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ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF LITERATURES  
IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

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## PREFACE

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The World Oral Literature Project is an urgent global initiative to document and disseminate endangered oral literatures before they disappear without record. The Project was established in early 2009 to support scholars and community researchers engaged in the collection and preservation of all forms of oral literature. The Project funds original fieldwork and provides training in digital collection and archiving methods.

Through our series of Occasional Papers, we support the publication of research findings and methodological considerations that relate to scholarship on oral literature. Hosted for free on our website, the series allows scholars to disseminate their research findings through a streamlined, peer-review process. We welcome expressions of interest from any scholar seeking to publish original work.

The current paper on the Encyclopédie des Littératures en Langues Africaines (ELLAf) grows out of a presentation by Ursula Baumgardt and Marie Lorin in Cambridge on March 5 2012, hosted by the World Oral Literature Project.

This paper offers an aspirational view of how an integrated digital platform of African literature would function, and I look forward to its implementation in due course.

Dr Mark Turin  
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January 2013

# ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF LITERATURES IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Ursula Baumgardt and Marie Lorin

## INTRODUCTION

The project *Encyclopaedia of Literatures in African Languages* (ELLAf)<sup>1</sup> concerns oral and written literatures in African languages. It aims to develop a scientific website devoted to texts regarded either as oral literature or literary writing in African languages, whatever their sociolinguistic status. This is the result of a preliminary reflection on the specificity of these two modes of literary expression and on the scientific interest of documenting and analysing, within the same space, texts belonging to different communicative modes.

Literatures in African languages are poorly documented and very rarely analysed in their various forms—oral and written—or in a comparative perspective taking into account the context of literary expressions in African languages. The focus of current analyses, following criteria of orality and writing, involves a comparison only from the point of view of the text itself. Such a comparison considers neither the conditions of the literature's enunciation nor its impact on the content, forms and functions of literary expressions. Yet new multimedia storage facilities allow oral and written literary corpora to be brought together without altering their original form. This means that it is possible to design a tool that facilitates both documentation and research of literature in African languages.

## WHY THIS PROJECT?

African literatures comprise those written in European languages as well as oral and written literatures in African languages. Those in European languages are relatively well known and documented. African literature in French, for example, has benefitted from publishing houses launched in the 1950s (*Présence Africaine*, founded by Alioune Diop in 1949), from receiving structures in the form of journals devoted to that literature (*Notre Librairie*; *Présence Africaine*), and from awards to celebrate it, such as the 'Grand Prix littéraire d'Afrique noire' given since 1960 by the Association of Francophone Writers (ADELF). Internationally renowned

writers such as Leopold Sedar Senghor and Ahmadou Kourouma have contributed to displaying this literature on the world scene. This same literature is equally taught and researched in African universities and in France,<sup>2</sup> although it could be afforded a greater role. Virginia Coulon's bibliography *Littérature africaine francophone* (LITAF), organised as a website,<sup>3</sup> includes more than 26,000 literary texts, articles and critical works.

Some authors regret the fact that, in their words, their texts are first perceived as 'African' before being considered as literary texts (Porra 2011: 396-397), and they question the French-heavy involvement in the critical and normative reception of their works. Nevertheless, this literature, just as the anglophone African literature, has seen a real development which has made it possible for it to be known and read both in African countries and especially in France.

The situation of oral literature in African languages is very different.<sup>4</sup> It is performed in oral context in Africa and is an integral part of cultural practices in many 'traditional' African

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by the authors at Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) and UMR 8135 CNRS, Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire (LLACAN), Paris. The authors are grateful to Françoise Ugochukwu for translating this article.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Chevrier, Lilyan Kesteloot, Bernard Mouralis, Jean Derive, Mwatha Ngalasso and Alain Ricard, for example, have been lecturing in France on the subject of francophone African literature between 1960 and 2000. Since 2000, this subject has been taken over, in Parisian universities, by Xavier Garnier, Papa Samba Diop and Florence Paravy, while some other French universities and Institutes share the same interest.

<sup>3</sup> Home page of *Littérature africaine francophone* <[www.litaf.cean.org](http://www.litaf.cean.org)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

<sup>4</sup> We use the singular 'oral literature' to simplify matters; yet every language can produce a specific oral literature, and this constitutes a significant cultural wealth.



societies where it is passed on directly without being stored on any material device. This literature has been collected since colonial days by missionaries and administrators, and also by linguists and ethnologists. It has reached Western audiences as written or sometimes re-written transcripts, or supported by translations.

The introduction of European languages in African countries, coupled with the schooling and acquisition of writing skills by a small part of the population, led to a strong devaluation of oral literature. This literature had already been affected by important changes triggered, amongst other factors, by radical cultural transformations brought about by the colonisation of the continent. After independence, some francophone African countries chose to augment their oral cultural heritage by launching institutes devoted to research on orality or by including this research in their existing research programmes, as illustrated by the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN, Senegal),<sup>5</sup> the Centre d'Études Linguistiques et Historiques par la Tradition Orale (CELTHO, Niger)<sup>6</sup> or the Centre International de Recherche et de Documentation sur les Traditions et les Langues Africaines (CERDOTOLA, Cameroon).<sup>7</sup> Internationally renowned figures committed to the cause, such as Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ, contributed to the defence of oral literature and to its recognition by UNESCO in October 2003 as belonging to intangible world heritage (Furniss 2005: 31-44).

