand Poupy. The narrator also played his childhood games in the Voungou neighborhood and when he comes back as an adult he tries to look for clues that would remind him of the games he played as a child. He walks through these neighborhoods as an adult and the walks serve as journeys that help him remember. The details of his homes serve to make him relatable to the reader. He gives the details to show that he lived a normal childhood like every Congolose child in Pointe-Noire. It also serves to show the journey he took with his mother towards self-dependence.

Part of the actions in the narrative also takes place in Grandma Helene's hut. She was the clan's matriarch who made large meals and forced kids to eat till they belched; an action she thought showed that their stomachs were full. Grandma Helene's cooking for the entire clan showed the opposition between village life and urban life as evidenced in the communal rural ways she insisted on keeping despite living in a town far away from the village. She also held a superstitious belief that she would die only when she met a white woman. When the narrator and

his girlfriend go to visit her in her sick bed she mistakes the girlfriend for the white angel who has come to deliver her from the earth.

The narrator also highlights life in Uncle Albert's house where he spent part of his childhood especially in periods when he refused to eat and his mother sought the efforts of Ma Ngudi, Uncle Albert's wife, to force him eat. The narrator reveals the mischief that he and his twin cousins, Gilbert and Bienvenue got involved in and how they were punished by the aunt. Most of the clan also visited Uncle Albert's house seeking money favors. The days he spent in his uncle's house show that despite not having immediate siblings, the narrator was part of a family. He enjoyed the kind of sibling rivalry that siblings enjoy through his interactions with his cousins Gilbert and Bienvenue.

The Victory Palace Hotel where his father, Papa Roger, worked also formed a part of the narrator's childhood. Built in the 1940s, the Victory Palace was among the oldest Hotels in Pointe-Noire. It was located in the centre of the town, a short distance from the Cote-Sauvage and the railway station. It was owned by a French lady. The narrator's father brought him an apple from the hotel occasionally. The father also brought magazines from the hotel which he read with him. In the summer, the narrator and one of his half-brothers, Marius, worked at the hotel cleaning rooms and washing dishes. On his return, he realizes that except for satellite dishes on the roof and air-conditioners fitted above the windows, not much has changed about the hotel.

Mieke defines events in a narrative as a process (214). Mieke goes further to elaborate that a process is change, a development, and it presupposes therefore a succession in time or a chronology. Events in a narrative therefore demonstrate a change. Noting change in the economy

of his city as a teenager Mabanckou observes that the railways which reserved “the workers train” for railway employees or those who worked at the maritime port had started allowing the public to use the train to maximize profits. The public included high school students and the narrator recounts how he and fellow students became professional fare dodgers. Change/transition is also evident in the constant change of names of his high school depending on the ideological views of those in power at the time. For instance, the school begun as The Classical and Modern Secondary School, changed to The Classical and Modern Secondary School Augagneur, then The Karl Marx Lycee and then back to The Lycee Victor Augagneur. It is at this school that his dreams of leaving the Republic of the Congo first came to surface. This is because it was at the school that the selection of students who would go to Europe began. The close proximity of the sea also heightened his longing for exile.

The narrator also recounts his childhood and how he and his friends hid in the Lantana fields near the Agostinho Neto Airport and how they went fishing for minnows from the banks of River Tchinouka. He recounts this when comparing his childhood and that of the numerous kids he meets on his return. He also recounts his visits to the beach as a teenager. They went there with his friends to get some Sardines from the Beninese fishermen and the secret hope of spying on the half-naked women, particularly white ones. He also reveals that growing up they feared the port calling it the zone of death since it was where slaves were taken to Europe and some of them died in the water. The people of Pointe-Noire also believed that witches came to the Cote Sauvage to draw up the list of names of people who would die in the coming year. The Pointe-Noire coast therefore strengthens the people’s beliefs in myth.

The narrator also details his first visit to the Louboulou village where he meets his animal double, the deer. On a hunting trip with his uncle Matete they meet their family's animal doubles, the hind and the stag. His uncle knelt on the ground and prayed to the animals while mentioning names of members of their family. When they return home from hunting, Mabanckou dreams about the hind and the stag only that this time the hind and stag are accompanied by a stag whose head resembles his own. His uncle interprets the dream for him making him aware of the concept of animal doubles and his connection to the deer. Since then Mabanckou has a spiritual connection with deer and does not eat their meat.

In the narrative present, Mabanckou visits an area called the Three-Hundreds named so because of the price of the prostitutes working there. Zairean prostitutes leaving Zaire during the Mobutu regime reduced the price of a "trick" from the five hundred CFA Francs set by the Pontenegrins to three hundred CFA Francs. Mobutu had insisted on a policy of authenticity in Zaire and created a CFA franc that was inferior when compared to that of the Republic of the Congo. The reduction of prices led to a war between prostitutes from Pointe-Noire and those from Zaire. As a result, the Zairean prostitutes resorted to killing their colleagues from Pointe-Noire. Admitting defeat, the Pontenegrin prostitutes moved to the town centre though the pay was low due to lack of customers. Eventually, some closed shop while others resigned to the price of three hundred Francs and returned to Pointe-Noire. From them he learns about the challenges they face like being cast away by their families and some customers not agreeing to use of protection during sex. He also visits Hotel Chez Gaspard where through an unreliable narrator he learns about his exaggerated accounts of the Congolese war. The war divided the country along the Northern and Southern lines.

The French Cultural Centre was the only library in Pointe Noire and here Mabanckou had his first introduction to classical French literature. He narrates how he visited the children's side of the library and read comic books that for a time transported him and his friends away from Pointe-Noire. He also started studying French literature alphabetically with the aim of reading all the books in the library from A-Z. In this library he got his introduction to French Literature. When he moves to France, he is surprised to learn that some of the writers they glorified in The Republic of the Congo while growing up are not revered in France. This also shows his academic growth for his view of Literature is altered through experience and education.

Setting is also brought into light through the use of words and phrases in the local language. Some of the words he uses include *Kundia*, *Mairie* and *Maman*. *Kundia* is a plant his father and his fellow workers at Hotel Victory Palace use to scare Mma Ginette's father from the hotel lobby. A *Mairie* on the other hand, is a place where marriages are officially sealed. Mabanckou refers to both his biological and stepmother as *Maman*. He could have used the French translations of these words but he chooses to stick with the original versions. Local words make the story authentic. They also give the story a local flavor. The words are also part of his identity: they identify him as belonging to a certain community that uses a certain language.

Sonya Fossin *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* argues that there are major and minor events in personal narrative (44). Sonya calls the major events kernels and the minor events satellites. Kernels, according to Foss are the life-changing events of a person's life. Kernels affect the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motives for acting. Satellites come before or after the kernels and they show minor events that inform kernels. The setting of

The Lights of Pointe-Noire shows minor events (satellites) that inform the major events (kernels) of his life. Through his experiences in the Lycee Victor Augagneur we understand the beginnings of his desire for solitude or the urge to become invincible. His experience in the Lycee, therefore, is a satellite that informs the kernel that is the rest of his life. He says, “I wanted to be a loner in a crowd, invisible ...” (136). His experiences and the fears he held as a child also inform his decision to miss his mother’s funeral. “The truth was, I dreaded coming face to face with the body of the woman I had last seen smiling, full of life. My fear of seeing her again, lifeless, had its roots in my childhood. Back then, like many other children of my age, I was phobic about corpses, especially since they were laid out in the yard so anyone who wished to could come and pay their last respects” (19).

