

## The Story of a Life as It Is, Not as They Assume It Is: Revisiting the Anticipatory and Healing Powers of a Memoir

*L'histoire d'une vie telle qu'elle est et non telle qu'ils la supposent : Revisiter les pouvoirs d'anticipation et de guérison d'un mémoire*

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### Résumé

Cet article propose une discussion sur les mémoires comme représentation d'un genre littéraire qui permet surtout aux écrivains de présenter leur récit de vie selon leur part de vérité. L'article tend également à démontrer que les mémoires, d'une certaine manière, constituent un moyen d'entraver la propagation d'hypothèses sur la vie du mémorialiste. Plus important encore, l'article vise à fournir des preuves aux affirmations selon lesquelles les mémoires sont utilisées pour remplir plusieurs fonctions, notamment (i) gérer les crises d'identité, (ii) atteindre des objectifs politiques et (iii) repousser la culpabilité et se réconcilier. Ces affirmations ont été mises à l'épreuve avec respectivement les mémoires suivants : "Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez", "My First Coup d'Etat : Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa", et "Tuesday's Child : A Memoir". Avec des

preuves extraites des livres analysés, il a été démontré que les mémoires n'ont pas seulement un effet rétroactif ; ils permettent aussi à leur auteur d'anticiper l'avenir et d'avoir un impact sur le cours des événements.

**Mots clés :** Mémoire, Vérité, Identité, Anticipation, Culpabilité, Réconciliation

### **Abstract**

This paper suggests a discussion on memoirs as representing a literary genre that, above all, allows writers to introduce their story according to their part of the truth. The paper also tends to demonstrate that memoirs, in a certain fashion, constitute a means to obstruct the propagation of assumptions about the memoirist's life. Most importantly, the paper aims to provide evidence for the claims that memoirs are used to serve several functions including (i) handling identity crises, (ii) achieving political goals, and (iii) repelling guilt and getting reconciled. These claims were put to test with respectively the following memoirs: "Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez", "My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa", and "Tuesday's Child: A Memoir". With evidence retrieved from the books analysed, it has been shown that memoirs not only have a retroactive effect; they also allow their author to anticipate the future and have an impact on the course of events.

**Keywords:** Memoir, Truth, Identity, Anticipation, Guilt, Reconciliation

## **I. Introduction**

For various reasons, the vagaries of life can leave an individual with scars which, quite often, are hard to get rid of. When not dealing with scars and experiences, life can be a matter of becoming, needs, and goals, all of which are intimately bound to halfway obstacles. For this reason, humans often feel the need to tell their story and introduce their authentic image to the world, cherishing the hope that they will be understood, forgiven, and/or embraced. This is the reality that justifies the importance of the autobiographical writing, especially one of its major types: the memoir.

Indeed, memoirs have some substantial communication and persuasive power which often allows writers to give voice to their emotions, thoughts, or intentions and restore the truth—their truth. Memoirs render a story-telling activity so eloquent that, hardly, any other literary genre would succeed in doing so. Besides, whether for reconciling with the past or arranging the present moment in search for a better future, a memoir has been used in a myriad of contexts to serve various goals. However, in most cases, one can note that memoirs are used as to draw a clearcut between the memoirist's part of the truth and the audience's assumptions.

Therefore, this paper essentially puts emphasis on two properties of a “good” memoir: (i) it succeeds in drawing attention to the memoirist's exclusive version of the story and leaves no room for assumptions; (ii) it either helps the writer to overcome conflicting situations by seeking and/or showing forgiveness and move on in life or serves as an aspect of a more global strategy for seeking legitimacy. As a result, three books have been selected for the sake of this discussion: “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez” by Rodriguez (1982), “My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa”, by Mahama (2012), and “Tuesday's Child: A Memoir” by Ashun (2015). Respectively, the three memoirs deal with the following themes, around which the discussion in this paper will develop:

- i. A memoir as a remedy to identity crises
- ii. A memoir as a political device for seeking legitimacy and power
- iii. A memoir as way to expel guilt and reconcile with the past

## **2. Literature Review**

Literature, like pure science, remains a field about which there is yet a lot to say. That is, its flexible nature, which allows the writer to explore a myriad of perspectives, makes it unique. However, unlike pure science which mostly follows empirical principles, literature can be anything but restrictive since it allows the writer's inspiration to blossom into a multiplicity of possibilities. Still, the question remains whether the same applies to a memoir. But first, it would be interesting to explain what the notion of memoir entails.