In France, research has been boosted by ethnolinguistic works initiated by Geneviève Calame-Griaule, Veronika Görög-Karady, Christiane Seydou, Paulette Roulon-Doko and Jean Derive since the 1970s. This research led to the publication of several bibliographies<sup>8</sup> and collective books.<sup>9</sup> It continues within the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO, Paris) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) research laboratory on

Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire (LLACAN).<sup>10</sup> Contributors include Ursula Baumgardt, Sandra Bornand, Mélanie Bourlet, Marie-Rose Abomo-Maurin, Françoise Ugochukwu, Cécile Leguy and Marie Lorin, in collaboration with specialists of African orality such as Ruth Finnegan, Isidore Okpewho, Graham Furniss, Lee Haring, Russel Kaschula, Hein Willemse, Daniela Merolla and Jan Jansen grouped around the International Society for Oral Literature in Africa (ISOLA).

Literary writing in African languages appeared at different times, depending on the region and especially the type of colonisation. Whereas the French colonisation produced a French-speaking elite, in British colonies, linguistic policies supported the development of African languages of intercommunication such as Swahili for East Africa (Garnier 2006) or Hausa for West Africa. Graham Furniss et al. (2002) counted more than seven hundred published literary titles in the Hausa language. On the other hand, in francophone countries, literary writing appeared later: literature in Fulani, for example, dates from the 1970s (Bourlet 2009). Moreover, the Arabic alphabet was disseminated in many regions long before the European colonisation, in the time of Islamic expansion. This alphabet, which facilitated literary creations mostly inspired from Arabic poetry, is still in use for that purpose.

The coexistence of all these literatures is largely ignored and their fragmented perception does not allow one to appreciate the wealth and complexity of literary expression on the African continent. There is currently no global theoretical approach to account for it, as works inspired by postcolonial studies do not take orality into account. Oral literature, whether explicitly mentioned or hinted at, is often considered to be an old, inferior form expected to evolve towards literary writing (Ricard 1995). A concept of 'literary systems' defined according to the mode of communication and the language used, while helping to account for the coexistence of written literatures in European and African languages with oral literatures, does not place them within any implicit hierarchy (Baumgardt 1993, 2008). Nevertheless, this concept can be regarded as a framework for reflection and analysis, and will be developed and intensified by creating the tools required for an in-depth literary study of available data.

From a disciplinary point of view, these literatures have never been addressed as one field: namely that of literary creation in a plurilingual context. Several reasons explain the dearth of research and the lack of a fully constituted theoretical field on the subject:

**Differences in sociolinguistic status:** In most African francophone countries, French remains the only official language of instruction, while African languages continue developing

<sup>5</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot contributed greatly to its international repute; she is followed by Bassirou Dieng, Amad Faye and Abdoulaye Keita, among others.

<sup>6</sup> Boubou Hama and Diouldé Laya are emblematic figures of this institution.

<sup>7</sup> Founded in 1977 in Yaoundé, the CERDOTOLA comprises of Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad. Its current President is Charles Binam Bikoi.

<sup>8</sup> Görög (1981); Görög-Karady (1992).

<sup>9</sup> Görög et al. (1980); Görög-Karady (1990); Görög-Karady (1994); Görög-Karady and Seydou (2001).

<sup>10</sup> See the collective publications resulting from these collaborations: Baumgardt and Ugochukwu (2005); Baumgardt and Derive (2008); Baumgardt and Bornand (2009); Baumgardt and Roulon-Doko (2010); see also Derive (2012).

and producing a wealth of literary texts. In anglophone East African countries, on the other hand, a major language like Swahili is used for regional intercommunication in all domains of public life. African languages are therefore variably taught, despite recent efforts led by international bodies such as UNESCO to improve teaching. As well as disparities in teaching, African languages are characterised by a great variety of sociolinguistic statuses, as these languages are variously spoken, written and documented. This variety forces researchers to undertake extensive local fieldwork before embarking on any cross-disciplinary study.

**Difficulties accessing works in African languages, whether oral or written, due to various factors:** This is primarily an economic problem: due to their high production cost, books suffer from restricted circulation in Africa, at the levels of both popular reception and Africanist research. This has led research on literatures in African languages to focus on the building and dissemination of corpora, through the recording of oral performances, their transcription and translation with a view to publish them; or through the publication of texts written in African languages.

**Under-exploitation of existing corpora:** A number of corpora are already available. Some of these are published, but most existing research data are inaccessible (researchers' personal archives or unpublished academic papers, audio-visual documentation which could not be used at the time of recording but made easily accessible today thanks to the development of technology, etc.). These corpora have not always been put together for the specific purpose of literary study. The limited exchange of knowledge, both between oral and written literary productions in African languages and between literatures in European and in African languages, has hampered efforts towards cross-disciplinary studies and theoretical exploration, which both require constituted and accessible corpora.

