

# **Retelling Human and Non-Human Affiliations in Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic*: A Zoocritical Exploration**

*Eunice E. Omonzejie*

*Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria*

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## **Abstract**

In African human societies, animals as part of the physical environment play an important role in the conceptualization of spirituality and belief systems. The manner in which they are depicted in narrative fiction often reflects the attitude of a people about animals embedded in their religion, culture and life philosophies. My study sought to explore the representation of animals in African prose fiction of French expression, focusing on Alain Mabanckou's novel *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006). The novel redirects the reader's vision of nature, some types of animals and culture especially as it pertains to the spiritual double. It influences the way we view animals as harbingers of evil by depicting them as being under the total control of man executing his nefarious desires. I also examined the philosophical views that informed Mabanckou's manner of animal presentation. Methodologically, I have aptly applied to this research the literary theory of zoocriticism being that aspect of literary criticism which is concerned with animal representation, animal subjectivity and animal rights. My analysis revealed Mabanckou as an ecocritical novelist who employs his narrative skills to argue for the preservation of interconnected affiliations of all creatures and the earth.

**[Keywords:** Animals, zoocriticism, affiliations, humans, earth, *Mémoires de porc-épic*]

*[A]nimals have been worshipped as gods, reviled as evil spirits, endowed with souls, or regarded as mindless machines. They have been killed for food with careful respect but also slaughtered for sport. Whilst some species have been objects of terror or loathing, others have been taken into our homes and treated as if human themselves.*

(Manning and Serpell, 1994: xi).

## **Introduction**

All through the centuries, animals have featured prominently in oral and written literatures of all human cultures. They have been depicted as being cognizant of their situation within human cultural structures. In the various genera of narrative prose fiction, they have embodied various human and godly qualities and employed to impart religious and ethical lessons. Animal representation in literature reflects as well on the manner in which the real animals are perceived within a cultural community. As Wendy Woodward (2003) appositely upholds, animal representation in texts impacts directly or obliquely on animals themselves and resonates ethically (15). With her sustained

appreciation of the ethical repercussions of literary representation within a culture, Woodward (2008) later insists that “[t]he way that an animal is represented and constructed discursively has [...] an interrelationship with the way that culture responds to the real animal” (15). For as animal studies become a potential force of enlightenment and change in public attitudes and behaviors toward animals, an increasing number of animal characters enter into African prose narrative.

In eras past, the prevalence of animals in African oral traditions has been a prop of expression – surviving in songs, proverbs, riddles, adages and folktales. They have long been popular components of moral tales – acting as a model for humans to draw “moral lessons from the observation of animals” (Doudoroff, 273). In fables, they have been represented as examples of moral standards of behavior for humans to emulate or shun. In satire, they have been used to reflect human eccentricities, destructiveness and political ineptitude with the aim to ridicule. Specifically, as scholars and transcribers attest, the animal trickster protagonist as an integral part of African oral tradition, is an often humorous figure of mischievous disruption, who through cunning creates many features of the natural world such as the moon and stars, hills and rivers as well as physical traits of animals (the craggy nature of the tortoise’ shell, the size of the elephant’s tusks, the length of the giraffe’s neck, the blackness of the dog’s nose, etc.).

In recent times within the newly emerged disciplines of Ecocriticism and Zoocriticism, animals have functioned as polemic agents debating the parameters of the human category and the connectedness between humans and animals (Finnegan, Courlander, Shueib, Hamilton). My study would be theoretically anchored on the context of zoocriticism especially as defined by Huggan and Tiffin (18), to refer to the practice of animal studies in literary studies which focuses on animal representation, animal subjectivity, and animal rights. Animal studies scrutinize how the distinctiveness of human lives, identities and histories are inseparably tied to other sentient, intelligent, communicative and cultured beings. It means turning the animal gaze back unto the humans. Animal studies also interrogates man’s subjugation, domination and exploitation of animals – underlining some philosophers’ assertion that animals exist for the sake of humans; for their use as food and “other accessories of life” (Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* 206). Zoocritics oppose this anthropocentric view of nature or “speciesism” (Singer) which endorses the supremacy of man over nature and his right to exploit it for his own ends.

