

CALL FOR PAPERS

Transatlantic Africas *Cultural Circulations, Borders and Dispersal* *(18th-21st centuries)*

Paris Diderot University
Novembre 15-16, 2018

International conference organised by the Centre d'études en sciences sociales sur les mondes africains, américains et asiatiques (Paris Diderot University), the Centre d'histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines (UVSQ, Paris-Saclay), the Cheikh Anta Diop University and the Institut des Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique Latine (CREDA / Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle University) in the frame of the research program "Transatlantic Cultures"
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Transatlantic Cultures: an international research project

The project *Transatlantic Cultures* offers to implement a connected cultural history of the transatlantic space thanks to new digital tools and media. Launched in 2015 by the Centre for Cultural History of Contemporary Societies (UVSQ, Paris-Saclay), the Research and Documentation Centre of the Americas (University Sorbonne-Nouvelle Paris 3) and the University of São Paulo, this project brings together a team of 40 researchers, affiliated to 19 universities across Europe, Africa and the Americas. It aims at the creation of a *Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History (18th-21st centuries)* edited online in four languages (French, English, Spanish, Portuguese). It is imagined as a digital platform that analyses the dynamics of the Atlantic space in order to understand its role in the process of contemporary cultural globalisation. Conceived as closely as possible to the research, this encyclopaedia aims at developing a critical reflection on transatlantic circulations, as well as on the identification processes and borders that contributed to the formation and renewal of the main cultural areas from the 18th century onwards. We hope therefore to break with traditional approaches that oppose a “centre” (European or North-American) to cultural “peripheries” (African, Caribbean or Latin-American) to better highlight the plurality and polyphony of the Atlantic space – Black Atlantic, South Atlantic, Euro-Latin-American space, Caribbean crossroad, etc. [Gilroy 1993, 2010; Alencastro 2015; Bystrom 2018; Guerra 2002; Dubesset 2014]. In addition to the junction of historiographies arising from academic fields too often separated, the balanced integration of scientific achievements that exist on the studied cultural areas constitutes one of the main challenges of the project and of this conference in the first instance.

The contribution of African Studies

During the 1960s-1970s, research devoted to the African continent was included in the field of the cultural areas studies. Later on, Jean-François Bayart's work has given a certain echo to the approaches aiming at a better understanding of colonisation and its legacies through the history of Africans themselves: urban history (Coquery-Vidrovitch, Dulucq, Goerg, etc.), intra-African migrations (Harries, Gondola, Mandé, Gary-Toukara, etc.), and relations between the political and civil societies (Bernault, Boilley, Bancel, etc.) were then well represented. Approaches centered on the study of cultural productions and identities also provided valuable works (Lenoble-Bart, Goerg, Chrétien, etc.), yet the focus at that time was rarely on the transnational.

For the past fifteen years, research in African studies has experienced a renewed dynamism in France (*Les études africaines en France. Un état des lieux* [African Studies in France: A State of the Art], 2016) due to the rise of some previously relatively marginal themes (gender studies, multi-scalar history of identity constructions, history of margins and marginalities in Africa, political history from below, etc.). They have opened up new questions in the wake of the postcolonial studies. By illuminating the persistence of colonial cultural legacies on contemporary societies [Saïd 1978; Mbembe 2000] and by questioning the situations of exile, the diasporic imaginaries and the hybrid identities of certain dominated groups [Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1990], they have made the transnational circulations a major issue of their reflection [Gilroy 1993] while sometimes seeking to historically relocate Africa at the heart of the Atlantic space [Thornton 1998]. In parallel, African studies have been interested in the *transnational turn* [Iriye, 2004], which has been crucial in the human and social sciences since the mid-2000s. Though very clear abroad [Comaroff 2011; Cooper, Stoler 2013], this opening remained a bit more timid in France despite works inspired by the new British imperial history [Zuniga 2007], on the circulations of diasporas [Pétre-Grenouilleau 2004; Chivallon 2004] or relations between Africa and the Indian Ocean [Nativel, Rajaonah, 2007].

This increasing openness has also resulted in the organisation of the fourth French Meeting of African Studies (REAF) on the theme of ‘cosmopolitical’ Africas (Paris, 2016), the conference “Afrocentricités. History, philosophy and social practices” (Paris 8, November, 2017) or the study day “Africa and the Americas. History, politics and independence” (Paris-Diderot, December 2017). In this context, the history of cultural circulations is today experiencing a renewed dynamism. This history has been approached from internal circulations that fall within the political and geographical frameworks of kingdoms, empires or colonial and postcolonial states [Fall 2017]. But it also concerns the old connectivity of Africa with other continents, as well as the presence and experience of African diasporas outside the continent. The study of the African slave trade and slavery systems in the Americas is at the origin of many works on the phenomena of appropriations and cultural *mestizaje*, conceived from a material approach [Ozer 1998; Seck] or a reflection on the identity constructions in the Black Atlantic [Gilroy 1993] and in the South Atlantic [Boidin 2011]. In 2002, the South-South workshop, symbolically organised in the town of Gorée, focused on the Atlantic construction of notions such as race, black identity and anti-racism based on the critical assessment of ebbs and flows, ruptures and reciprocal influences between the two shores of the Atlantic from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries [Barry & al. 2010]. Studies have also taken into account the diplomatic relations established between African and socialist countries that implemented cultural exchange programs, particularly in the context of the Cold War [Djebbari 2015; Dorsch 2011]. Finally, the renewal of research on cities, their interconnections and connections to the world at different periods of time, has enabled a more attentive look at migrations, the circulations of artworks or even those of artists and intellectuals [Malaquais, Khouri 2016].

