

Session 2 summary: Creolisation, Historiography and Knowledge Production

In her fully absorbing and engaging talk, Professor Ananya Jahanara Kabir discussed the new project she has developed with Doctor Elena Jabari. She unveiled nearly a decade of thinking about dance in post-colonial African nations using the concepts of appropriation, reciprocity, colonialism, enslavement, and pleasure. Ananya Kabir riveted the audience with her travel stories of trips to Lagos Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and Ivory Coast for different annual Afro Latin dance Festivals, which were part of the project “Modern Moves: Kinetic Transnationalism and Afro-Diasporic Rhythm Cultures” funded by a European Research Council Advanced Grant.

This research explores how Afro Latin dances, born out of the traumatic experiences of enslavement and colonialism, transformed into a source of excitement, joy and discovery. Kabir explains that this work involved extensive field research and travel experience and benefited from and the stimulus of Benedict Savoye’s work on the restitution of cultural goods to African nations by western museums and institutions. Inspired by the rhythm-packed festivals of West Africa, Kabir and Jabari have constructed an argument, about embodiment and repair that transcends the tangible objects. The fact that these expressed artistic forms can be felt, remoulds their nature as they are performed through the medium of the body, and hence, redefined, in the case of dance, as a tangible form of rhythmic expression. Their work shows that “creolisation”, commonly understood as occurring on

the American side of the Atlantic, is taking place on the African continent as well, at least in the realm of embodied practices such as dance. An equally important aspect of this trans-Atlantic dynamic is the path of reconciliation of post-colonial West African people with their history of complicity in the slave trade, such as the famous example of the kingdom of Dahomey in today’s Benin.

Moreover, Kabir put forward an explanation of the 3 axes of memorialization that connect the West African diaspora: spirituality, post-colonial trauma and social dance. The connexions enabled by these axes are

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grounded in historical fact and affective states (in this case the shared memorialisation of Voodoo and enslavement), and embodied

performativity (dance) is part of a complex relationship between movement and memory between West African regions/countries. This relationship formed through creolized dance allows for “a multidirectional ownership of the traumas of the Black and Creole Atlantic” which, as mentioned earlier, “offers a reparative stance towards slavery as a shared legacy.”





The second presentation of this session was by Nathalie Kouamé (Japanologist) and Aurélia Michel (Black and Latin Americanist). They presented their “Encyclopaedia of Historiography: Africa, America, Asia” and brilliantly discussed the ambitions of this editorial project and the considerations behind its conception. The second volume, centred around African, American, and Asian historiographies, challenges the status quo of the historiographical debate in France and attempts to remedy the exclusion of the various historical narratives of the non-western world in the historiographical discussion. Indeed, historical knowledges in the West do not reflect the rich historical narratives in the rest of the world.

Kouame’s and Michel’s talk was highly instructive not only because it highlighted the shortcomings of the discipline of history as it is practiced in Europe and north America, but was similarly critical of their own publication. Indeed, the speakers pointed out that the terms “encyclopaedia” and “historiography” in the first and second volumes are not entirely illustrative of their project. This is to say that

Bibliography: 1st talk

- Benedict Savoye From reparation and restitution in English, translated as Africa struggle for its art history of a postcolonial.
- Woman king. directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood. Universal pictures Sep. 2022. 2hr., 15 min.
- Ashley Mbembe

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both volumes do not try to be as exhaustive as encyclopaedias typically do. Second, this encyclopaedia does not necessarily refer to epistemological discourses on the science of history but refers to past narratives. Nevertheless, the two volumes remain copious, nearing 2000 pages for the first volume, and probably more in the second volume. the use of the above-mentioned terms is purely strategic.

Considering that the discipline of history is practiced and exported from the west, this is to say with a limited Euro-centred or franco-centred perspective, this project serves as a reminder that it is only one out of multiple representations of the discipline, and their initiative restores multiplicity to the practice of the discipline. This is why, explained the speakers, it was important for the historiographical concepts and debates presented in this project to be non-western. However, taking into account the fact that non-western and western historiographical debates can be closely connected, contributors to the encyclopaedia were asked to put more emphasis on the non-western aspect of their respective entries.

Considering that the “Encyclopaedia of Historiography” tries to make historical knowledges which were previously limited to specialists of the field more easily available to historians of the west, Kouame’s and Michel’s talk showing how the discipline of history, in France at least, is west-centred, can only foster a greater appreciation of this project.

Bibliography: 2nd talk

- Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, Patrick Garcia et Nicolas Offenstadt dir. *Historiographie, concept et débat*. Gallimard, « Folio », 2 vol., 2010
- François Hartog. *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2003.

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