Thus, within the context of zoocriticism, this essay seeks to analyze and critique the various ways in which animals are represented in Alain Mabanckou’s animal novel *Mémoires de porc-épic* through which non-human life forms are valorized in the author’s vision of his society specifically and the black African ecological structure in general. I would further explore the writer’s attitude to animals, such as it emerges through the various depictions of nature in the narrative, thereby redirecting our thinking of the human category.

Across African societies, various traditional concepts of spirituality involving animal life forms are greatly similar. African peoples believe that their lives are directly

connected to and narrowly reliant on the flukes and fortunes of non-human forms (animal and vegetation). They believe that a shared sacredness connects animals and humans. Part of the common cultural knowledge of African spirituality, is the conception of some animals as the messengers humans use to carry out their evil deeds while some other creatures are believed to be avatars of humans. Some others still such as the owl and the cat are believed to be executors of malevolent deeds and harbingers of evil events. . The belief in the existence of a "double" or an alter-ego exists in most traditional cultures of Africa. In Nigeria and some other parts of West Africa, the term describes one's spiritual double. To this double is attributed the control of one's destiny and absorbent of unnamable portended evil.

It should be noted that in other cultural systems of the world, similar beliefs are perpetrated. According to Gossen, Mesoamericans also believe in a "private spiritual world of self that is expressed through the concept of animal souls or other extrasomatic causal forces that influence their destiny" (1994, 555). Gossen (1996) further stated that this belief is underscored by "the predestination and life history of the self that lies outside the self and is thus not subject to individual control" (83). Mabanckou's play on this individual capacity for self-control would be analysed later.

At this point, one must make reference to the Congolese cultural inferences which serve as the framework of the narration of *Mémoires de porc-épic* and being the ethnical origin of Alain Mabanckou. At the core of the Congolese indigenous belief system, there exists a valorization of non-human life forms which constitute the embodiment of the metaphysical ties between humans and animals and between both of them and nature. The Congolese spiritual concept of souls accepts that a person is explicitly connected to an external animal counterpart or co-essence. They correspondingly believe that their ancestors "could gather the power of animals into their hands ... whenever they needed..." (Janzen and MacGaffey, 55).

In *Mémoires de porc-épic*, the Congolese author Alain Mabanckou employs an animal narrator-protagonist to make statements about human-animal categorisation and essence. Consequently, from its study of human behavior, the porcupine passes laid-back judgmental comments on people, which reminds the wo/man of her/his follies and foibles as a human being. Through narrative imagery, the author reverses the normative human characteristics choosing to bestialize humans and humanize animals. *Mémoires de porc-épic* takes us on a literary journey populated by animals, humans, plants, words and images. The novel reflects the values and beliefs of African people which constitute their everyday life. Specifically, it is the concept of an animal "double" self that comes into play.

In *Mémoires de porc-épic* a definite consciousness of animal life-forms pervades the narration. The author uses the porcupine not only in a naturalistic mode "in a fairly straightforward way and figure as part of the narrative situation and environment" (Soper 303), but also in a compassionate mode, to influence the reader's empathy with the animal narrator.

## Human and Non-Human Spiritual Connectedness

The narration of Mabanckou's novel *Mémoires de porc-épicis* centered upon the belief that a shared sacredness connects non-human life-forms to human life. It testifies to a type of co-existence and interdependence between humans and animals, and between nature and other life-forms. It first calls attention to the spiritual conditions prevalent in the culture of a traditional Congolese village, where animals are believed to have metaphysical bonds with humans. There exists an acknowledgement of the centrality of animals in human life, being a potent life-force without which the humans would cease to exist. In the novel, the association of animals with sorcery and witchcraft is thus not surprising. In African aboriginal religions, witches are persons who possess aptitudes to harm through supernatural means.

