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Claire Ducournau, *La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone (1960-2012)*. Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique Éditions, 2017. 444 pp. Tables, graphs, figures, annexes, and index. 27 € (pb). ISBN 978-2-271-08158-2.

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The publication of the “Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français” in *Le Monde* in March of 2007 sparked much controversy and debate while purposefully drawing attention to drastic inequalities embedded in the publishing industry and literary market in France.[1] Taking inspiration in part from the Anglophone context in which the concept of world literature enabled a shift towards wider recognition of writers from outside of the Anglo-American realm, the manifesto’s forty-four signatories sought to usher in similar change by liberating literatures written in French from national confinement. In many ways, the manifesto aimed to address the bifurcation of the literary market into French literature and Francophone literature that tends to ghettoize texts by non-European authors. However, as Claire Ducournau points out in the prologue to *La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne*, while such critiques of the French literary market had already been taking place for decades, the manifesto’s publication rendered such debates more readily understandable and public. Additionally, Ducournau, mobilizing James C. Scott’s notion of a hidden text, argues that much more can be gleaned about the mechanisms of the literary field and its agents—particularly the relationship between European cultural intermediaries and authors of African origin—by examining situations around the manifesto that put authors in contact with the media.[2] In fact, it is these types of interactions, outside the covers of publications, and their possible impact on such publications that interest Ducournau and serve as the kernel of her extensive research on the dynamic mechanisms at work in the fabrication of African literary classics.

In *La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone (1960-2012)*, Ducournau mobilizes a sociological approach founded upon extensive research and empirical data to analyze the fabrication of the African classic, focusing on what she identifies as the two intertwined major figures: cultural intermediaries (mainly located in France) and authors of sub-Saharan African origin. The three main sources of data include: primary sources regarding authors active between 1983 and 2008; ethnographic data acquired between 2006 and 2016 in France, Switzerland, and Mali including observations at cultural and media events and interviews conducted with eighty different people integral to the African literary field in French such as writers, editors, literary critics and agents, and instructors and researchers specializing in African literature; and extensive archival research of newspapers and journals, university documents, and public and private archives. Rather than attempt to define what an African classic

might be, Ducournau, in articulate and detailed writing, provides a behind-the-scenes look at the dynamic processes of production, dissemination (and classification), and reception of literary works by African authors and the development of an African literary space. This study builds upon other works dedicated to the study and history of literary production from sub-Saharan Africa and of the global literary marketplace more broadly and is divided into three sections, starting with the aforementioned prologue followed by part one dedicated to the role of cultural mediators and literary institutions and part two dedicated to the makeup and changing trends among authors.[3]

To begin, in the introduction, Ducournau describes what she sees as the two main discursive tendencies when discussing African francophone literature. The first, in which European editors seem relatively nonexistent, posits it as made up of an autonomous ensemble producing texts of similar themes along a linear progression. In contrast, the second tendency, in which European editors are cast as all-powerful, views authors as manipulated and dominated by non-African institutions and agents responsible for their selection, publication, and promotion. Far from taking a stance between these two poles, Ducournau is much more interested in how the formation of the idea of an African classic reveals the tensions between these opposing views. Using a social history perspective, she sets about uncovering the mechanisms that allow authors to write, publish, and gain recognition while at the same time unpacking the structural conditions of their production, editing, and reception. Integral to this endeavor is an exploration of how authors' symbolic capital changes over time and space alongside the geographic and social dimensions of the fabrication of African classics.

The efficacy of Ducournau's approach to provide insight is demonstrated in the prologue that delves deep into an analysis of the publication of the "Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français" and its broader context. Closer attention to the empirical data of the manifesto's signatories reveals, as Ducournau argues, that the "place" of the manifesto was Gallimard in that at least thirty of the forty-four signatories had published with Gallimard.[4] Conversely, while the hidden text of the manifesto demonstrates Gallimard's substantial influence, it also reveals the asymmetries between publishing in Europe or in Africa as evidenced by discussions at the *Étonnants Voyageurs* festival in Bamako, Mali both before the publication of the manifesto in 2006 and afterwards in 2008.