The Internet has entered this challenging context, facilitating a progressive democratisation of tools that have transformed the way we gather, store, organise and disseminate data.<sup>11</sup> Many African cities now offer affordable Internet connections, with African universities and leading institutions being among the first beneficiaries of this development. This integration allows web-based initiatives to be accessed in Africa, generating bilateral collaborations.

In creating a plurilingual website bringing together and analysing African literature-based corpora, ELLAf aims to respond to this theoretical and disciplinary context while benefiting from technical innovations which directly impact the circulation of works.

## OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the ELLAf project include a considerable amount of documentation, central to the elaboration of a theory of literatures in African languages. It is crucial to go beyond individual presentations by language or production mode—oral or written—to allow for a better perception of the domain, apprehend its wealth and analyse the way it works and functions, and its forms of expression.

Successful documentation requires a presentation of literatures in their diversity, using a common methodology. From a linguistic and editorial point of view, the greatest attention is given to transcription or writing, annotations and translation of texts, following a strict protocol established and verified by specialists of the languages concerned. It is equally essential that each text or excerpt presented on the site be contextualised both from the viewpoint of the language concerned and from a literary point of view (see Fig. 2).

The contextualisation of each text allows one to reflect on the circumstances surrounding its production. These circumstances greatly impact the form, operation and functions of the texts, and cannot be considered in isolation. Multimedia storage facilities such as ELLAf bring oral and written literary corpora together within the same space. Such an approach facilitates the detailing of their contextual conditions, as it is possible to upload, for example, photos or videos of performances of oral literature, or interviews with authors on the conditions surrounding their literary creations. In the same way, because languages are not selected on the basis of their status, it is possible to examine the relationship between the specificity of a given literary production and the sociolinguistic status of the language concerned: does a 'major' language produce a 'major' literature?

The encyclopaedic character of ELLAf is defined at several levels. Its database will never be exhaustive; yet, our objective is not to restrict either documentation or research by using geographical criteria (region, country), mode of communication (either orality or writing), type of language ('major' versus 'minor') or literary genre (novel<sup>12</sup> or epic<sup>13</sup>). Concerning the editing of texts on the website, the objective is for both critical apparatus and contextualisation of texts

<sup>11</sup> See Lorin (2012).

<sup>12</sup> The publication of the first novels in African languages is an essential part of the work, yet one that opts for a predefined and restricted perspective in selecting a genre outside those witnessed in African traditions. While authors did not adopt any implicit comparative perspective, they might suggest the idea that African literary creation arrived 'late' in comparison with that of Europe; see Garnier and Ricard (2006).

<sup>13</sup> See 'Réseau Euro-Africain de Recherche sur l'Épopée' (REARE), launched at the University of Dakar in November 2000.

at all levels to be as complete as possible. Concerning the mode of communication—orality or writing—the challenge is to use new technologies to facilitate inclusive, collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

By bringing together oral and written texts in African languages, the website will facilitate a better analysis of the circumstances surrounding literary production in Africa. The common methodology governing the presentation of texts allows various search pathways (language, author, literary genre, predefined key-words and/or search for key-words in natural language), in a cross-disciplinary and comparative perspective. This allows access to:

- *All the texts from a particular literature*
- *The same genre in several literatures*
- *A thematic aspect in several literatures*
- *A figurative element in several genres; notional levels which may not be clearly defined in lexical occurrences*
- *Stylistic devices either common or diverging, depending of the type of communication chosen*
- *A comparison between the geographical range or number of speakers of a language and literary creation*

ELLAf equally aims to collect and analyse new oral and written corpora. New data collections will be made, benefiting from audiovisual recording equipment. This fieldwork will test theoretical hypotheses and measure a double impact: that of the field on the media and that of the media on the field.

In particular, several key questions and concepts that are central to the study of these literatures will be explored:

- *What are the processes that ensure creative writing in African languages?*
- *How does the concept of 'authorship' apply to oral literature? Who creates literary texts (performer vs. writer)?*
- *What is the reception of literatures in African languages? Is it the same for both oral and written literatures? Can the ELLAf project have an impact on the reception of these literatures beyond the borders of their production? What are the processes of mobility and re-creation of these works?*
- *How does intertextuality work between those various literary fields?*
- *What are the links between literature and language transmission?*
- *Is there a genre system common to all these literatures, or does each language reinvent its own system?*
- *How can one analyse the coexistence of the various writing systems corresponding to specific literary practices and targeting particular audiences (Latin alphabet versus Arabic alphabet)?*

This dual approach, both theoretical and practical, combining basic and experimental research, is new and innovative in the field of literature studies. In this regard, the ELLAf project takes its place in the elaboration of a theory of African literatures and aims to raise the profile of new aspects that the dispersion of data has previously hidden from view.

## ORIGINALITY

Within the last few years, a number of digital projects have been created in the humanities. Those projects have had several objectives:

- *To preserve existing corpora*
- *To create new corpora*
- *To ensure that these corpora are made available to a wide audience (scientific and general public)*

The ELLAf project is part of the digital move in the humanities. It seeks to upload those corpora that were previously unavailable, for the benefit of both the scientific community and the general public. Because it facilitates the free flow of uploaded texts, the ELLAf project also joins the move towards open access, increasingly dominant within the worldwide research community.