Mabanckoure tells the superiority of human mortality to that of animals advancing that Kibandi the protagonist of *Mémoires de porc-épicis* nothing without his animal double and the porcupine outlives him contrary to popular cultural expectation of the simultaneous demise of both connected beings. The narrator's satiric jibe expresses its defiance as it elaborates this interdependence:

*il aura cru sa vie entière que je lui devais quelque chose, que je n'étais qu'un pauvre figurant, qu'il pouvait décider de mon destin comme bon lui semblait, eh bien, sans vouloir tirer la couverture de mon côté, je peux aussi dire la même chose à son égard puisque sans moi il n'aurait été qu'un misérable légume, il n'aurait même pas valu trois gouttelettes de pipi du vieux porc-épic qui nous gouvernait à l'époque où je faisais encore partie du monde animal* (12).

[he would have believed throughout his life that I owed him something, that I was nothing but a poor figure, that he could decide my destiny as it pleased him, well, not wanting to pull the blanket to my side I can say the same thing about him, since without me he would be nothing more than a miserable vegetable, he would not even be worth the urine droplets of the old porcupine who governed us at the time when I was still part of the animal world ...] [All translations of quotes from *Mémoires de porc-épicare mine*]

What is all too evident here and in other portions of *Mémoires de porc-épicis* the author's empathy with animals, through a reversed image of the animal as an evil being. He places the responsibility of evil thoughts and deeds on the humans. The animal double is stripped of its freewill. The animal point of view of narration of the story interprets the anthropocentric view of nature in favour of the animal species. It demonstrates that the evil in animals is at the instance of man who employs them to do his bidding. The narrator's character therefore invites pity instead of disdain or hatred. The animal "double" lives to gratify the needs of its human self, forced to remain at the mercy of its master's occult passions and appetites. The narrator states : *je lui obéissais sans broncher... je vais pourtant lui obéir, j'assumais ma condition de double comme une tortue qui coltinait sa carapace* (15) ["I obeyed him without flinching ... I will however obey, I consent to my condition of a double as a tortoise lugs its shell"]. It insists later that the wicked animal double "*remplira sans protester les missions que celui-ci*

*luiconfiera*" [“execute without protesting the missions that the latter bids him”], concluding with a question to which it gives a negative response : “*depuisquand a-t-on vu d'ailleurs un double nuisible dédire l'homme de qui iltient son existence, hein*” (17-18) [“moreover, since when has it been seen a wicked double contradict the man to whom he owes its existence?”]. The story attempts to upturn the old belief that familiars of witches are themselves likewise evil creatures. It indicates rather that humans are the evil species who force animals to be bad. It suggests that animals are always at the losing end whenever they interact with humans.

The porcupine protagonist attempts to validate the Aristotelian philosophy that animals share with humans such capacities as consciousness, desire, pain and imagination. It challenges the Cartesian viewpoint that disclaimed for animals rationality, consciousness, language and sentience. Descartes considered animals as mere “thoughtless” automata or machines which “cannot be said to have a mind or soul” (Regan, *Introduction* 4). Mabanckou successfully imbues life-force and souls into his non-human fictional creatures, bringing them at par with, and at times surpassing, humans. He puts into question the superiority of human intelligence over that of animals. In *Mémoires de porc-épic*, the categorical statement of the narrator attests to the lack of native intelligence in humans: “*les hommesont tort de se vanter là-dessus, je suis convaincu qu'ils ne naissent pas avec leur intelligence*” (25) [“men are wrong to be boastful about that, I am convinced that they are not born with their intelligence”]. At a point, the narrator immodestly employs self-praise believing that its animal companions will acknowledge its numerous virtues: “*ma lucidité, mon flair, mon intelligence, ma vitesse, ma ruse...*”(68) [“my clear-headedness, my flair, my intelligence, my swiftness, my wiliness”].