3.2 The Narrative

This section examines how Mabanckou narrates his story through remembering and re-remembering to make it an interesting autobiographical work. The term Re-remembering was originally coined by the anthropologist Barbara Myeroff. Myeroff explains that “to signify (a) special type of recollection, the term ‘Re-remembering’ may be used, calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one’s life story....” (111). In 1997 White introduced the term into narrative therapy by developing the idea that people’s identities are shaped by what can be referred to as a “club of life” This acknowledges the fact that there are individuals in our life that have shaped our identity. Used in the context of the term thus signifies a special type of ordering the memory of an individual’s life while giving credit to and questioning the individuals and places that inform the individual’s being. The term remembering has roots in the Latin word *rememorari*. The term *remorari* is a combination of the words ‘re’ which means again and ‘memorari’ which means to bring again to memory or to recall to the

mind. Remembering, as used in this context, is the process of recalling to mind past events in an individual's life.

Mabanckou leads with suspense right from the title. This is because the reader is left wondering what these "Lights of Pointe-Noire" are. The reader would wonder whether they are literal or figurative lights. This is a question that keeps the reader glued to the narrative trying to discover what the narrator meant with *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. This suspense is further heightened by the fact that he does not start his story directly with the story of his life. He leads with the confession of the deaths of his parents and then switches to the myth of the mystery woman.

The narrative begins twenty-three years after he left The Republic of the Congo on his return and he shows his regret over the fact that for over seventeen years he has been living a lie. For so long he had led the world into believing that his parents were alive yet they were all dead. His mother's death affected him the most because he begins the narrative by comparing his mother to the mythical woman in a story he heard as a child. In the myth there was a disagreement between the earth and the sky and God, who was asked to judge sided with the sky because that is where he resided. The earth was then hit by massive drought and famine. Despite the drought the old woman kept selling bananas whose source no one knew. As a result, she was blamed for the drought and she was given as a sacrifice to end the scourge. Mabanckou compares this woman to his mother maybe because of the sacrifices his mother made for him and the fact that he dishonored her by leaving for France and not coming back even after her death. In an interview with Helen Stevenson (who has translated most of his works to English) the narrator reveals that he took twenty-three years to return to the Republic of the Congo because he feared to arouse the

painful memories of the death of his parents. He exiled himself intentionally, therefore, to escape from a world that was no longer (characterized by the death of his parents) and about the fear of finding out that the new world did not march with his own vision of the world (the world he had left behind as compared to the present). *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* therefore is to him a rewriting of a story which no longer exists. The autobiography has proved to be therapeutic to some people and to Mabanckou the narrative helps him get over the regret of exiling himself and constantly lying about his parents' death.

The narrative then traces his mother's movement from Louboulou to Pointe-Noire. He brings into fore the fact that she had faced many challenges before deciding to move. Through foreshadowing the narrator perhaps in an effort to explain his long self-imposed exile reveals that through a story he heard from his mother that an aunt, Adele, had predicted that his mother would never have kids and if she did she would only have one child that would leave on a long journey and the mother would die alone in a hut like a person with no family. This prophecy by Adele comes to pass when the mother passes on and the narrator opts not to come back for the funeral. The narrator blames his choice on the fear he had for hearses and dead bodies as a child. However, while explaining his mother's origins and experiences the narrator goes ahead to narrate about his mother's thought process and reaction to his birth. For a narrative told in the first person this is not possible since he could not know how she reacted when she gave birth to him. He misses to acknowledge where he heard the story from in the entire narrative.

He divides his narrative into two sections containing twenty-five chapters in total. The two sections detail the narrative present divided into the events of the two weeks he stays in Pointe-Noire. The chapters included, however, travel back and forth in time, capturing the past and the present. Each chapter title details the events he wants to talk about. Some of the events are from his childhood while others are from his interactions with members of his family in the present. He structures the narrative in this way to give a section to each important person and place in his life. In so doing, he re-member them. For instance the chapter titled 'The Woman From Nowhere' details his mother's journey while the chapter titled 'The Lady Killers' details his experiences growing up with Grand Poupy.

In the chapter titled 'One Thousand and One Nights' the narrator loses his naivety. In this chapter he lives under the false belief that his sisters exist. His mother fosters this belief by leaving two plates of food outside for them. The narrator keeps taking food from one of these plates and adding to the other if he felt that one sister did not get an equal share with the other. When Mabanckou questions the fact that the plates are always full in the morning, his mother tells him they are not full for were they full Miguel would have eaten the food. When he tells his father the story, he hears him and his mother laughing about it from the bedroom. He then comes to terms that his sisters do not exist and his mother had been lying to him all this time. Kilatu argues that the introduction of his mother as a character is a way to further the plot (233). I agree that the addition of his mother as a character furthers the plot for through the actions of this chapter his loss of innocence is detailed and his coming of age is shown. He comes to the full realization that his sisters do not exist.

The narrator then goes on to give details about his family growing up and about Papa Roger whom he called his father but who “is not really his father”. He explains his growing up in a polygamous family and the love and camaraderie that existed between him and his stepsiblings. This is shown in the incident where he and his stepbrothers go to confront Celestine, a woman who had an alleged affair with their father. The narrator exposes that Papa Roger fostered a reading mentality in him by constantly reading to him magazines he carried from Victory Palace Hotel. They would read newspapers together and if they came across a difficult word, his father would check its meaning from the dictionary at the hotel. This is also the same period he learnt that his mother could not read when he caught her reading a newspaper upside down. In an interview titled *Alain Mabanckou in Conversation with Helen Stevenson* published in Wasafiri Mabanckou reveals that his mother made him a poet. By claiming that his illiterate mother made him a poet, the reader is left with questions: How did an illiterate mother make him a poet? Did he become a poet out of the guilt of betraying his mother? Is poetry a way of him making amends and communicating with his dead mother?

Through Papa Roger and Marcel’s skirmish in Rue de la Louboulou we also learn that the narrator grew up surrounded by his extended family. His extended family had owned a street in the Pointe-Noire neighborhood and it is here he spent part of his childhood. He also goes on to highlight the communal upbringing he had as evidenced by the fact that he could spend nights at his Uncle Albert’s house and the constant meals they had at Grandma Hellene’s house. He further goes on to detail land ownership in the Republic of the Congo. He exposes that no one owned the land since all land was owned by the state. Traditional chiefs were later given the mandate to sell land and that is how his mother got her piece. This chapter helps the narrator

place himself as part of a community of immigrants to Pointe-Noire. Like most immigrant communities, Mabanckou's family moves as a group and prefer to stay together in one neighborhood.

Mabanckou gives little attention to his biological father and only mentions his existence through other people like his uncle Mompero. In this way he distances himself from a hurtful experience because he cannot understand why his father would leave him and his mother alone never making an effort to meet them. In a discussion about his fathers, his uncle Mompero says "You should tell yourself now, you have been lucky to have three men in your life. The first one failed in his mission to be a father, and ran off just before you were born, you can wipe him from your mind, you have already, it's better that way, lowlife like him don't deserve respect, since they never showed any themselves"(84). Through Uncle Mompero therefore we learn that the narrator has learnt to wipe from his mind those things that would hurt him.

It is through his extended family in the form of Grand Poupy that the narrator becomes consciously interested in writing. This is through the notes he read in Grand Poupy's notebook. Grand Poupy used to write long passages addressed to a friend called Chelos. Due to their opening formula the narrator could not discern whether they were non-fictional or products of his uncle's imagination. Later on in life when he returns home he realizes that Grand Poupy wanted to be a writer only that he did not have the consistency to become one. Grandy Poupy admits this himself when the narrator asks him for some of his manuscripts to take to France for publication: "Forget it, my boy, I don't have the tapeworm in my gut that writers have, that eats away at their inside every day" (48). From this illustration the narrator overtly suggests that he has the worm

in his gut that writers have since he has written many books. This also serves an egocentric purpose because through it Mabanckou suggests that to be a writer you have to possess the urge and determination to write.