## 2. 1. An Overview of the Memoir

More than a mere literary genre, a memoir is a way for writers—who also happen to be artists—to give life to their feelings, heal injuries that time and events have brought about, and reconcile with history without altering it. Most importantly, the autobiographical writing makes it possible to discover, accept, or redefine the notion of “self”. Such perception of a memoir would certainly not be refuted by William Zinsser (1998), who suggested the following:

Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we once were and what values and heritage shaped us. If the writer is seriously embarking on a quest, readers will be nourished by the journey, bringing along many associations with questions of their own. (p. 6)

Furthermore, if it is important to specify what a memoir is and shed light on the various possibilities related to its definition, it is also essential to specify what a memoir is not, mostly because such distinction often revives controversies. Thus, Zinsser (2006) insists on what a memoir should not be confused with and asserts that a “*memoir isn’t the summary of a life; it’s a window into a life [...] It may look like a casual and even random calling up of bygone events. It’s not; it’s a deliberate construction*”. (p. 136)

It might seem easy to narrate the natural course of one’s life events; yet, doing so, as suggested by Zinsser (2006:136), is a matter of “*deliberate construction*” which, by extension, depends on pure art. And yet, memoirs often turn out to be associated with the feeling of reading something “fabricated” or “embellished”. That is, a reader’s first impression of a memoir might be—perhaps mistakenly—that the author either intends to display a life story which is not necessarily original, or else, to be insincere about the natural course of events for more attractiveness. That takes us to the issue of sincerity or truth in a memoir.

Indeed, even though memoirs have unanimously been perceived as pertaining to a form of nonfiction within the literary realm, the argument as to how distant they are from fiction has long existed. To put it simply, is a memoir purely a nonfiction literary genre or does it allow room for fiction? What does truth represent in a memoir and what does the absence of truth imply? What do memoirists seek to present to the world through their life story and how important is this in the eyes of the reader? Ultimately, since

the autobiographical writing consists of the writer's endeavour to tell personal stories, what makes memoirs interesting narratives to read? Before providing any answers for this ultimate question, it is highly important to initially address certain issues related to the concept of memoir itself.

## 2. 2. The Memoir: A Fiction or Nonfiction?

As Angell (2007:1) pointed out, “*our stories about our own lives are a form of fiction, I began to see, and become more insistent as we grow older, even as we try to make them come out in some other way*”. The question as to whether the memoir should be classified as fiction or nonfiction often seems to spark off a lively debate. The debate even takes the form of a dilemma. This is because the principle according to which a memoir is a nonfiction is often challenged when it comes to observing what happens in reality. What can be noted is that certain aspects of a memoir can hardly be put together without the writer's imagination. More precisely, the story told in a memoir, no matter how well the memoirist succeeds in making it up, can hardly be well articulated without modifying specific sections of it for the sake of convenience. Below is an illustration of this fact:

When you're writing a book that is going to be a narrative with characters and events, you're walking very close to fiction, since you're using some of the methods of fiction writing. You're lying, but some of the details may well come from your general recollection rather than from the particular scene. In the end it comes down to the readers. If they believe you, you're OK. A memoirist is really like any other con man; if he's convincing, he's home. If he isn't, it doesn't really matter whether it happened, he hasn't succeeded in making it feel convincing. (Hynes, 2004)

## 2. 3. The Virtue of Truth in a Memoir:

A question that readers often ask is to know what a memoir would represent without its truth-value. Of course, the first purpose of reading a memoir is not to check whether it reflects the truth or not, but it seems undeniable that truth (or else, faithfulness to the natural sequence of events and the maintenance their real nature) is a fundamental element when dealing with a memoir. Thus, what is the virtue of truth in a memoir?