Several Africanist initiatives have been launched in Europe:

- *In linguistics: Reflex, LLACAN, hosts a reference lexical corpus for African languages, as well as processing and analytical tools adapted to this corpus.<sup>14</sup>*
- *In African oral literature: Verba Africana, Leiden, Daniela Merolla (2006-2009) brings together transcription and oral performance in order to produce educational materials for the teaching of African oral literature.<sup>15</sup> This work is supported by African Oral Literature, New Media and Technology, edited by Merolla and Jansen.<sup>16</sup>*
- *On oral literature in general: the World Oral Literature Project, University of Cambridge/Yale University, directed by Turin and established in 2009, is focussed on Asian and Pacific populations and aims to document and collect endangered oral literatures.<sup>17</sup>*

ELLAf is the only one of these varied and interesting projects to focus on African literatures, embracing both oral and written literatures in African languages whatever their socio-

<sup>14</sup> Homepage of RefLex: lexique de référence des langues d'Afrique (2009) <[www.reflex.cnrs.fr/](http://www.reflex.cnrs.fr/)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Homepage of Verba Africana (2010) <[www.hum2.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana](http://www.hum2.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

<sup>16</sup> See Merolla (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Homepage of the World Oral Literature Project (2012) <[www.oralliterature.org](http://www.oralliterature.org)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

linguistic status. The ELLAf website is therefore innovative, as there is no other existing tool to account for the complexity of literary expressions from the African continent and facilitate the realisation of cross-disciplinary research.

This is not the only unique aspect of the project. Beyond the innovative conceptualisation of its content—literatures in African languages—the website offers a creative use of new information technologies, opening revolutionary perspectives at all levels for documentation, research and teaching.

The aim is to create an encyclopaedic structure by bringing together oral and written literatures and to make this widely available via a website built through a collaborative effort that is accessible everywhere.

### SITE ORGANISATION

The site works on several principles:

- *Database*
- *Encyclopaedic sections*
- *Exchanges between users and contributors*
- *Connectivity between the various components of the website*

### DATABASE

The database is at the heart of the project, as in all digital libraries. By database we mean the storage space; the digital space that will host our documents. The database hosts the following documents organised under different entries:

- *Excerpts from previously published written literary texts*
- *Unpublished written literary texts*
- *Oral performances (transcriptions, audio or audiovisual format)*
- *Metadata on literary creation in oral and written context (such as notes from fieldwork and interviews with creators)*
- *Research documents (such as articles and files)*

### GENERAL ORGANISATION OF THE DATABASE

Creating a database as extensive as the one we are putting together necessitates a great amount of logistical support. This is why we chose to build the ELLAf site within the Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations (BULAC),<sup>18</sup> an academic library specialised in languages and civilisations, shared by various institutions including INALCO. One of BULAC's activities is to digitise old and rare book collections to make them available to the public. For this purpose, BULAC has developed its own digital space and its administrators are keen to open its hosting capacities to other partners' projects.

That is why they agreed to help us with two important aspects. First, BULAC offered to host our data. The capacity of their services was recently increased, which should guar-

antee enough storage space for a long time. This choice was motivated by our belief that it is beneficial to work with a partner permanently attached to an institution, because a research laboratory may find itself in a difficult position and become unable to continue as a host. Second, BULAC shared the 'Omeka' software with us that they are currently using to manage their data.

Omeka is a web content management system developed by the Centre for History and New Media at George Mason University, Virginia.<sup>19</sup> The software was specifically designed to meet digital humanities' needs. It is an open source system, easy to use not only for administrators but also for contributors and individual users.

As a storage space, Omeka can handle different document formats such as PDF, audio and video files. These documents can be made freely downloadable, under Creative Commons licenses if unpublished, or under the copyright of the previous editor.

### WHAT IS AN ITEM?

Our database is divided into items. An item is defined as an entry, as in a dictionary. An entry is a constellation of components including texts (sometimes several versions of the text), metadata around the text and links to other components. Two questions are raised by the construction of an item: what constitutes an item; and how are items linked together and to the rest of the website?

We are well aware that contributors can have very different texts, different corpora and different ways of working with them. That is why we propose two different approaches in data-processing which allow different degrees of involvement from our contributors:

**Minimal item processing** (see Fig. 3): In this configuration, the item only contains essential components and is only linked to a single element from the website. In this minimal configuration, ELLAf is a storage tool. It can be used as a corpus for researchers who sometimes need data without being in a position to conduct fieldwork themselves. In order to constitute a credible and useful database for researchers, we have agreed on a few conditions that need to be fulfilled before we agree to publish a text. A text item must contain at least the text itself in the original language, its translation in French or in English, and metadata tag ('general notice') using the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (a set of metadata terms). Furthermore, the item should at least

<sup>18</sup> Homepage of the Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations <[www.bulac.fr](http://www.bulac.fr)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Homepage of Omeka <[www.omeka.org](http://www.omeka.org)>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

be linked to the relevant language section. This means that all languages present on the website need to be presented.