The narrator's consciousness is aroused in the Lycee. This is where he realizes that he will eventually leave though he did not know where to. As he observes, his adolescent crisis was expressed in a voice whispering that the Lycee would prise him away from his family. This is because it was at the Lycee that they started to pick out those would leave one day, never to return. The presence of the Atlantic Ocean just behind the school heightened his yearning for leaving. Mabanckou says that the activities going on in the Ocean drew him out of Pointe-Noire (1260). He also becomes conscious of the changes in his body as a result of adolescence. Since he was taller than most of his classmates, they teased him claiming he had been kept behind a year. He therefore became a loner, spending long periods of time alone. His time in the Lycee therefore denotes the beginning of the changes in his life.

When he visits Cinema Paradiso or Cinema Rex he takes a nostalgic journey to the past. He explains how important Cinema Rex was to his childhood. It is here that he witnessed the development of film and the rise of dojos where he and his friends tried to learn martial arts. There was also a 'bookshop on the ground' where he bought books. The narrator cannot help comparing the atmosphere in the church that occupies the building in the narrative present and the atmosphere of the Cinema Rex when he was growing up. He feels disappointed by the church and he feels the building look small. As children, the building delivered their dreams and brought fictional heroes from all over the world to their neighborhood. That is not the case now.

Kim Purnell in *Listening to Lady Day: An exploration of the creative (re)negotiation of identity revealed in life narratives and music lyrics of Billie Holiday* explores how autobiography can be used by marginalized groups as a means of raising consciousness. Purnell is of the opinion that by telling their stories, marginalized groups revisit their identity and speak their reality, reconstructing themselves through their stories (17). Mabanckou enables a group of prostitutes raise consciousness on the problems they face in their trade in the chapter titled 'Wild Nights'. These problems include excommunication from their families and clients who do not want to use protection.

In the penultimate chapter of the narrative titled 'Farewell My Concubine' the narrator shows how difficult it is for him to leave Pointe-Noire again. He refers to the town as a concubine saying that he and Pointe-Noire are in an open relationship. This shows that he is not committed to returning as the open relationship he has with Pointe-Noire allows him to love other cities. The doubt is expressed in the rhetorical question he asks in the end. "As I finally get into the taxi, I wonder as I always do, and as I always will: When will I return to Pointe-Noire again?" (153).

The postscript happens three weeks after he leaves Pointe-Noire. Grandma Helene dies and this proves right her assertion that a white woman would deliver her from the earth. His cousin, Bienvenue also leaves the Adolphe-Sice Hospital ending the curse of room one. When he sends money for the funeral, his cousin Gilbert asks him to say the amount over loudspeaker so as to avoid squabbles. As he notes, money from relatives living abroad has broken families (148).

3.2.1 The Complexities of Return as portrayed in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*

According to Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* ideas of return-intentional and actual- have been a consistent feature of African literature (197). Brah further observes that returnees in African literature are represented in different ways including belonging to an ideal home, alienation in a home they no longer recognize, or experiencing 'multiplacedness' through 'feeling at home' but not 'declaring a place home' (197). Ideas of return in African fiction therefore are not novel. Different writers have dealt with the experience of returnees in varied ways.

The narrative, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*, can also be studied as a narrative of return. Every migration ends in return. As Cousins and Dodgson observe in *Diaspora and Returns in Fiction*, disillusionment is one of the key aspects of return (3). Disillusionment occurs in two phases: the returnee is disappointed by what they find. They realize that change has occurred while they were away and they cannot comprehend it. There is also disillusionment in the part of the families, friends and colleagues who have expectations that are not met. Mabanckou strikes an embarrassed tone when talking about his family members. He compares them from how he sees them now and the images he had of them when he was writing about them before the reunion. This is especially evident when Yaya Gaston storms an event he was addressing in the French Institute. He is embarrassed by the state of Yaya Gaston and the fact that he insists on calling himself his brother from the same womb. He also feels guilty for the embarrassment Yaya Gaston gets because the embarrassment serves to discredit, albeit falsely, his narrative of an only child. As he exposes, the picture he paints of Yaya Gaston in his novel *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* is not the same one he sees now. This hurts him because he idolized Yaya Gaston a lot. Through

his experience with Yaya Gaston we deduce that the narrator longs for a perfect past, a past in which Yaya Gaston is “a proper elder brother” and not the drunkard he has become. This is also evident when he walks in the Voungou neighborhood trying to look for clues to remind him of his childhood.

Elsewhere, Mabanckou is irritated by his family when they come to him with demands for money. Narratives in which return is a theme are characterized by notions of strangeness, exceptional sensibility and susceptibility, distress and disgust. Throughout the narrative, most people he meets expect him to give them money. Some, like his step-sister Georgette have an exact amount in mind: She expects him to give her a million francs as an apology for missing their father’s funeral. Mabanckou did not contribute anything for the funeral preparations so he must repay that according to Georgette. Georgette comes along with a cousin of their father that Mabanckou had never met. The cousin wanted to be given the money Mabanckou could have given Papa Roger had he been alive. As Mabanckou notes, even the shoes and clothes he has on have been spoken for: Yaya Gaston wants the shoes and clothes. Mabanckou is deisgusted by his family’s shameless demands. The narrative therefore portrays the strife that exists between the returnee and those that stayed over unmet expectations.

Mabanckou’s return to the Republic of the Congo is an unease return. He does not find the sense of belonging. As a result he remains alienated and exhausted by the reality of his country. As a result he fails to integrate by not drawing a line between himself as a native and as a tourist. He thus keeps oscillating between native and tourist during his visit. He makes physical journeys to places he visited as a child to find familiar memories that could foster his sense of belonging. But

even as he does this he realizes that he does not belong and people can tell that he is not local- or he no longer is (61). The narrative therefore portrays Mabanckou as a returnee, who is aware that he no longer belongs. He is strange even to the children who did not know him before he left. He does not make efforts to belong since he has resigned to the fact that he no longer belongs. He is, on the contrary, vexed by the attention he draws from people as a ‘foreigner’ and sometimes chooses solitude over the company of his kin (145).

The separation over time and distance has changed relationships between Mabanckou and his country of birth. The comforts he expected to find in return are now challenged by the changes in his country of return, Republic of the Congo, and the changes he himself has undergone. His expectations of his country, and his family are not met and he thus constructs a new image of his country as he makes his travels and meets the ‘new reality’ of his country.

3.3 Plot

Aristotle argues that plot is the most rudimentary feature of a narrative. According to Aristotle therefore, a good narrative must have a beginning, middle, and an end. Jonathan Culler in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* observes that a plot requires a transformation, that is, there must be an initial situation, a change involving some sort of reversal, and a resolution that marks the change as significant (84). As suggested above, the autobiography is an example of a coming-of-age story; Culler’s assertion of transformation therefore fits this narrative since the autobiographical subject is transformed through change and growth. Because of the rhythm of their ordering, plots give pleasure. Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* defines plot as the organizing line and intention of narrative (37). Brooks observes that plot is a constant of all written and oral narratives, in that a narrative without at least a

minimal plot would be incomprehensible. Plot therefore is indispensable in narrative since it is the principle of interconnectedness and principle. As Charles Griffin in “Movements as Motive”: *Self-Definition and Social Advocacy in Social Movement Autobiographies* observes autobiography as a form of communication serves a specific function for its writers and thus there is a special relationship between form and function in autobiographies. This is because the ordering of events in a narrative explains character developments and also highlights changes in character, attitude and values. I have dedicated this section to examining how Mabanckou constructs a unity of plot to enhance credibility in his narrative through consistency.