It appears that the full truth is not a sine qua non for making up a memoir. However, readers are also looking for a story that displays some sense of integrity to what is feasible, reachable, and accepted by common sense—otherwise, the story becomes an epic. This is how readers form their sense of truth while dealing with a memoir. For this reason, the concern for remaining truthful and sincere is manifested in a lot of memoirs. This concern attains such a degree that one might be tempted to believe that memoirs are sorts of a testimony to the audience, more of a justification than of a narrative. The passage below, derived from Delbridge (2009), is an illustration of the importance of truth in a memoir.

To the Reader: Lord knows I've tried my best to tell the truth here, even when it would have been simpler to fabricate. While all of the incidents in this essay collection happened, I have changed the names of people, businesses, and institutions when it felt right. In a few cases I even nudged a fact slightly, but no more than necessary and only to avoid identifying somebody I love. I'm writing from memory most of the time, so be forgiving, gentle reader. I went to college in the seventies. (p. ix)

## **2. 4. Memory: the foundation of a Memoir:**

Even though it has now been suggested that a memoir can hardly be pure nonfiction, the paradox remains that, recurrently, a question that crosses the reader's mind while going through a memoir regards whether the narrated events did occur in the way the writer pretends they did. Besides, it is legitimate to ask if the sequence of events chosen by the memoirist fit the original evolution of the story. The issue of conformity is also constantly raised while reading a memoir. Therefore, what is evoked is the writer's memory, i.e. how sharp it is in recollecting the different events both on their own and in relation to each other.

What is sought is not for the writer to be able to recollect all the events that occurred in his life, especially those in the early childhood; rather, the task is to be able to revive the salient moments, arrange them according to their chronological order and keep their true nature intact. If this is done successfully, it feels in the memoir which becomes systematically a successful work of art; however, if the writer fails to do so, the memoir itself will let the reader know.

Thus, what specific role does a memoir play and how fundamental is that role? More precisely, what functions does a memoir serve as a sociocultural, historical, or even political product? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in the upcoming sections of this paper. To do so, the following memoirs will be examined one after the other and each one will serve to illustrate a specific role played by the memoir: “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez”, “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa”, and “Tuesday’s Child: A Memoir”. The themes that will run through this paper are (i) A memoir as a remedy to identity crises, (ii) A memoir as a political device for seeking legitimacy and power, and (iii) A memoir as a path towards forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **3. Roles of a Memoir**

More than a mere life story, a memoir represents a combination of virtues regarding various aspects of the interrelations between man and his natural environment. However, within such a range of functions that a memoir serves, some appear to be more commonly opted for. What follows is an exploration of three of those functions.

#### **3. 1. A Memoir as a Remedy to Identity Crises: Illustrations from “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez”**

I grew up victim to a disabling confusion. As I grew fluent in English, I no longer could speak Spanish with confidence...It surprised my listeners to hear me. They’d lower their heads, better to grasp what I was trying to say. They would repeat their questions in gentle, affectionate voices. But by then I would answer in English. No, no, they would say, we want you to speak to us in Spanish...But I couldn’t do it. Pocho then they called me. (pp. 28, 29)

Richard Rodriguez’s memoir is particularly expressive of loss, uncertainty, and questions about life and social belonging at some point. This memoir deals with the writer’s controversial search for identity. The main question seems to be, “Who am I?”, which remains barely answered until the end of the memoir.