In contrast, it employs several epithets to ascribe stupidity to humans, calling them “*cesimbéciles*” (142), “*des fous du village*” (149) [“village fools”]; and goes as far as to derogatorily address them as “*les pauvres*” (39) [“poor things”] for it considers them of inferior circumstance and intelligence. The ultimate denigration is to classify them as creatures to be pitied by animals: “*il leur arrivait alors de se tordre de rire, de plaindre les humains*” (69), [“it would then become twisted up in laughter, pitying the humans”]. The only concession of achievement made to humans is their ability to write (to commit their thoughts to paper) : “*j'étais arrivé à la conclusion que les hommes avaient pour une fois une longueur d'avance sur nous autres les animaux puisqu'ils pouvaient consigner leurs pensées, leur imagination sur du papier* » (122). [“I reached the conclusion that men had for once a lead over us animals because they could commit their thoughts, their imagination to paper”].

## Animal Integrity

There is a premise that pervades the whole narration of *Mémoires de porc-épic*– it is that basically all life forms are equal and interdependent: human, animal, earth. It implies that all possess souls and traits that should be respected. However the story

portrays that because of man's greed, bloodthirstiness and quest for power, he has dominated and abused the animal, exploiting it for its own selfish evil ends. Mabanckou thus attempts to upturn the anthropocentric viewpoint by according animals and vegetation both intelligence and life-force.

A deep respect for animal integrity pervades the story. Mabanckou agrees through his story, with the 16th century French philosophers Montaigne and Pierre Charon who believed, not only that animals had intelligence, but that they surpassed man in virtue and nobility. By means of "sympathetic imagination" (J. M. Coetze), Mabanckou is able to think the human self and his way of life into the way of life of the animal narrator, positively imbuing it with humaneness. The animal world is credited with a social structure and territorial organization. "*je sais d'expérience que les animaux aussi sont organisés, ils ont leur territoire, leur gouverneur, leurs rivières, leurs arbres, leurs sentes, il n'y a pas que les éléphants qui possèdent un cimetière, tous les animaux tiennent à leur univers...*" (127).["I know from experience that animals are also organized, they have their territory, their governor, their rivers, their trees, their ways, it is not only elephants who have a cemetery, all animals hold on to their world"]. The author advances that the harmony and balance in that animal world must not be disturbed by man.

To further develop the image of animal integrity, Mabanckou underscores in the character of the animal narrator, attributes such as kindness, compassion, humaneness and unselfishness. The porcupine ruefully narrates its experience of these feelings after each murderous mission. Its compassionate nature is underlined by its reticence against the killings its master forces him to do: "*aussitôtque je me suis approché du nourrisson, j'ai eu un pincement au cœur j'ai voulu rebrousser chemin*" (178).["as soon as I approached the little baby, my heart flipped over, I wanted to retrace my steps"]. But it was compelled to continue and accomplish its master's bidding to kill a hapless baby because of Kibandi's anger against his parents. The suffering and forlornness of the narrator are baldly stated (186-188).

It should likewise be stressed that when the porcupine makes any reference to his human side, it is describing its weakness not its strength. For example, when it is very frightened or as now when he digresses in his narration, denigrating humans as prevaricators: "*c'est encore ma part humaine qui s'est exprimée, en effet j'ai appris de l'homme le sens de la digression, ils ne vont jamais droit au but, ouvrent des parenthèses qu'ils oublient de refermer*" (151).["it is still my human side which has expressed itself, in fact I learnt from man the meaning of digression, they never go straight to the point, [they] open brackets which they forget to close"].

### **Animal Victimhood**

The porcupine's condition of victimhood and harmlessness is also highlighted. It is portrayed as a hapless victim of the whims of its human master Kibandi - a creature constantly involved in the existential struggle of resistance and antipathy to human ethos. It is depicted as an unselfish character that is totally under the spell of its human double

acting against its will as his supernatural agent of evil: “*je n'ai été que la victime des moeurs des gens de ce pays*” (217). [“I was nothing but the victim of the customs of the people of this region”]. The porcupine describes its haplessness and incapacity to oppose its master, underpinning the author’s view of human domination.