The narrator begins the narrative with the admission that his mother, Pauline Kengue, has been dead for seventeen years and that he has been lying when he talks about her existence. He distances himself from the lie which to him was an attempt to postpone his mourning. He then shifts to incorporate the myth of the miracle woman who gave her life to save the community from perish. The miracle woman’s selfless action is so important to the people that they pay homage to her. To Mabanckou, therefore, the narrative is his way of paying homage to his mother.

The narrative then shifts to tell the story of his mother and her journey from Louboulou to Pointe-Noire. He talks about the events of his mother’s journey and his birth, events that happened before he was born or events that happened when he was too young to remember them. While he does not make concise efforts to say where he got the information, from he employs dialogue later on in the narrative to show that his mother told him stories of part of her journey. However, his detailed description of the events of the day of his birth questions the truth in his narrative because a toddler would not give details of his birth:

I was the indisputable sign of immortality she imagined she would finally achieve the day I emerged from her womb in a run-down building in a maternity hospital in the Mouyoundzi district, that both torrid and glacial night of 24 February 1996, while the moon struggled to lighten the darkness and the cocks were already crowing at the new dawn. Scarcely able to believe her own happiness, which even the memory of the disaster with my father could not spoil, she anxiously placed her feverish hands on my chest to check I was still breathing, that I wasn't an apparition who would vanish the moment she turned her back. She had to be persuaded to let the nurse wash the newborn babe she cradled in her arms.(9)

Through retrospection, the act of looking back, he explains his mother's feelings when he was born. Feeling cheated by the premature death of her two daughters, Maman Pauline holds tightly to the narrator. Looking back at the moment, the narrator feels that perhaps his two dead sisters, who he refers to as two angel children, had heard the prediction of a jealous cousin of his mother who had predicted that the destiny of his mother was the darkest of her line. And that she would not have children or if she did it would be one ungrateful boy who would leave her to die alone in a hut. The retrospection he employs here is highly speculative because he was too young to judge the events of the day of his birth.

The narrator tampers with the linearity of time by moving the narrative backward and forward in time. This is evident for instance from his movement from the events of the day of his birth to the events of the day of the death of his mother. He relays how he received telephone calls from Pointe-Noire urging him to go back for the funeral. By then the narrative has moved twenty-nine years from the point when he was born. He is living in a small studio apartment in Paris. He does not attend his mother's funeral going back to his childhood to explain why; as a child he and fellow children feared seeing corpses because according to them the dead wandered the earth for

a few weeks, haunting the living and children who had seen them during their funeral rites were among their targets.

Though dialogue, the narrator is able to take the reader into the events of the time before he was born. Dialogue with his mother takes the reader to the 1960s and the reader learns of the trending fashion then and about music then. His mother tells him how the 1960s concerts given by their national orchestra, Les Bantous de la Capitale and the band Les Trois Freres, namely Youlou Mabalia, Loko Massengo and Michel Boyibanda. Through his mother's observations Mabanckou takes the narrative to the 1960s and then compares it with the 1980s observing a drop in quality of music taste and fashion sense. Dialogue also helps him fill the gaps that emerged as a result of his twenty-three-year exile. When talking with his uncle Mompero, he learns that Uncle Rene grabbed Uncle Albert's house when he (Albert) and his wife died. Their children got nothing from the proceeds of the sale of the house.

As a result of its backward and forward movement in time, the narrative employs flashback and foreshadowing to make a narrative whole and to explain events. Through a flashback to his childhood the narrator explains why he misses his mother's funeral. He explains that as a child he had a fear of dead bodies and he also feared the hearse because he thought the dead person looked out memorizing faces. He admits that even as an adult he still holds that fear. It is also through flashback that he details his journey to Louboulou and explains his encounters with the hind and stag that subsequently inform his choice not to eat deer.

Through foreshadowing, he shows instances in his childhood that defined his adulthood. For instance, he mentions his close relationship with his half-brother Yaya Gaston that explains his portrayal in his later novel *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*. It is also through foreshadowing that he

explains his connection with Papa Roger and the reason he refers to him deferentially as Papa Roger in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*. Through flashback he portrays how despite being a stepfather, Papa Roger, literally held his tiny stretched arms and swept him up off the ground. His portrayal of Papa Roger in *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty* is thus deferential. Aunt Adele's prophecy also foreshadows his mother's death. She predicts that Maman Pauline would have one ungrateful son who would leave for a foreign country and leave her to die alone and it comes to pass. This is also the case with Grandma Helene who believed that a white woman would set her free from the tribulations of the earth. She dies a few weeks after meeting the narrator's white girlfriend.

The narrative takes a journey in memory thus explaining the narrator's tampering with the linearity of time. He adopts a journey motif both to introduce characters and events in his narrative and also to foster cohesion. The journey motif is defined as the recurrent use of and reference to physical movements, psychological growth, emotional and spiritual maturation of the protagonists as they progress from one stage of life to another in pursuit of some quest or an accomplishment that brings them fulfillment. While he did not come back to the Republic of the Congo primarily to come to terms with his mother's death, Mabanckou makes the journey to let go off the lie of his parent's existence. The fact that he admits that they are dead sets him free in the sense that he does not have to go around carrying the weight of their death and his denial of it around anymore.

So central is the journey motif in the narrative that Anna-Leena Toivanen in "Uneasy homecoming" in Mabanckou's *Lumieres de Pointe-Noire* labels it a travelogue. She argues that *Lumieres de Pointe-Noire* represents the travel of the narrator (identified as Alain Mabanckou) to Pointe-Noire, the city of his childhood, after twenty-three years of absence. As such, she

continues, the text corresponds to the conventional understanding of the travel book as “a narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates [...] in the first person a journey [...] the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming [...] that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical” (17). This assertion is true only that it fails to acknowledge journeys in memory or flashbacks. It only takes into account the two weeks of the narrative present.

The narrator (and other characters in the narrative) makes physical journeys in the narrative that serve to introduce other characters and contribute to the unity plot. His mother makes a journey from Louboulou to Pointe-Noire. The physical movement gives her independence in the fact that she sets up her own trade in the Grande-Marche district, buys her own plot and constructs her own house. As a child, the narrator makes a physical journey to Louboulou and he gets introduced to animism by his uncle Matete.

The narrative fits into the paradigm of departure-separation-initiation and return. He first leaves Pointe-Noire to go to France to get education. While he thinks his separation from his mother is temporary, this does not become the case since she dies while he is away. He gets educated but still decides to stay and returns later on in life.

Each physical journey he makes on his return provokes a return in memory. For instance, when he visits the Voungou neighborhood he looks for clues of games from his childhood. But while there he meets his brother and sister and he then travels in memory and recalls the kind of people they were. He compares his memory of them and who they are now. This is the same case when he travels to the Cote-Sauvage, the Lycee Victor Augagneur, the French Cultural Centre and

Cinema Rex. They each take him back to encounters in his childhood when he interacted with those places. His physical journeys therefore provoke memory and thus sustain the narrative.

The journey in memory gives him fulfillment. As he observes, he does not even need to travel to see his parents' graves in the Mont-Kamba cemetery since they are already there in his hotel room with him. They sense his presence. This is the same case with the deer: He does not make a journey to Louboulou to see it but sends samples of his urine.

The postscript serves to conclude the narrative by telling of the developments in the village after he left. It tells about the death of Grandma Helene; proving her prophecy and it also tells of the return of Bienvenue from the Adolphe-Sice hospital. It also shows that the narrator keeps contact with his family now unlike in the past when he did not.