**Complex item processing** (see Fig. 4): Users can use our website and our storage space to its full potential by building a more complex kind of item linked to many other website components.

Whether the presentation used is simple or complex, all items must be accompanied by a Dublin Core tag (Fig. 4). Dublin Core is a well-established protocol to build descriptive tags of web resources in digital libraries and institutions such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Gallica,<sup>20</sup> along with other digital enterprises not only in France but in the entire world. Dublin Core ensures that each document hosted in the database contains information that can be used as filters when carrying out advanced research.

These features can be used differently depending on what kinds of information the contributor is in a position to provide. For example, the Description and the Subject sections can be either very detailed or simple summaries.

## ENCYCLOPAEDIC SECTIONS

The encyclopaedic pages are part of what makes our website original. They demonstrate our intention not to let the visitor wander alone through various types of data that may be quite difficult to understand when one is not familiar with the culture from which they come. These four sections, detailed below, will constitute an important part of our scientific project:

**Languages and literatures:** Africa is home to between 1,000 and 2,500 languages (see Furniss 2005), even though not all languages have been counted and the same language is sometimes given several different names. ELLAf welcomes all languages, whatever their sociolinguistic status. No literary text is ever presented without its language and the literature concerned being situated. The presentation of each language includes the various terms used to describe it; the geographical location of the language (a menu currently under construction on our website); details concerning its sociolinguistic status and the language family it belongs to; as well as common presentation criteria. In the same way, the overview of the literature concerned will include indications on its form—oral and/or written—and on the alphabet used.

**Conceptual dictionary:** The conceptual dictionary seeks to give a general presentation of the main concepts referred to such as 'oral literature'; 'orality'; 'transcription'; 'data collection'; 'literary genre'; and 'proverb'. The objective is to create a benchmark conceptual system, discussed and shared by contributors. Concepts presented in the dictionary can be further examined in the 'ELLAf dossiers' menu.

**ELLAf dossiers:** This menu is conceived as a special space devoted to in-depth research. It hosts thematic dossiers such as those on a genre in a given literature. It is equally possible to build a dossier on the same genre presented in various literatures, in a cross-disciplinary and comparative perspective, in order to better highlight its cultural aspects as opposed to generic characteristics. Some examples of dossiers are 'Fulani epic' and 'African oral literature, challenges and perspectives' (AAR, 2011).<sup>21</sup>

**Bibliography:** The bibliography is scalable. Beginning with some 150 titles, it will eventually include references from contributions featured on the website as well as data given by contributors.

## CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity has been central to the theorising preceding the conception of the website. This is because we assumed that users should be able to navigate as smoothly as possible between various components (items from the database, encyclopaedic sections and various information).

Instead of imposing strict and mutually exclusive systems of classification on our database through the collection system, we have chosen to keep a seemingly unordered database. The order comes not from the internal structure of the database, but from the outside links that exist between different categories of the encyclopaedic pages and a given item. Obviously, this choice affords considerable flexibility to surf through the database, but comes at a cost: it compels us to be extremely careful in the way we link items together and to the encyclopaedic pages.

This is why there are multiple links between documents, and between documents and encyclopaedic sections, allowing users to navigate freely between the various components of the website. Several pathways are available, including:

- Documents linked together by hyperlinks placed after the entry
- A number of thematic dossiers (for example the *Fulani epic*, the *Malagasy folktale*, oral myths and their impact on written literature in African languages)
- A search engine that can find required occurrences in written or transcribed documents, in entries and in the various headings on the website
- Documents that can be recovered through a geolocalisation tool
- A directory of authors and researchers that allows users to find related documents

<sup>20</sup> Homepage of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (2012) <www.bnf.fr>. Accessed 11 December 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Archives Audiovisuelles de la Recherche (AAR) Conference, Paris, INALCO, October 20 2011 <www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/2167/home.asp?id=2167>. Accessed 11 December 2012.



This highly dynamic structure is based on the association between dissemination and analysis of the works. It assumes that the more data added to the database and encyclopaedic sections, the richer their interaction will be.

#### INTERACTIVITY AND COLLABORATIVE CHARACTER

ELLAf is created to establish links between sometimes distant collaborators and multiple audiences. The website will therefore function as a platform to facilitate both the exchange of information and facilitate scientific collaboration. A directory menu allows users to locate the various contributors involved in the creation of the website. The various institutions and partners are also listed on a separate page. A toolbox allows contributors to obtain clear and concise instructions on the various headings listed, and to harmonise protocols on text layout. Headings include:

- *Language datasheet*
- *Literature datasheet*
- *Sample document datasheet*
- *Document template datasheet*
- *Article stylesheet*
- *Contributors' directory datasheet*

The section: 'Know us better' allows us to present the way the project is organised and outline its operation.<sup>22</sup> ELLAf is constituted as a scientific committee responsible for the elaboration of the theoretical structure of the project and the supervision of the scientific quality of data uploaded to the website.

The scientific committee includes at least one specialist per language and literature. These individuals coordinate documentation and research activities in their sector. In cases with a large data set, several specialists might be jointly responsible for a particular domain. In 2012, the researchers' network for the project in both Africa and Europe counts some forty specialists.