In many sections of the book, Rodriguez appears to say, “That is how you see me, but this is how I want you to look at me.” and eventually, “This is the image I want for myself.” Such perception of the “self” gives way to a

series of embarrassing situations that Rodriguez goes through, with, each time, significant disappointment as a result. Of all the things that embarrassed him, his dark skin colour and the fact that his parents would often speak Spanish in public instead of English were the ones that he considered the most paining. For instance, he declares:

It was more troubling for me to hear my parents speak in public: their high-whining vowels and guttural consonants; their sentences that got stuck with 'eh' and 'ah' sounds and the confused syntax; the hesitant rhythm of sounds so different from the way the gringos spoke. (pp. 14, 15)

Hunger of memory starts in a very figurative but highly evoking way, with lines that reveal a lot about Rodriguez's mindset and, in a way, his wishes. The first paragraph reads, "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle." This passage could be interpreted as one that shows Rodriguez's satisfaction about the fact that he, an immigrant, has come into the land of *Los gringos*<sup>1</sup>, acquired their knowledge—perhaps better than they did—to the point that he had become a threat and had to leave their land. However, despite this excess of pride and self-esteem shown at the beginning of the memoir, the rest of the story shows a very skeptical and sad man: skeptical as to his roots and fate, and sad, almost broken, about his skepticism. Not to add that Rodriguez will mention, later in the story, his anxieties as to his maleness, thus giving evidence that in addition to the range of crises already mentioned, he also had to deal with questions as to his sexual inclination. The rest of the memoir, therefore, evolves according to this situation. The sequence of events can be outlined according to four themes until Rodriguez finds out his true identity and reconciles with the self.

First, Rodriguez appears to say, "This is who they say I am". Thus, he introduces himself as a Mexican immigrant living in America and starts narrating, accordingly, his story, ranging from where he comes from to the community that he lives in. But it does not take long before the reader can realise that Rodriguez is a sad and unsatisfied man and that a significant part of the memoir deals with his melancholic life. Indeed, worse than disliking his being a mulatto, Rodriguez even denies the fact that he is not a middle-class American. Therefore, the spirit of "This is who they say I am." is well indicated in the memoir and should be highlighted because it shows



Rodriguez's refusal to go along with the reality that his community ceaselessly reminds him of. Everything seems to show him that he is different from *Los gringos*, no matter how well he manages to speak English, behave like middle-class Americans, or get close to them. Besides, even worse is the fact that he had fallen into an inferiority complex due to his rejection of Mexican values for the American lifestyle, which he viewed as a high priority.

This attitude was fostered on the one hand by his mother who, angrily, would say, 'You look like a negrito,'... 'You know how important looks are in this country. With *los gringos* looks are all that they judge on.' (p. 113) On the other hand, it was Rodriguez himself who seemed to have embraced those American "good-manners".

Secondly—perhaps simultaneously—Rodriguez gently adopts a narrative approach in which he appears to say, "This is who I think I am—or who I want to be like, whether you like it or not." His love for such ideal depiction of himself pushes him towards the rejection of not only his Mexican accent but also body features such as the shapes of his face and nose, and mostly his skin colour which, he thought, was the first noticeable sign of his non-gringo status. Rodriguez, desperate, asserts in the memoir:

One night when I was eleven or twelve years old, I locked myself in the bathroom and carefully regarded my reflection in the mirror over the sink. Without any pleasure I studied my skin. I turned on the faucet...With a bar of soap, I fashioned a thick ball of lather. I began soaping my arms. I took my father's straight razor out of the medicine cabinet. Slowly, with steady deliberateness, I put the blade against my flesh, pressed it as close as I could without cutting, and moved it up and down across my skin to see if I could get out, somehow lessen, the dark. (p.124)

Besides, as Rodriguez tries hard to impose an ideal image of himself, he also shows how difficult, if not impossible, it has been for him to be unanimously accepted for his choice. Indeed, no matter what he did, he could neither be perceived as a gringo nor get satisfaction from his attempt to be what he simply was not.