3.4 Paratextual Elements

Paratextual elements are non-linguistic elements used to communicate in a narrative. They maybe photos, pictures, diaries, the mentioning of exact dates or reference to historical events and dates. The narrator employs paratextual elements to corroborate his claims and to also offer credibility to his narrative. Some of the photos he attaches are taken in the narrative present while others are taken in the past. His unnamed girlfriend is the photographer.

The first paratextual element employed by the narrator is his name on the cover page of the memoir. This serves to prove that the narrative is the story of an existing individual who can be sought for clarifications. The narrator also offers the exact date of his birth to support the assertion that this is his own narrative and that it details events he heard or took part in:

I was the indisputable sign of the immortality she imagined she would finally achieve the day I emerged from her womb in a run-down building in the maternity

hospital in the Mouyondzi district, that both torrid and glacial night of 24 February, 1966, while the moon struggled to lighten the darkness and the cocks were already crowing at the new dawn.(9)

The narrator also attaches Papa Roger's tattered employee card to prove that he worked at the Victory Palace Hotel. Having lived in denial for a period of time the photo attached thereby is his way of acknowledging his stepfather's role in his life and also coming to terms with his death. The narrator also attaches a picture of the hotel. This is done to also acknowledge the place because he worked there in the summers and he also got stories about the place from his father.

Throughout the narrative, the narrator keeps talking about how central a figure his mother was in his life. It is befitting then that he attaches a photo of himself, his mother and his father in a bar though right now he sees that his mother dominates the photo. This is symbolic of the big influence she had in his life. The fact that she had attained 'freedom' through having her own trade in the Grande Marche and subsequently having her own plot and house is also demonstrated by her domination of the photo. As the narrator observes, Papa Roger felt like a lodger in Maman Pauline's house and that is exactly how the narrator and Papa Rodger appear in the photo. They are merely impostors in her photo.

The narrator also attaches a photo of the street sign of Rue de Louboulou to offer credibility to his claim that his uncle Albert Moukila founded the street and named it. According to him a majority of the people who live in the street are people from his home village who were brought there by Uncle Albert. The narrator also attaches a photo of his mother's hut. The photo serves to authenticate his claims about his mother's plot of land. It also serves to familiarize the narrator with the reader by showing how normal his life was while growing up.

The narrator attaches a photo of the Victor Augagneur school. Through the school's history he briefly mentions the history of the nation. For instance, his secondary school was named Trois Glorieuses Secondary School in honor of The Three Glorious Days revolution of 1963 that saw the deposing of the country's first president, Fulbert Youlou. He was a polygamous Catholic priest who sought to make the country a one-party state but the refusal of trade union leaders to agree to this and their subsequent arrest led to a revolution. When Marien Ngouabi came to power in 1968 he sought to make the country Africa's first Marxist-Leninist state and hence the change of the name of his Lycee to Lycee Karl Marx. The name was later changed back to Lycee Victor Augagneur. All this historical material can be verified from other sources thereby giving credibility to his narrative.

The narrator also attaches photos of his uncles; Matete, Mompero and Grand Poupy. This is done to identify some of the men who were very influential in his life; Grand Poupy provoked writing in him and he was also a character in his novel *Black Bazar* , Uncle Matete introduced him to Animism and the idea of animal doubles, an issue he has employed heavily in his other novels and something he still believes in as evidenced in his avoidance of deer meat and willingness to give urine samples to his uncle to take back to the forest, Uncle Mompero on the other hand was like a father to him helping his mother to raise him up.

The narrator also attaches an excerpt from a magazine article handed to him by the prostitutes in the Three Hundreds. He makes a point to quote the date and source of the article for authenticity. He says the article was published by the Syfia Agency and dated 19th September 2009. It is entitled: *Congo Brazzaville; Prostitutes care more for their lives than for money*. In publishing this he avails the prostitutes' issues to a wider readership. He also makes the article available to anyone who might want to read more on the issue.

He also attaches the last paragraph of the tribute to Dipanda written on the wall of the Lycee Victor Augagneur. Dipanda, real name Jean Makaya had been a ‘corridor supervisor’ at the school for over thirty-four years and the narrator refers to him as the most steadfast witness of the history of the school. He had seen several school heads come and go, he knew notable alumni of the school and he also loved telling the story of the first female teacher at the school who arrived in 1963.

3.5 Narrative Voice

In the analysis of a narrative text, the narrator is the most central concept. The subject of life-writing is the narrator and it is on the narrator that the narrative depends. The reader gets to know the subject’s worldview and opinions on important subjects from a personal perspective. The autobiography therefore becomes a handshake between the reader and the writer where the writer implicitly disseminates truth about himself. Mieke in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* observes that the identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which the identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. Her observation is important in the fact that the aspects of the narrator she discusses are what make *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* qualify as a memoir.

The narrator owns the story by employing the first person point of view. His use of the “I” narrator shows that he is talking about events he took part in or events he was told about by someone else. Except for a few occasions the narrator in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is the object of the occurrence. This is because the events he relays in the narrative are events affecting him in the present or events that affected him in the past as a child. He therefore becomes what Bal refers to as a character bound narrator, that is a narrator that occurs when the I in a narrative is

identified with a character. This is evident in the way he expresses his feelings towards the actions of others or places and events:

I am grown up now, but belief remains intact, protected by a kind of reverence that resists the lure of Reason. And returning to my roots after twenty-three years away, I feel my faith more than ever. At every full moon anxiety takes hold of me, and pulls me out of doors. (4)

In the above extract the “I” narrator is the object of the events in the narrative.

Muchiri (54) posits that one is bound to get more information about the surroundings of the narrator from the memoir than they would from other forms of life writing like the autobiography. The memoir therefore tells not only the story of the subject but also the stories of those around him. As Mabanckou himself observes in an interview with the *Literary Show Project* Mabanckou says that the reader meets in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* characters from his childhood; his mother, aunts, stepfather and maternal uncles, the city and its streets, memories, traditions and beliefs etc. For him thus the narrative is a kind of identity card or a form of life writing which in contrast to the genre is not written by him but by the people surrounding him, the people watching him. When telling the stories of these people the narrator shifts to become an external narrator that’s a narrator that does not refer explicitly to himself as a character. This is especially evident when he talks about his mother and her struggles and journey. The narrator therefore remains just an observer of the actions of his mother:

Every New Year, my mother left a plate of pork and plantain Bananas out for him, the traditional dish of the Bembe tribe. She talked to him for at least an hour to bring him up to date on what we’d done that year, and on our hopes

and projects for the year just beginning. (7)

In the above extract, Mabanckou moves himself from character to observer. He observes the actions of his mother and those around him. The decisions and choices of the people around him affect him and thus through telling their stories, he tells his own story.

The narrator employs dialogue as a way to give credit to the sources he got his information from. He does not follow the conventional means of saying someone told me this. For instance he talks about the curse spelt on his mother by her cousin Adele first and then comes to quote the source of the information later on in a scene in a bar when he is about to travel to France. It is here that his mother observes that Adele was right. In this way he not only gives the character of his mother voice but he also credits the source of his information. Dialogue also helps him negotiate the pitfalls of first person narration. The major issue of first person narration is that it only gives an account of events only from the perspective of the narrator. Dialogue helps him incorporate the opinions and perspectives of others adding to the richness of the narrative. This is the case with the dialogue with Old Koblavi. Through their interaction we learn about his side of the story on the fall of Cinema in the Republic of the Congo.