<sup>22</sup> The ELLAf founding members are all literature specialists and linguists familiar with the publishing of literary texts: Ursula Baumgardt, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) and UMR 8135 CNRS, Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire (LLACAN); Jean Derive Emeritus, Université de Chambéry and UMR 8135 CNRS, Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire (LLACAN); Xavier Garnier, Paris III, EA 4400, Ecritures de la modernité; Aliou Mohamadou, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) and UMR 8135 du CNRS, Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire (LLACAN); Narivelo Rajaonarimanana, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) and Centre de Recherche sur l'Océan Indien et Madagascar (CROIMA); Marie Lorin (INALCO/LLACAN) has been in charge of the website since 2011.

#### CONCLUSION

Alongside the intrinsic interest of building a website devoted to literary productions in African languages, both largely unknown and hard to access, ELLAf faces many challenges.

In African studies, literature can be defined as an important topic for interdisciplinarity, engaging linguistics, anthropology, history, geography and ethnomusicology. While borrowing the contextualisation it needs from these disciplines, literature, in turn, can contribute to the understanding of previously inaccessible viewpoints.

For literary studies, the understanding of complex connections between orality and literary writing constitutes a major theoretical challenge, as these cannot be reduced to a simple 'move' from one mode of expression to another. The comparative approach based on textual analysis allows for in-depth reflection on the inclusion of a literary text in its context, and on the impact of the mode of communication—orality or writing—on text structure and content. Whereas the performance of an oral text in the presence of the enunciator and of the audience allows it to be inserted in a context familiar to both communication frames, the situation is radically different in the case of literary writing. We know that when literature is written in European languages, it automatically includes the reader who is not familiar with the context as a privileged addressee. This issue has not been addressed in the case of literary writing in African languages, which requires us to explore a new definition of literary genres based on a more accurate analysis of the relationships between oral literature and literary writing.

ELLAf will facilitate exchanges between researchers from different areas, crucial for a better circulation of textual data and for scientific reflection. Moreover, bridging the gap between the anglophone and francophone worlds through a website using these two working languages will facilitate knowledge dissemination and exchange between researchers.

Lastly, ELLAf will have a scientific and societal impact on the interface between high-level research and the dissemination of results, since the project will offer high-quality scientific research in a format accessible to both specialists and a broader public. Our on-going reflections on appropriate presentational forms seek to build a wealth of documentation that will improve knowledge of literatures in African languages while supporting the construction of educational tools.

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## INTERNET SOURCES

[www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/2167/home.asp?id=2167](http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/2167/home.asp?id=2167)  
[www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)  
[www.bulac.fr](http://www.bulac.fr)  
[www.ellaf.fr](http://www.ellaf.fr)  
[www.hum2.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana](http://www.hum2.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana)  
[www.litaf.cean.org](http://www.litaf.cean.org)  
[www.omeka.org](http://www.omeka.org)  
[www.oralliterature.org](http://www.oralliterature.org)  
[www.sumale.vjf.cnrs.fr/Lexiques/reflex](http://www.sumale.vjf.cnrs.fr/Lexiques/reflex)



Fig. 1. ELLAf's homepage (website preview, <www.ellaf.fr>. Holding page accessed 11 December 2012). Photographs by Marie Lorin and Henry Tourneux.



**Langues et littératures**

**Base de données**

**Dictionnaire des concepts**

**Les dossiers d'ELLAf**

**Sur la carte**

**Annuaire**


## Encyclopédie des littératures en langues africaines

Un espace de diffusion et d'analyse des littératures en langues africaines

Le projet « Encyclopédie des littératures en langues africaines » (ELLAf) porte sur les littératures orales et écrites en langues africaines. C'est un projet de recherche commencé en 2009 qui aura des retombées pédagogiques considérables. Certes, les littératures de quelques langues de grande extension sont relativement bien documentées. Cependant, il n'existe actuellement aucun instrument qui rende compte de la complexité des expressions littéraires du continent et qui permette de réaliser des recherches

**Ajoutés récemment**

**Lion- Kulle Iadde**



**Conférence Mélanie Bourlet**





Fig. 2. Languages and literatures menu, Igbo page (website preview, <www.ellaf.fr>. Holding page accessed 11 December 2012). Photographs by Marie Lorin and Henry Tourneux.