Let’s be clear: whereas the dialogues and porosities between transatlantic cultural studies and African studies are not that obvious, they are far from being non-existent, as several recent studies can attest: for instance on ethiopianism [Bonacci 2008], Pan-Africanism [Boukari-Yabara 2014], intellectual circulations [Mangeon 2010; Renault 2016], exchanges in the South Atlantic [Cunin 2015; Luiz Felipe Alencastro 2015] or the place of the Africas in the world [Dramé 2017]. How can we think about the relations between artistic productions, public policies and social identities? How have North-South exchanges combined, sometimes for a long time, with South-South exchanges, engaging many actors with their own logics? These were some of the questions raised during the study day “Cities and Cultural Circulations in Sub-Saharan Africa 20th-21st centuries. Actors, modalities, impact” organised at Paris Diderot University in November 2016 after a two-year seminar at INALCO.

Temporalities, actors and forms of cultural exchange

The conference *Transatlantic Africas* will allow to examine in greater depth the possible links between transnational cultural studies and African studies while tightening the focus on transatlantic studies around three central questions.

1/ First of all, the contribution of African studies to the understanding and knowledge of transatlantic circulations. What are, since the end of the 18th century, the features, modalities and contexts of the contribution of African societies to the emergence of a transatlantic relational space? How did African studies, in their disciplinary and geographical diversity, address the transatlantic circulations and what can they teach us about these circulations? How can these contributions enrich, question or challenge some of the

current achievements of the *Transatlantic Cultures* project in terms, for instance, of periodisation of transatlantic cultural dynamics or apparent marginalisation of the African continent?

2/ Reciprocally, how can the transatlantic prism, so important for the modern era, be useful or stimulating for the current generation of researchers working on the history of the continent or its contemporary cultural dynamics? Can the identification of certain channels, actors, and networks between Africa and the Americas, for the most recent period as well, allow for decentering the focus on colonisation, the study of relations with the (ex)-metropolis and questions about imperialism, its forms and its effects?

3/ From a more epistemological perspective, what are the possible dialogues and points of tension between African studies, postcolonial studies and transnational cultural studies? Can *Transatlantic Studies* provide an interesting basis for experimenting with new sets of scales between transnational, regional, national or local circulations? Are there any obstacles –methodological, epistemological, institutional– to the appropriation of transatlantic perspectives by researchers in African studies and reciprocally to the contribution of African studies to transatlantic perspectives?

This triple questioning will be explored through precise case studies on forms of knowledge, practices and cultural objects that circulated in the Atlantic space or that arised from exchanges between the three continents. All major fields of cultural studies will be addressed, without exception: visual culture, literature, music, live performance, architecture, sport, religion, scientific knowledge, cultural policies, education, media, food, travel, etc. Papers may present original research or revisit former works on Africa from a transatlantic perspective in the light of the proposed questions. Many topics are possible:

- **Archives, historiographies and methodologies**
- **Slavery and contemporary identities**
- **Imaginaries, exiles and diasporas**
- **Transatlantic material cultures**
- **Religious, sports, artistic and media circulations**
- **Memory and heritage circulations, etc.**

State of the art of current knowledge, disciplinary decompartmentalisation and opening up of new perspectives, such are the expectations of the conference organisers whose assumption is indeed that the richness of African history should enrich the knowledge on transatlantic circulations while the transatlantic perspective could reciprocally come to fertilise the questions raised by African studies. During the 2-day conference, the Africas will therefore be placed at the core of more global questions brought by specialists in African studies, but also by researchers working on other cultural areas or transnational circulations. At a time when some African thinkers seek to write the “Africa-World” (*L’Afrique-Monde*) and to lay the foundations of an African centrality in the discourses produced on the world to come (Sarr, Mbembe 2017; Mabanckou 2017), this conference will surely confirm the crucial role of past and present inspiring, relay and driving forces played by African actors in the international cultural dynamics.

Paper proposals (maximum 300 words) including the presentation of the author (maximum 100 words) should be sent by the 10th of July to the following email address: afriquestransatlantiques@gmail.com

Official languages of the conference are English, French, Portuguese and Spanish

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