The narrator uses “our” in some instances in the narrative to show that he not only belongs but he also owns what he is talking about. When a friend from Paris tells him that his nephews and nieces, like most Pontenegrins live in a paradise of poverty, he looks back at his and his age mates’ childhood and reflects that they too had fun their own way and it could not be described as a paradise of poverty. The narrator is of the opinion that the French friend has acquired false airs in France, something he describes as “Parisian Negro” arrogance. He is of the opinion that their childhood is what knits the children together just like his own childhood did for him and his

friends. This shows that he identifies with the issues back at home despite being away for long. And that the poverty at home does not embarrass him but he looks at it from how it joins them together.

The narrator also employs an unreliable narrator in the form of an individual he meets at the Chez Gaspard Hotel. This individual gives him his falsified part of the civil war in the country. The individual takes the chance to attack the West for the role it played or did not play in the war. While Mabanckou does not side with him the unreliable narrator may be seen as a clever strategy by the narrator to attack the West indirectly over its role in oil wars in Africa or a strategy to show the misinformation that affects people in his country.

Similarly, on a visit to the three-hundreds he meets a prostitute from Kinshasa. He records her story on his recorder and rather than writing it in reported speech he writes it as recorded. This gives the prostitute the chance to narrate her story directly to the reader in the first person and also avoid doubts on the originality of the information the narrator receives.

Through the “I” narrator the narrator is able to engage his imagined audience by providing details of events and objects in his life to make his experiences relatable to the reader. He vividly describes his mother’s house and then proceeds to call it a castle to show how important it was to his mother:

Our house had two tiny bedrooms and a small living room. I had one room, my parents the other. Uncle Mompero himself slept in the living room in a bed he built himself. And when two members of the family arrived from their villages- my mother’s cousin, Grand Poupy, and Papa Roger’s niece, Ya Nsoni. I let the latter have my room and slept in the living room with my uncle, together in the same bed. Every evening Grand Poupy spread a mat on the ground, and some nights I slept with him. (52)

By describing his home and their living arrangement, Mabanckou seeks to familiarize himself with the reader. He also shows that his family kept contact with those who stayed in the village since they hosted them whenever needed. His mother's house, though small, was a castle in her eyes because it gave her independence.

The narrator is a witness to most events he tells. Those he did not witness he acknowledges the source. For instance, on a visit to Louboulou, he witnesses his uncle Matete pray to animals. That same night he dreams about the same animals. He also observes his mother's routines and her praying to Massengo.

The narrator employs narrative voice as a cohesive device. The combination of narrative voice and other narrative strategies such as plot help bring cohesion to the narrative through consistency. The consistent narrative voice also gives his narrative credibility.

3.6 Characterization

The narrator's worldview is shaped by many individuals present in his life and who he makes a point to mention in the narrative. Being an only child his life is informed through interactions with people who are not his immediate siblings

3.6.1 Personalities

Firstly, his mother takes a centre stage in his life. She is a woman who had suffered immense loss in life. Having witnessed the death of her two daughters and with the weight of a bad prophecy on her back she elects to leave Pointe-noire with a son whose father had fled. She settles in Pointe-Noire with her son and sets up a trade at the grand Marche district. The narrator portrays her as a very resilient woman who tried every bit to hide her pain from him. He could

tell she struggled a lot to raise him, but she did not want him to know this and thus she sent him away whenever she wanted to address Massengo, the straw-hatted scarecrow. As the narrator observes, it would have been the height of dishonor for his mother to show her vulnerability to him.

The narrator portrays his mother as idolatrous as she strongly believed in Massengo. The scarecrow was made for his grandmother N'Soko to protect her maize plantation from an army of birds. When grandmother N'Soko died Maman Pauline insisted on having the scarecrow unlike her siblings who were interested in the material things left by their mother. The Scarecrow became a part of the narrator's childhood, moving houses with them whenever they moved. At the dawn of each New Year his mother addressed it and told it what they had done that year and their hopes and projects for the coming year. She also made him salute it before a test or end-of-year exam assuring him that it would bring him good luck and also tell him what to write to get a good mark. She also did not have a bank account preferring to save her money in a hole guarded by Massengo hoping the money would multiply tenfold.

He also shows his mother's independence through the fact that she made her own income through her trade at the Grande-Marche. The fact that she had bought her own plot and constructed her own house made Papa Roger feel useless in the marriage. He hated her autonomy and complained that a woman should not get property in her own name nor should she "wear trousers in the relationship". His mother is also portrayed as liberal by the fact that she asks for a beer for him when they go to take a picture in the bar. Later on when he announces his plan to leave for France, she has a beer with him and then wishes him well.

Mabanckou compares his mother to the miracle woman because she, like the miracle woman from the myth, sacrificed her life for ungrateful people. He realizes that he has been ungrateful of the sacrifices his mother made for him and he appreciates her through writing the memoir.

Second, the character of Papa Roger was very influential in his life. Despite not being his biological father, Papa Roger loved Mabanckou like he was his own. As Mabanckou says he called Papa Roger “Papa” first when he swept him up off the ground. Papa Roger brought him apples from Hotel Victory Palace. He also brought magazines from the hotel, and he invited Mabanckou to read with him. He took note of difficult words and checked their meanings in the dictionary at the hotel. In the summers he got Mabanckou and his half-brother Marius a job at the hotel cleaning rooms and washing dishes. The narrator uses his biological father as a foil to show his deference of Papa Roger. As uncle Mompero observes, the narrator’s biological father abandoned him. He therefore failed in his mission and the narrator is lucky because a lowlife like him does not deserve a role in his life. Uncle Mompero encourages the narrator to forget his biological dad. Uncle Mompero however refers to Papa Roger as a generous man who took the narrator and his mother in. He encourages him to honor Papa Roger as an example to all adopted children to make them aware that their life is not doomed just because their biological fathers were idiots.

The third character of prime importance to the narrator is Grandma Helene. Grandma Helene was an old woman from Louboulou who had not changed her communal mannerisms despite living in an urban environment for a long time. She cooked meals for everyone and forced children to eat and belch to show that they were full. As a child the narrator loathed her meals

and looked for ways to avoid going to her house. However, Diedonne Ngolou, who had remained loyal to her sold them out and they went back to eat at her house. The old woman lived with a belief that a white woman would kiss her on the forehead a few days before her death, opening doors to the next world. For Mabanckou Grandma Helene symbolized his past as evidenced by the fact that she never forgot him even after twenty-three years.

Fourth, Uncle Matete introduced Mabanckou to Animism. This was done when Mabanckou made a visit to the village of Louboulou as a boy. Uncle Matete took him hunting and introduced him to the hind and stag and also explained to him why they do not hunt deer. As the narrator admits, he has never eaten deer meat in his life and as can be seen from his books such as *African Psycho*, the concept of animal doubles has become central in his work. He still believes in animal doubles as evidenced in the fact that he willingly gives his urine samples to his uncle to take back to his double in the forest.

Fifth, Grand Poupy has a great influence in the narrator's life. He introduces him to the art of writing unknowingly. He encouraged him to write letters and poems to a girl he liked, Alphonsine. The narrator however derived too much pleasure from reading Grand Poupy's notebook than from learning the intricacies of seduction. He was intrigued by Grand Poupy's opening formulas in his notes which he addressed to a friend in Sibiti called Chelos. This explains why he even mentions Grand Poupy in his novel *Black Bazaar*. As Grand Poupy recounts, Mabanckou's portrayal of him in *Black Bazaar* made children come to him for chat-up lines.

Mr Nimble completes his list of the important people in his life. Mr Nimble was his teacher of Philosophy at the Lycee. According to Mabanckou, Mr Nimble left the greatest impression on the students of his stream during his stay in the Lycee. His teaching was an invitation to independent thought since he discarded Marx and Engels who were recommended by the Party in power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo then. His teaching made the Mabanckou and his classmates create a discussion group in which they discussed philosophy alongside poetry. As Mister Nimble observes, the Mabanckou turned out a philosopher though he is not aware of it himself. Mister Nimble makes this observation in reference to the narrator's novel, *Memoirs of a Porcupine*.