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## Igbo

### Présentation de la langue

*Noms alternatifs : ibo (graphie coloniale aujourd'hui abandonnée mais que l'on retrouve dans quelques publications).*

*Classification : famille Niger-Congo, branche Benue-Congo*

*Écriture : latine avec diacritiques sous les voyelles ouvertes. Avant l'arrivée des missionnaires, il existait bien des scripts igbo comme Nsibidi, Urialala, Uri Mmuo et celui de Nwagwu Anieke, mais les deux premiers étaient*

**Langue**

**Littérature**

**Items liés**

**Bibliographie**





## Minimal item processing

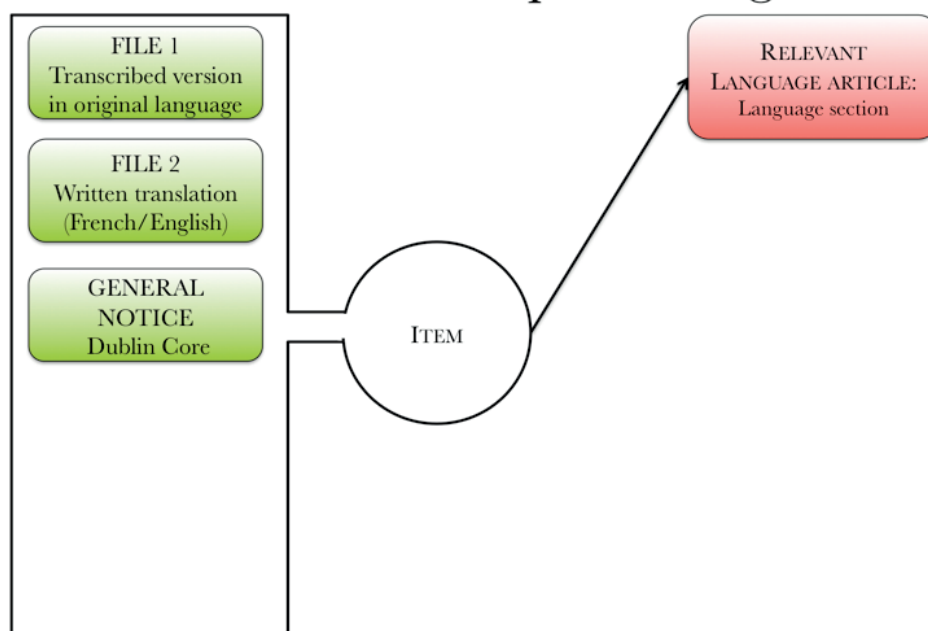


Fig. 3. 'Minimal item processing', minimal data that an item has to provide to be accepted in the database.

## Complex item processing

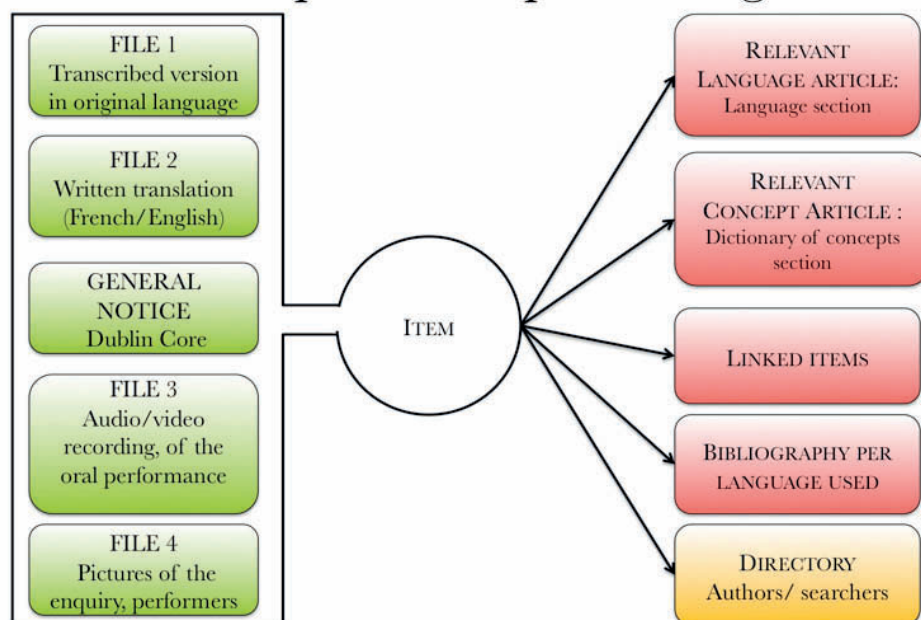
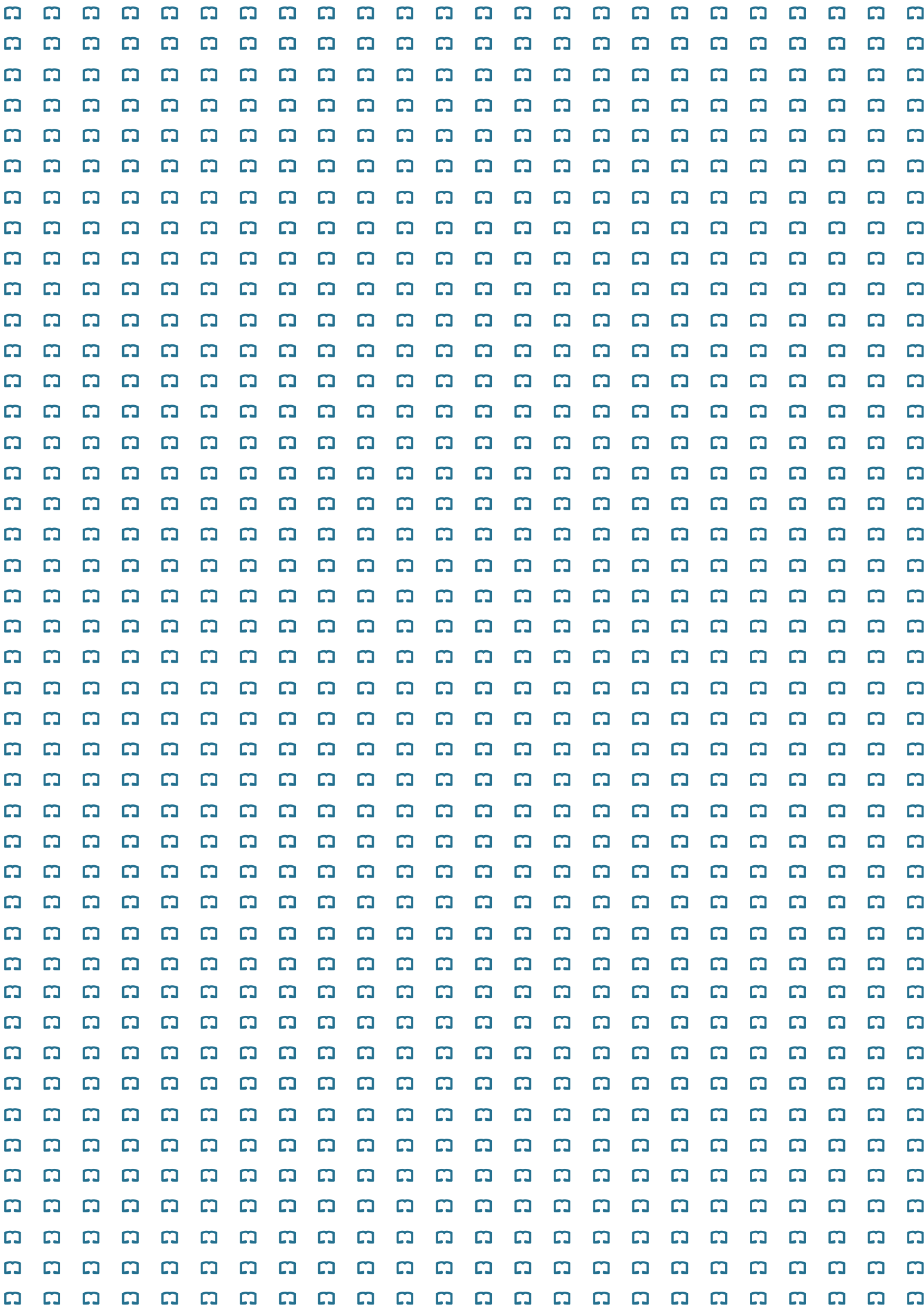