Consequently, Rodrigues comes to take up another voice, one that certainly denotes his consciousness about the reality. The memoir finally presents not a new Rodriguez but the very same that now seems to have learned from experience and who seems to say, “I have come to the resolution that I can never be that person I am mimicking.” Next, the writer realises that the best—not to say the only—way for him to enjoy peace and reconcile with others, but mostly with himself, is to accept that he is a Latino. These lines are particularly important in showing Rodriguez’s reconciliation with the self:

Writing these pages, admitting my embarrassment or my guilt, admitting my sexual anxieties and my physical insecurity, I have not been able to forget that I am not being formal...The curse of the physical shame was broken by the sun; I was no longer ashamed of my body. No longer would I deny myself the pleasing sensations of my maleness...I am today darker than I ever was as a boy. (pp. 130, 136)

With “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez”, one realises that a memoir can be a way for memoirists to gradually search for, find out, and embrace their true identity. More than that, by writing a memoir, writers set out to achieve two goals, among other: (i) to show to the world not only that they have come to reconcile with their identity, their roots, and (ii) to draw attention to why, for some reason, they faced such an identity crisis at some point of their existence. Therefore, it can be argued that within memoirs that are meant to remedy identity crises, and from the perspective of the memoirist, the salient aspect of the narrative is not the writer’s reconciliation with the self, but rather the excuse or the reason provided for having been lost at some point. In this situation, what the writer seems to say is, “Please, do not judge me. After all, I am just a human being like anybody else.”

### **3. 2. A Memoir as a Political Device for Seeking Legitimacy and Power: Another Way of Looking at “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa”**

What follows might be an uncommon way to interpret Mahama’s memoir provided that most credits given to the book derive from a purely formalist, compositional perspective. In other words, if “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” is generally analysed according

to what it represents in terms of its form<sup>2</sup>, little interest has been drawn on its function in most analyses. For this reason— though the author himself claims that he found the balance between his social life and political ambitions while putting the story together—this discussion will explore Mahama’s memoir in terms of its political implications. If one considers the circumstances under which “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” was released and the particular time when it was introduced to Ghanaians, it could be said that Mahama’s memoir is a political campaign runner.

To explain how this memoir was used by a politician (Mahama) as a means to legitimacy and—consequently—power, it is important to look at both the historical background of the memoir and the author’s political life and ambitions, the context, timing and content of the memoir, and the eventual implications it may have on the political scale.

John Dramani Mahama was born into a well-off Ghanaian family, with his father as a minister of state in the Nkrumah government, his mother who had not always been there, and many siblings of which, he clearly shows in the book that he was the most catered for. His father has been the one who lit up his life, his source of inspiration, and “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa”, somehow, is the expression of that love and pride he has for his late father. Throughout the whole story, the reader can note instances where Mahama appears to show how much he is proud of his father and how much he would like the latter to be proud of him. The following passage is an illustration:

Looking back now, I see that it is no coincidence that in class 4 I was recognized for my aptitude and achievement in history and English, and that years later, in university; I graduated with a degree in history and then we later pursued a graduate diploma in communication studies to satiate my love of reading and my desire to write...Of all my father’s children, I turned out to be the one who would follow directly his footsteps. (p. 36)

Besides, through this memoir, Mahama endeavours to deliver two important messages to Ghanaians, both of which reveal to be vital to his reputation and the becoming of his political career. The first one is that his father was not the one people took him to be. The author, therefore,

attempts to place his father in the right side of history by showing not only that the true story of that man had remained untold but also that the perception that Ghanaians had about him, i.e., his father, was wrong. He displays the positive sides of his father, talking about his realizations and the deeds that make him a good person. To evidence Mahama's efforts to associate that sense of rightness and greatness with the memory of his father, the dedication of the book reads, "To the memory of my father, Mr. E. A. Mahama, a man of humility and integrity, who lived in service to his family, his people, and his nation". Later in the story, such feeling of pride, which Mahama depicts as mutual between his father and himself, is manifested in several instances in the memoir, among which the following:

After I ran to become a member of Parliament and won, my father gave me all his books and papers. He would often talk to me, long into the night, about his experiences in politics, sharing the lessons he'd learned and cautioning me about the pitfalls and impediments I might encounter. Sometimes...I would be reminded of that day in the headmistress's office..."This your little boy Dramani," she'd say. "I think he has the potential to make you really proud." (p. 37)