His clan and his extended family also shaped his life. Mabanckou reveals that his uncle Albert Moukila was the first member of his extended family who set foot first in Pointe Noire. He welcomed other family members. When his success grew and the members of his clan in Pointe-Noire increased, he asked the town council to name the street they lived after the village of Louboulou where they originally came from. The narrator grew up in the protective eyes of these members of his extended family and despite being an only child he never felt lonely because he had his cousins Bienvenue and Gilbert to keep him company. His extended family taught him communal living as evidenced in the fact that most people came for money gifts from Uncle Albert and the fact that his aunt Ma Ngudi could discipline him as if he were her own. The event of the fight between Papa Roger and Marcel and his clan's taking sides with Roger made him feel secure because he knew that his clan would always side with one of their own in such instances. The communal living makes him not complain when he comes back and realizes that

he has a large number of nephews and nieces who expect gifts from him. It also explains his spirited defense of the kids when his friend from France looks down upon them

.

3.6.2 Non-Personalities

Non-personalities are non-human events, objects and places that informed the life of the autobiographical author. They are part of the narrator's sites of identity formation.

Mabanckou portrays various non-personalities that informed his life. His mother's house in the Vangou neighborhood which he refers deferentially as his mother's castle is a non-personality that informed his life. It is in this house that he spent his early childhood with his mother and observed her routines. These routines formed bond between them and when he looks back at time he sees that he can only understand her in the context of her "castle". This explains his insistence that the hut does not get demolished because it holds the memories of his mother. The house gave his mother freedom and destroying it is like returning her to servitude despite the fact that she is already dead. It is also in this house that he grew listening to stories from Papa Roger and Grand Poupy. He also kept a dog, Miguel, when he stayed here. He was so attached to Miguel that when it passed he refused a replacement though his Uncle Mompero had offered him one.

As a child Mabanckou and his friends frequented Cinema Rex a lot. They were left in awe by the mythical powers of the doorman who was a professional boxer. As the he admits, with a bribe of a hundred CFA Franc coins he would allow children into showings reserved for "over 18's". It is here at the Cinema Rex that he watched the development of the cinema industry in Pointe-Noire.

The transition involved movement from the boxing films, the arrival of the martial arts films, the entry of comedy and finally the entry of Indian films. As a child, the narrator and his friend also admired the projectionist for his vast knowledge of film and the variety of women at his disposal. Looking at the Cinema Rex after his return he cannot help but observe that it is a shell of its former self. Outside the Cinema Rex there were traders who sold books. This led to their trade being referred to as “Bookshop on the Ground”. It is at this bookshop in the ground that Mabanckou first got a taste of the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud and Baudelaire. He also got to read Guy des Cars but when he arrived in France he realized that Guy des Cars was an underrated author. Guy des Cars was so underrated in France that his works were labeled “station workshop novels”.

The Lycee Victor Augagneur also informed his life greatly. It is at the Lycee that he got interested in poetry and philosophy as evidenced by the long discussions he had with his classmates and Mister Nimble. It is also at the Lycee that he became conscious of himself. He elected to be a loner as a result of the gibes he received from his classmates for being the tallest in the class. He spent a lot of time taking lonely walks in the coastline to avoid meeting his classmates. As Mister Nimble observes, Mabanckou’s study of philosophy in the Lycee is evident in his novel *African Psycho*. It is also at the Lycee where students who would go abroad were selected. The proximity of the Lycee to the Atlantic Ocean also exposed him to travelers and he wished to join them. He leaves The Republic of the Congo shortly after leaving the Lycee.

The French Cultural Centre was the only library in the town of Pointe-Noire. It also had a children's books section. At around the age of twelve years, the narrator and his friends spent a lot of time reading in the library. They loved comic strips because they took them on a journey to a fantasy world leaving Pointe-Noire for some time. Unaware that one could read any book they chose, he read books in the library in alphabetical order getting his first glimpse into the works of classical French literature. His reading culture was also bolstered by the urge to impress girls for having read all the books in the library from "A" to "Z". When he went to France he was surprised to find that authors he rated highly such as Jean Dotouré were not that highly rated in France. He kept his interest in the writers to himself to avoid embarrassment.

Growing up in Pointe-Noire, the Cote Sauvage informed the Mabanckou's life. It was the object of dark speculation from the people. Superstitious beliefs strengthened by the warnings local sorcerers made the narrator and fellow children never swim in the coast. The children had a desire to become as strong as their heroes from comic books and to attain these powers the sorcerers required them not to bathe in the Cote Sauvage among other things. The narrator therefore only went there in the hope of getting sardines from the fishermen from Benin.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the employment of artistry in the writing of the memoir, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. The discussion was based on the premise that the narrator employs art in remembering and remembering the events of his life, especially those of childhood. The study takes specific interest in setting, the narrative, the plot, character, character, narrative voice and the employment of paratextual elements in *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*.

The study examines setting in terms of time, place and culture. The study found out that setting informs the narrator's character. His social and cultural setting informs his choices, attitudes and values. The study also found out that the narrator employs a non-linear plot for communication purposes. The non-linear plot coupled with flashback and foreshadowing helps create a narrative whole through the creation of coherence. This put together helped give the narrative credibility.

The study also found out that the narrator through the journey motif identifies and orders the important characters and places in his life. They include his family and places he frequented or visited as a child. He identifies each character and through memory explains how the identified character informed his life. He also employs a first-person narrative voice. He tweaks with his position in the narrative through dialogue to give other characters the chance to talk about issues he himself is not an expert in.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study explores how Mabanckou employs art in his memoir *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Through art, Mabanckou has remembered and re-membered the experiences and events of his life as a child through the wise gaze of an adult. He has done this by selecting, ordering and presenting the experiences that have led to his 'becoming'. The remembering and re-membering of the events of his life contribute to the unity of the plot of the narrative of his life. This is because the acts of remembering and re-membering create unity of coherence and action.

This study also sought to answer the question whether Mabanckou's memoir is an autobiographical work. This was done through an analysis of the aspects of art employed in the text. Going by the artistic presentation of the narrative, *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is an autobiographical text. Mabanckou employs artistic strategies unique to life writing to enable him tell the story of his life. These strategies include the use of his name on the cover page, the use of the I-narrative voice, the use of paratextual elements such as pictures, the mentioning of actual dates and events that can be verified from secondary sources and through explicit and implicit claims of authority of experience.

As a fictional writer, Mabanckou negotiates the trap of derailing into fiction by employing artistic strategies unique to life writing. His experience as a fictional writer enables him to artistically present the non-fictional experiences and events of his life. Mabanckou employs dialogue to negotiate the pitfalls of I-narration. Dialogue enables him to recount events he did not witness or take part in through others. This helps him cover the void in narration that coincides with his twenty-three-year exile.

Mabanckou also employs dreams and myths in the narrative. Myths help him archive his community's history and culture. Myths are also a tool that helps him highlight the origin of the prevailing gender politics in his society. Dreams help him communicate his worst fears. They offer him an avenue for expression of his concerns. Dreams also help him archive his culture. Through dreams we learn about animism and how important it is in his culture.

The research finds that autobiographical memory plays a significant role in the narrator's life. Through memory Mabanckou traces the formation of his identity. Through memory, he traces the beginnings of his philosophy of life. It enables him to identify events in his life that shaped his personality. Memory also acts as a form of therapy for the narrator because through remembering he comes to terms with painful events in his past. Mabanckou, as is the case with most autobiographical writers, remembers selectively. He intentionally ignores events in his life that would be embarrassing. He chooses to remember events from his childhood because childhood is characterized by innocence.