*Si j'avais eu le courage, j'aurais dit à mon maître que nous avons atteint la limite de nos activités ... je ne voudrais pas que tu me juges sans tenir compte du fait que je n'étais qu'un subalterne, une ombre dans la vie de Kibandi, je n'ai jamais appris à désobéir* (188).

“if I had the courage I would have told my master that we had reached the limit of our activities ... I would not want you to judge me without considering the fact that I was just a stooge, a shadow in Kibandi’s life, I never learnt to disobey”.

### Human Bestiality

*Mémoires de porc-épic* participates in the on-going zoocritical debate of who possesses bestiality – animals or humans. In fact, through intertextual characterisation, L’Escargot Entêtea character from Mabanckou’s previous novel *VerreCassé*, is announced in the annex of this novel from where he interrogates: “*D'ailleurs, qui de l'Homme ou de l'animal est vraiment une bête? Vaste question!*”(229). [“Moreover, man or animal, who is really a beast? Huge question!”]. The novel seems to be predicated on the assumption that man’s original state is animal, and that he can very easily return to bestiality if he accedes to his base instincts. This is validated mainly in the blood-thirsty characters of the protagonist Kibandi and Papa Kibandi. The latter through his wizardry devoured a total of 99 people in the village of Mossaka, including his own brother Matapari, sister Maniongui and niece Niangui-Boussina. His degeneracy into animalistic state is pithily declared :

*tout se passait comme si, en vieillissant, Papa Kibandi retournait à l'état animal, il ne coupait plus ses ongles, il avait les tics d'un vrai rat lorsqu'il fallait manger, il grattait le corps à l'aide de ses orteils ... le vieil homme était désormais pourvu de longues dents acérées, en particulier celles de devant, des poils gris et durs prenaient racine dans ses oreilles, arrivaient jusqu'à la naissance de ses mâchoires...*(87)

[it all happened as if in aging, Papa Kibandi returned to the animal state, he no longer cut his nails, he had the twitch of a real rat when he had to eat, he scratched his body with his toes ... the old man was thence equipped with long pointed teeth, particularly the front ones, tough grey hairs took root in his ears, reaching down to the edge of his jaws].

Mabanckou’s elaborate application of contrast highlights the bestiality of humans. While the porcupine narrator vaunts its own virtues, it denigrates man’s vices. The protagonist Kibandi’s physical trait of extreme skinniness and unprepossessing features constitute the physical ugliness popularly associated with witches and further suggest

ugliness of behaviour. The narrator dehumanizes Kibandi through the character Papa Louboto, by ascribing to the protagonist the ugliness of a cockroach and the skinniness of a photo-frame nail: "*Kibandi était laid comme une punaise, maigre comme un clou de cadre de photo*" (128). In the narration, humans are insultingly designated repeatedly with the epithet "*les cousins germains du singe*" (68, 127, 150). ["the monkey's first cousins"]

Other references in the story to the mental prowess (or lack thereof) of humans generally, are downright unflattering. Right from its incipit the narrator jeers at the acclaimed superiority of non-animal species.

donc, je ne suis qu'un animal, un animal de rien du tout, les hommes diraient une *bête sauvage* comme si on ne compte pas de plus bêtes et de plus sauvages que nous dans leur espèce... à vrai dire, je n'ai rien à envier aux hommes, je me moque de leur prétendue intelligence.(11)

[so, I am just an animal, an animal of no significance, men would say a savage beast as if the more beastly and more savage than us are not found amongst their specie ... truly, I have nothing for which to envy men, I laugh at their supposed intelligence].