The second message that Mahama sets out to deliver with "My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa" is a structured one. It takes the following form: "If I was able to prove that my father was a good and strong person and since I have the ambition to be like him, then I am the right person for Ghana's prosperity." As a result, he adopts a sort of argumentative approach in which the main objective is to make him appear brave, courageous, intelligent, and equipped with all the qualities a great leader should have. Below is an example derived from the class bully anecdote, which Mahama stood against and to which he put an end:

We stood together, one in front of the other but I was the first in that chain...David explained that they felt it would be best to delay the protest by a day, just one day. Tomorrow, they promised, they would be ready. Their voices were trembling nearly as badly as their hands. [Mahama's ripost:] "Our fathers pay our school fees," I huffed. "The school fees pay for the snacks, so these snacks are being paid for by my father. He is buying them for me, and not for you." (pp. 48, 50)

The question about “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” is not to know whether it is fiction or nonfiction; for, it truly takes the form of a nonfiction piece of work. However, what is interesting about this memoir is that the reader gets the impression that Mahama only told the parts of the story that glorify him as a political leader, the son of a former minister of state, a member of a very “rich” family, and mostly, a man who cherishes the ambition to be the top decision-maker of his country. This, therefore, brings in the question to know whether ignoring part of the truth turns the story into a fiction or not. In any case, the fact is that Mahama, in a way, modifies the story “without” altering its integrity, as the author himself stresses. The following passage represents the Mahama’s observation within the memoir:

This is a work of nonfiction. I have changed the names of some individuals and modified identifying features, including physical descriptions and occupations, in order to preserve their anonymity. Occasionally, timelines have been compressed in order to further preserve privacy and to maintain narrative flow. The goal in all cases was to protect people’s privacy without damaging the integrity of the story.

Now, though “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” puts up the writer’s endeavour to preserve the integrity of the story, Mahama seems to adapt the events to his political visions and his search for legitimacy. This adaptation takes two forms: (i) presenting Mahama’s greatest virtues, especially in areas where, as a potential leader of the nation, he needs acknowledgment and Ghanaians’ support, and (ii) presenting the memoirist as a sort of victim of the privileges he inherited from his wealthy family, especially his father.

Because Mahama was the sitting vice president of the Republic of Ghana when this book was published and because, subsequently, he came to be the president-elect of the country, it is legitimate to think of “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” as a serious and subtle campaign runner for its author. This memoir allowed Mahama to refine his image as a strong leader for his nation, seek approval among Ghanaians that he did not necessarily convince as a potential man of the state, and eventually aspire to the presidency of the country as a man that the people

knows enough. His memoir has succeeded in making him achieve that rehabilitating goal.

Thus, a memoir—just like “My First Coup d’Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” and others—is a literary device that is often used as means to political ends. Under such circumstances, it can serve three functions. First, politicians can use it after their terms to provide excuses or explanations for things they did, choices they made, and in a way, outline their successes and failures. Secondly, a memoir can be used by political leaders as they are in office to subtly show their ideals, with the intention of informing, sensitising, or convincing about the benefits of great decisions or reforms they want to make. Such kinds of memoirs may be published anonymously to avoid making direct links between the memoir and its real author. Thirdly, ambitious politicians can have recourse to a memoir before a potential term to introduce themselves and the experiences which, they believe, have made them who they are and have shaped the visions they have for their people, etc. In short, memoirists that belong to the third category present their story in a way that refines their image as lucid and trustworthy leaders and makes them earn their people’s confidence.

### **3. 3. A Memoir as Way to Expel Guilt and Reconcile with the Past: Revealing the Pacifying Side of “Tuesday’s Child: A Memoir”**

Mary Ashun’s memoir may be common in what it seeks to achieve, i.e. its reconciling and pacifying function, but not only does it remain very authentic in content, language, and style, it is also extremely interesting to read as a story. Ashun takes the reader on a captivating journey where she expresses all the pain and guilt that consume her for failing to be at the right place at the right time to say “farewell” to those she loves—her people. That unbearable culpability of hers along with the feeling that she needs to be forgiven represents the starting point of this return to her roots that Ashun narrates in her memoir. Yet, the homecoming makes her ask so many questions, the types of questions that one asks when apprehension, doubt, or distrust takes over. The spirit of the memoir lies in the lines below:

What will I find there? Who is left? Probably no one will remember me. I want to listen to sounds, look at places and faces quietly and deeply. I have to sleep but I can't, so I'm up writing this and wondering if I will ever forgive myself for taking so long to come back 'home'. (p. 216)

There is a complex situation that runs through Ashun's memoir. The question is, "How to make peace with the dead?" It seems fair to suggest that peace is generally gained from peace talks. But then, how to engage in talks knowing that those you want to reconcile with are merely dead and gone? Indeed, since talks are no option to this dilemma, the author uses a memoir to relieve her soul from that intense guilt of hers. To her mind, so many people had to forgive her, but the one whose forgiveness was the most important to her was her grandmother, about whom she said, "Much of who she was is in me—the child of a lion". (p. 224) So many people died while she was away; she was, therefore, left with the feeling of having not performed her duty. Thus, she confessed:

...Tomorrow I go to Asamankese. I am in conflict—guilty that I've been away for so long. While I've been gone, all the old guard have died: Nana, Papa Kwabena, Papa Lawyer, Teacher Kwabena, Maa Yaa and even Sisi Yanto. Why didn't I come earlier? I'm feeling like I need to explain myself, especially to Nana. To prove to her that I haven't lost an essential part of myself and that I'm still her granddaughter. The air is still thick with the humidity I remember from the age of ten. I can't sleep for all the apprehension trying to push its way past the air in my lungs; all because I am going back to Asamankese for the first time since I was a teenager. (pp. 215, 216)

Comparing "Tuesday's Child: A Memoir" to "My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa", one realises that although the two memoirs have certain features in common, they also seem to be antagonistic in many respects. Indeed, while Mary Ashun attended the same boarding school as John Dramani Mahama (Achimota School), the two authors offer diverging perspectives on the concept of memoir and the function it eventually can serve. Clearly, both authors write about their life at Achimota School, but it is only after reading "Tuesday's Child: A Memoir" that one notices the intensity of the political cause that "My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa" embodies. When it

comes to Ashun's memoir, the reality is else as she aims at seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. And after reading "Tuesday's Child: A Memoir", one's impression is definite: the writer managed to reach her goal.

Indeed, evidence of Ashun's quest for peace is demonstrated by her need to (i) reconcile with her grandmother's memory as the representative of all those who died and (ii) be in harmony with herself as a result of the impression that the dead had forgiven her.

She finally gets such an impression when, along with her mother, she pays a visit to grandma Nana's grave and find themselves on a solemn occasion, mindful and all in tears. She drops the following words—which happen to be the clue that she should now let it go because she is "all forgiven":

I think I now know what mourning is. I think it's that feeling that takes over when grief starts to dissipate, if it ever does. I remembered Nana's favorite song and as I raised it softly, Mummy joined in with me...I could almost hear Nana singing with us:

*"Den na min fa, min yi wa yeh Tu mi wura, desabre*

*Fa wo honhom, pa no ma yen Na wa sem a yeh me feh..."*  
(p.224)

## Conclusion

This discussion has explored three virtues (advantages from the authors' perspectives) of a memoir. The paper has dealt with three memoirs: "Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez", "My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa", and "Tuesday's Child: A Memoir". It has been shown that a memoir is a multifaceted device in terms of the roles it plays. Although the essence of the autobiographical writing is for writers to narrate their own stories, memoirs differ from one another both in terms of style and content. Therefore, readers' attitudes—whether constant or not—in assuming that memoirs always deal with monotonous stories is simply unfounded because the diversity of styles and contents makes each memoir a unique adventure. Most importantly, it has been shown that while memoirs usually serve to repair, balance, or reconcile with the past, it can also be used to anticipate the future in a meticulous and subtle way. An instance of this, as shown in this paper, is "My First Coup



d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa”, which has been proved to be politically inclined.

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<sup>1</sup> An expression used in the memoir to refer to English speaking Americans.

<sup>2</sup> “My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa” is seen as an exploit by Mahama who did not have any recorded literary career.