Mabanckou uses photos and pictures to give credibility to the narrative by authenticating the claims he makes. He attaches old photos that were taken before he left and photos taken on his return. The Postscript is also used to authenticate the claims he had made about his grandmother Hellene. He also uses exact dates and also mentions historical events which can be confirmed by other sources out of the text. This confirms that his claims and events he mentions are truthful. He also uses local words to authenticate his story and to give it a local flavor.

The study also finds that several motives informed the writing of this memoir. Among these was the motive of confession. Mabanckou uses the narrative to confess his lie. He confesses the truth about his parents and why he chose to lie about their death. The narrative also helps him pay

tribute to important people, places and things in his life. Through interaction with these people, places and things his identity was formed. By paying tribute to these people, Mabanckou immortalizes them. Through the narrative Mabanckou also details the history of his nation. He details philosophical changes that the country has noticed as a result of changes in its political history. The narrative also enables Mabanckou archive the ways of his community.

Mabanckou is one of the best writers in French of our generation. Reading *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* is akin to reading the making of perhaps Africa's best writer in French of the past decade. It is hoped that this research may provoke further study into the person of Mabanckou and his memoir *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Being a writer living in the Diaspora one might be interested to study how he writes about Africa in comparison to other writers in exile in their own autobiographies. This study was limited to the autobiographical approach. Studies on Mabanckou's *The Lights of Pointe-Noire* may be enriched by other approaches.

WORKS CITED

- Abbs, Peter. *Autobiography in Education*. Heinemann, 1974.
- Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography*. Routledge, 2001.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Barington, Judith. *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art*. Eighth Mountain Press, 1997.
- Beckett Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press, 1954.
- Berryman, Charles. "Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography". *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*. University of Manitoba, 1999.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Simon and Schuster, 1975.
- Butterfield, Stephen. *Black Autobiography in America*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1974
- Chelule, June. *Folklore and Identity in Joe Khamisi's Selected Works*. University of Nairobi, 2021.
- Conway, Ker. *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography*. Alfred A Knopf, 1998.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Selected Writings of Wilhelm Dilthey*. Ed Trans. and Introduced by H.P. Rickman. Cambridge University Press, 1976.

- . *Pattern and Meaning in History. Thoughts on History and Society*. George Allen, 1962.
- Egerton, George. *Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Polygenre*. University of Hawaii Press, 1998.
- Fass, Paula. *The Memoir Problem*. Penguin books, 2006.
- Foss, Sonya. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (3rd ed.). Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004.
- Fosshage , James(2013) *The Dream Narrative, Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 49:2, 253-258, DOI: 10.1080/00107530.2013.10746552
- Freeman, Mark. “Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative Inquiry” in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry. Mapping a Methodology*. University of Alberta Press, 2006.
- Griffin, Charles. *Movement as Motive: Self-Definition and Social Advocacy in Social Movement Autobiographies*. Western Journal of Communication, 2000.
- Gore, Vidal. *Palimpsest: A Memoir*. Penguin Books, 1995.
- Gusdorf, Georges. “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” in J. Olney (ed). *Autobiographical Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Hall Jacquelyne Dowd. *You Must Remember This: Autobiography as a Social Critique*. *The Journal of American History*. Vol 85, No.21 .1998. DOI.org/10.2307?2567747. JSTOR. www.jstor.org?stable?2567747
- Indangasi, Henry. “The Autobiographical Impulses in African-American Literature ” in *The Americas Before and After Columbus*. USIS, 1993.

Kilatu, Emmanuel. *Mystification and Demystification as a Trope in Alain Mabanckou's Writings*.

Published Doctoral Dissertation. University of Dodoma, 2018.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. E.D.P.J. Eakin, 1989.

Lucacs, Georg. *Record of a Life. An Autobiographical Sketch*. Versos, 1985.

Mabanckou, Alain. *The Lights of Pointe-Noire*. Trans. Helen Stevenson. Serpent's Tail, 2015.

Mahfouz, Naguib. *Echoes of an Autobiography*. Double Day, 1997.

Marcus, Laura. *Auto/Biographical Discourses*. Manchester University Press, 1994.

Mei, Huang. *Transforming the Cinderella Dream: From Frances Burney to Charlotte Bronte*.

Rutgers University Press. 1990

Miller, Nancy. *But Enough About Me; Why We Read Other People's Lives*. Columbia University Press, 2002.

Muchiri, Jennifer. "The Female Autobiographical Voice in Independent Kenya" Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2008.

----. *The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies*. Routledge, 2014.

----. *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*. VDM Verlag, 2010.

Munga, Simon. *Self Inscription in Becoming By Michelle Obama*. unpublished MA project.

University of Nairobi, 2020.

Myeroff, B. "Life History Among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility and Remembering" In

Ruby, J(ed): *A Crack in the Mirror, Reflective Perspectives in Anthropology*. University of Philadelphia Press, 1982.

Nelson, Katherine. *Self and Social Functions: Individual Autobiographical Memory and Collective Narrative*. University of New York. Graduate Centre, 2003.

Nenola, Aili. *Gender, Culture and Folklore*. Samienta, 1999.

Nielsen, TA. "Reality Dreams and Their Effects on Spiritual Belief; A Revision of Animism Theory," in *Dream Images: A Call to Mental Arms*. Baywood Publishing, 1991.

Njanjo, Charles. A Critical Analysis of the use of Space in Aminata Forna *The Devil that Danced on the Water*. Unpublished MA Literature Project, University of Nairobi, 2017.

Nyantino, Benard. *Representations of Memory in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Dreams in A Time of War and Wole Soyinka's Ake: The Years of Childhood*. Unpublished MA project, 2014.

Olney James. *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Memory*. Princeton University Press, 1972.

----. *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature*. Princeton University Press, 1974.

Pace, Edward. *Dreaming and Narrative Theory*. University of York, 2012

Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

Perromat, Prune. "A Conversation with Alain Mabanckou". *The Literary Show Project*, 9th

March 2016, theliteraryshowproject.com/conversations/2016/3/9/an-in Accessed 12th May 2021.

- Purnell, Kim L. *Listening to Lady Day: An Exploration of the Creative (Re)Negotiation of Identity Revealed in the Life Narratives and Musical Lyrics of Billie Holiday*. *Communication Quarterly*, 2002.
- Ravi, Srilata. "Home and the 'Failed' City in PostColonial Narratives of 'Dark Return'". *Postcolonial Studies*. 2017. DOI: 10: 1080/13688790.2014.987900
- Scott, Joan. *The Evidence of Experience*. University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Selden, Roman, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2017.
- Saint Augustine . *The Confessions of St Augustine*. Image Books, 1960.
- Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self Representation*. Bloomington University Press, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie and Watson Julia. *Reading Autobiography; A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Smith, Robert. *Derrida and Autobiography*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Spengeman, William. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. Yale University Press, 1982
- Stevenson, Helen. "Alain Mabanckou in Conversation", *Wasafiri*. 2012. DOI: 10.1080/02690055.2012.636886.
- Stone, Albert E. *The American Autobiography. A collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice, 1981.

Tjupa, Valerj. *Narrative Strategies: The Living Handbook of Narratology*. De Gruyter, 2014

Toivannen, Anna-Leena. Uneasy “Homecoming” in Alain Mabanckou’s *Lumieres dePointe-Noire*. *Studies in Travel Writing*. 2017. DOI: 10.1080/13645145.2017.1360276

White, M. *Narrative of Therapists’ Lives*. Dulwich Centre Productions, 1997.

Zinnser, William. *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Mariner Books. 1987