This interrogation of human intelligence continues as the porcupine's animal companions wondering "*s'ils se rendaient compte de leur arrogance, de leur supériorité auto-proclamée...*" (69).["if they were aware of their arrogance, of their self-proclaimed superiority"]. Here the porcupine narrator pricks the bubble of human pride and shatters his sense of superiority over other animals, debasing him through an elaboration of his negative attributes – features usually associated with animals. In Kibandi's character, these include ruthlessness and viciousness against his own kind.

Human bestiality is also depicted through the exposure of Kibandi's excessive thirst for blood. He is cannibalistic – feeding on his fellow humans. He is so voracious that as at the time of his death, he has "eaten" ("*a mangé*") 99 people in his village of Séképembé, and is preparing to kill a set of twin children. The porcupine narrator sardonically defends this despicable practice.

*je dois le préciser, mon cher Baobab, pour qu'un être humain en mange un autre il faut des raisons concrètes, la jalousie, la colère, l'envie, l'humiliation, le manque de respect, je te jure que nous n'avons en aucun cas mangé quelqu'un juste pour le plaisir de le manger... (Mémoires de porc-épic, 138-139).*

The sarcasm makes it clear that the proffered reasons are not sufficient enough for man's murderousness. The story condemns the deplorable values of humans and their morally anomalous conducts relating to witchcraft. Human savagery is shown even in the way suspected witches are tried - by plunging their hands up to the elbow into a pot of boiling oil to pick a silver bracelet without getting scalded (99). Then the young suitor wrongfully indicted (through a bogus investigative-corpse ritual [140-141]) of killing the girl Kiminou through sorcery, is buried alive with the deceased "*sans autre forme de procès, parce que c'était l'usage*" (140) ["without any other form of trial, because it was the practice"].

Apart from man's brutality to man, the cruelty of humans to animal-kind is also depicted. According to the narrator, man's savagery was so great that his animal companions always wanted to know if man were conscious of the harm he inflicted on animals since they appeared deaf to all appeal for peaceful co-existence : “ilsavaienttoujoursvoulu savoir si les hommes étaient conscients du mal qu'ils infligeaient aux animaux... puisque les humains nous mènent la vie dure, puisqu'ilssont hostiles et sourds à notreappel à la co-existence pacifique” (68-69). Rhetorical questions by the narrator denounce cruelty to animals and animal captivity for man's pleasure:

*mais quel intérêt de passer sa vie en réclusion tel un esclave, quel intérêt d'imaginer la liberté derrière des fils barbelés, ...moi je préfère les aléas de la vie en brousse aux cages dans lesquelles plusieurs de mes compères sont séquestrés pour terminer un jour ou l'autre dans les marmites des humains (13-14).*

[“but of what interest is it to live one's life in sequestration like a slave, of what interest is it to imagine liberty behind bared wires, as for me, I prefer the vagaries of life in the bush to the cages within which several of my comrades were confined to end one day or another in the cooking pots of humans].

The narrator makes it evident that the human bestiality also extends to the degradation of his environment:

il y a eu des fous du village qui ont essayé de mettre fin à tes jours et dans leur folie destructrice, nom d'un porc-épic, ils ont voulu te réduire en bois de chauffe, ils ont cru que tu bouchais l'horizon, que tu cachais la lumière du jour (149).

[there were some village fools who tried to put an end to your days, and in their destructive madness ... they wanted to reduce you to firewood, they believed that you were blocking the horizon, that you were obstructing the daylight...]

Man is thus condemned for his role as destroyer of nature for unreasonable purposes.

### **Human and Animal Forms with the Earth**

Expanding our critique to nature, it becomes pertinent to point out that in *Mémoires de porc-épic*, Mabanckou is aware of his environment and argues for the interrelatedness of all factors within the ecosystem – human, animal and plant. As his narrator is a rodent, his addressee is a tree. When the porcupine experiences anguish, despondency and dread at the death of its human double, interaction with nature becomes imperative. It communes with the Baobab tree, relieving anxiety by narrating to it all its woes. The porcupine finds solace in nature not with humanity.