Fig. 4. 'Complex item processing', documentation possibilities are increased by the network structure between items and encyclopaedic sections.

<b>Name of the element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Title	Name of the given resource
Creator	Main entity responsible for the creation of the resource content
Subject	Subject of the resource content
Description	Description of the resource content
Publisher	Main entity responsible for the dissemination of the resource
Contributor	Main entity that contributed to the creation of the resource
Date	Date of the resource's dissemination
Type	Nature or type of the resource content
Format	Physical or digital material of the resource
Identifier	Non ambiguous reference to the resource in a given context
Source	Reference to the resource from which the current resource comes
Language	Language of the resource content
Relation	Reference to another resource to which the current resource is linked
Coverage	Spatiotemporal coverage of the resource
Rights	Information on the copyright of the resource

Fig. 5. Main sections of Dublin Core metadata element set that ELLAF uses in general notices.





## ABSTRACT AND BIOGRAPHIES

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The *Encyclopaedia of Literature in African Languages* (ELLAf) project focuses on oral and written literature in African languages. The project proposes the creation of a website presenting and analysing literary texts in African languages, in order to make a wide range of these written or oral texts, in Sub-Saharan African and Malagasy languages, available to enthusiasts, students and specialists from around the world. The project aims to build up a research database based on literary works produced in their original languages, translated into French and/or English and presented in their linguistic, social and cultural contexts. This paper considers the relevance of ELLAf's technical and archival structure to its impact on improving widespread knowledge of literatures in African languages.

### BIOGRAPHIES

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Baumgardt holds a PhD in African francophone literature and studied Hausa and Fulani at INALCO. She completed her fieldwork in Northern Cameroon, focusing on Fulani Tales. Her doctoral research on the repository of a Fulani storyteller was published in 2000 (*Une conteuse peule et son répertoire*, Goggo Addi de Garoua, Cameroun, Paris: Karthala). Her publications include *Littératures orales africaines. Perspectives théoriques et méthodologiques* (with Jean Derive) and *L'expression de l'espace dans les langues africaines I et II* (with Paulette Roulon-Doko).

Marie Lorin is a PhD student in African Literatures at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris and Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Senegal. Based on many fieldwork seasons in Senegal, specifically in Fouta Toro (North Senegal), her PhD dissertation focuses on Fulani myths collected around the Senegal River, combining literary and anthropological approaches.

Lorin holds a special interest in the role that new media play in the transmission of African oral literatures. She is a founding member and the current webmaster of ELLAf's website.