Part one, "Légitimer les auteurs issus d'Afrique," presents three cases set primarily in France to explain the longer history of tensions embedded in the construction of African classics. First, in chapter one, Ducournau traces the constant rise in publications by authors of sub-Saharan African origin since 1960 and the various avenues of publication available to them. In the statistical data, Ducournau identifies two transnational waves the first of which started in the 1980s and greatly benefitted by French mainstream's cooptation of Léopold Sédar Senghor through his induction into the French Academy in 1983. At the same time, new publishing opportunities arose via specialized editors. The second wave, which started in the mid-1990s, saw the first publications by authors of sub-Saharan African origin with mainstream general publishers, a crucial turning point since publishing houses established in sub-Saharan Africa were prone to disruptions resulting from political and economic instability. Ducournau's data in this chapter clearly demonstrate how new publishers and strong relationships with mainstream publishers brought African classics to a broader public.

Chapters two and three also consider literary institutions located in France and their impact on the construction of African classics. Chapter two centers on the history of the Grand Prix littéraire d'Afrique noire started in 1961 by the Association des écrivains de langue française (ADELF). In particular, Ducournau underlines the importance of the ADELFF's establishment during the height of the colonial era (1924) and its somewhat continued neocolonial treatment of authors. Similarly, in chapter three (mislabeled as chapter four in the table of contents), Ducournau engages with Colette Guillaumin's *L'Idéologie raciste* in her analysis of two French magazines and their treatment of African authors.^[5] Both *Le Magazine littéraire* and *La Quinzaine littéraire*, according to Ducournau, assigned minority status to authors of sub-Saharan African origin through their meagre allotment of space to such authors, a reality blatantly evident in Ducournau's tables that show a spike around 1983 and the mid-1990s. Taken together, chapters one, two, and three sketch out the crucial material and symbolic mechanisms of cultural intermediaries and literary institutions.

Part two, "Accéder à la consécration littéraire," turns to the authors themselves and to a multiple correspondence analysis of them. As stated in the introduction, Ducournau's sample size includes four hundred four authors with a concentrated focus group of one hundred fifty-one authors. Chapters four and five offer assessments of the empirical data and present many tables, charts, comparative maps, and visualizations of the empirical data. While many of the tables and charts are straightforward, the comparative maps and especially the visualizations are far from easily legible. The recourse to black and grey and the size limitations of the maps and visualizations almost go so far as to empty them of their usefulness, which threatens to detract from the exhaustive research conducted to produce such data. Even so, Ducournau deftly describes each figure and clarifies her findings, identifying three trends among the population of authors since the 1980s: the distancing of authors from the African continent; the continuing rise of female writers; and the growing professionalization of authors. Additionally, she argues that the data reveal the specific conditions weighing on authors that push them towards these trends and towards sustained relationships with French editors. Ultimately, Ducournau points to the recurring and haunting symbolic violence that authors of African classics face.

La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone covers well-trodden territory but from a new angle. In a sense, Ducournau weaves together familiar strands in innovative ways to generate a more nuanced understanding of the asymmetry undergirding the African literary space in France. Her social history, supported by extensive sociological research, paints detailed portraits of key figures and institutions in the construction of African classics that offer new insight into the interconnected mechanisms and dynamic power structures that change over time and with which authors must engage. However, the data also demonstrate the ability of authors to participate in the creation of favorable conditions, which, in turn, open new publishing opportunities. While Ducournau's study centers of the field of literature, many of her findings have the potential to shed light on other fields of cultural production such as art, film, and *bande dessinée*; her meticulous and clearheaded telling of the story of the fabrication of African classics offers an enticing approach for other contexts and time periods.

NOTES

[1] Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, Alain Mabanckou, and Abourahman Ali Waberi, "Pour une littérature-monde en français," *Le monde des livres*, March 16, 2007.

[2] James C. Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance: fragments du discours subalterne* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2009).

[3] In particular, Ducournau engages frequently with the following works: Gisèle Sapiro (dir.), *Les Contradictions de la globalisation éditoriale* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2009); Gisèle Sapiro, *La Guerre des écrivains 1940-1953* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1999); Lydie Moudileno, *Littératures africaines francophones des années 1980 et 1990* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004); Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005); Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Marketplace* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2007); Ruth Bush, *Publishing Africa in French. Literary Institutions and Decolonization, 1945-1967* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016); and Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[4] According to Ducournau's data, Le Seuil came in second having published sixteen of the signatories (roughly half the amount who have published with Gallimard).

[5] Colette Guillaumin, *L'Idéologie raciste: Genèse et langage actuel* (Paris: Folio, 2002).

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