One can argue that Mabanckou maintains an ecocritical view-point by virtue of the fact that he makes a lot of reference to African flora and fauna in his narration. He describes the beauty of the rural landscapes of Séképembé and Mossaka, detailing the forests, trees, animals, birds, hills, rivers and the elements. Besides, with his novel, Mabanckou echoes the ecologists' appeal for peaceful co-existence amongst all of nature's

creatures. Mabanckou's ethical message to his readers is an appreciation of the environment and the redirection of our thinking about the relationship between humans and animals, and between humans and the earth. In using animal characters, Mabanckou's concern is focused on the exposure of human injustice against fellow humans and against animals as well as against other non-human life forms.

In *Mémoires de porc-épic*, substantial importance is placed on nature as a life-force that should not be tampered with. One can state that the Baobab which the narrator porcupine addresses in the story is also a protagonist, albeit a silent and stationary one. The character of the tree is used ecocritically by the author to convey his message to humans of respect for nature's vegetation. The Baobab which the narrator calls "*le gardien de la forêt*" (149) is used to represent the totality of plant life which humans must safeguard from harm; thus the acclamation: "*tugouvernes du regard la florentière* (148). [“you govern the entire flora with your look”]. The porcupine believes the majestic tree possesses a soul, serves as a medium to communicate with the ancestors and protects the region. It declares its conviction in the powers of speech and movement attributed to the Baobab in a bygone era. The ecological message is underlined by the narrator's direct reference to green when describing the habitat of Baobab: "*tu as de la chance de vivre dans un lieu paradisiaque, tout est vert ici*" (148). [“you are lucky to live in a heavenly place, here, all is green”].

Mabanckou's fable equally highlights the interconnectedness between animals and vegetation, demonstrating their mutual need of each other – the Baobab provides food, shelter, medicine and even physical and mystical protection from danger for all creatures. They in turn just like the porcupine, nourish the tree with their faeces and urine as organic fertilizer, though the narrator is quite quick to apologize for any perceived desecration. The porcupine believes the majestic tree possesses a soul, serves as a medium to communicate with the ancestors and protects the region. With aphorism, it also extols the sacred uses of its sap and bark for medicinal and spiritual purposes. It then concludes by sounding an alarm at the devastation that will occur at the destruction of Baobab: "*que ta disparition serait préjudiciable, fatale pour la contrée*" (149) [“that your destruction shall be inimical, fatal for the whole region”].

## **Conclusion**

Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic* attempts to redefine in a holistic way, the relationship of humans and non-human life-forms within their environment. The narration portrays both human and nonhuman life forms as equal and interdependent. Mabanckou's porcupine protagonist is a projector of morality. He presents good and evil as life's choices but he puts the responsibility of choice squarely on humans. Through *Mémoires de porc-épic* humans are indicted for their spoliation of the world's natural vegetation instead of its conservation. The novel is an appeal to the human heart to open up to animals and our natural environment. As an advocacy of justice, it is a clarion call for the dis-continuation of cruelty to animals, violence to humans and environmental degeneration. and moderation and fairness to include nature. It argues for the

preservation of all life forms. It is hoped that the influence of Mabanckou's novel on the reader, will cause her/him to echo L'EscargotEntêté's concluding remark: "Et depuis, je ne regarde plus les animaux avec les mêmes yeux" (229).["Since then I no longer look at animals with the same eyes"]. Mabanckou solicits for the reader's understanding of the interconnectedness of all things – appealing for the respect of the integrity of human and animal minds and the life of the earth.

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*Dr. Eunice Omonzejie is an Associate Professor of French Studies in the Department of Modern Languages, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. She is the Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Arts of her university. She is a scholar of African literature of French expression as well as French literature. Her areas of interest include women, masculinities and migration studies. She has written several articles and chapters in books in both French and English. She has been the editor of the last three volumes of the interdisciplinary journal Focus on Contemporary Issues. Email: euniceomons@yahoo.co.uk*

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