

Institution: University of Chester
Unit of Assessment: 27: Area Studies
Title of case study: Visions of Development and Slavery in Contemporary Francophone African Art 
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The research impacts on public discourse, professional practice and cultural life. It raises public awareness and professional understanding of how contemporary development is being viewed in Africa. Analysing the work of creative artists from several countries in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa, the research has revealed that, far from presenting development as positive change, artists are depicting economic development in the region as a form of enslavement. For over a decade they have been creating a visual vocabulary to speak about 'development' around the most iconic and disturbing images of the Atlantic slave trade. In public events delivered in English, French and Spanish, supported by digital resources, the author is disseminating this view from the continent to a broader audience across the world.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Key researcher, positions held and dates of research: The key researcher on the project is Claire H Griffiths, appointed Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Chester and Head of Modern Languages in September 2009, formerly senior research fellow in Francophone African studies at the WISE Institute, University of Hull, 2006-2009. The research project originated in Griffiths' doctoral and post-doctoral research on the French legacy in Africa and subsequently more specifically on development policy and gender in postcolonial Francophone Africa. The research has been conducted from September 2009 and includes impact up to 31 July 2013.</p> <p>Underpinning research: Griffiths' recent monograph, <i>Globalizing the Postcolony</i>, 2010, based on extensive fieldwork in West Africa, developed a new multi-methodological approach to learning how development policy is formulated, implemented and then experienced on the ground in Francophone Africa. The research methodology and findings, described as ground-breaking in the field, are applied in the current project. In this impact case study project the focus extends from gender in development to development in general in the region. The opportunity for impact from this research lies in the academic expertise of the key researcher in systems of historical and contemporary slavery in Francophone Africa, combined with specialist knowledge of development policy in the region and the analysis of visual culture. This expertise is operating at an interface with contemporary professional and creative practice. The interaction and collaboration is supporting emerging cultural practices representing development in an iconography of slavery, and providing new insights into this view of development in and from Africa.</p> <p>Research insights and findings: National and regional development policy in Francophone West Africa has been broadly modelled throughout the postcolonial era on social and economic development templates imported from non-African industrialised countries. The research has revealed how these models of development are not universally endorsed in the locality or effectively implemented. Increasingly they are being contested from sites outside the formal political arena. Analytical and critical engagement with the dominant development discourse of the region is being articulated in a range of cultural outputs (film, literature, poetry, dance, fine art, etc.). This project is currently looking at one area of cultural production, contemporary works of art (<i>les arts plastiques</i>), to reveal to a broader audience across the world how visual artists interpret contemporary development in Francophone Africa and communicate this in their artistic practice.</p> <p>The underpinning research has, from its inception, been based in what is historically the most economically-disadvantaged region of the world where the role of development policy is critical to</p>

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improving the welfare of populations in the region. Indeed traditionally, and theoretically, development is seen as a progressive series of actions towards something better.

What this project is revealing is that a growing number of visual artists are expressing 'development' in this region, and in this era of global markets, as not simply failing to bring 'progress' but, worse, they suggest the region is witnessing a return to practices endemic in earlier international economic systems.

As the project reveals, an increasing number of artists are now representing 'development' in Francophone West Africa using depictions deeply shocking to Western eyes. Images of the Slave Trade are reappearing in 21st century art work originating from Benin, the region of Africa that formed the epicentre of the transatlantic commerce in African slaves during the final two centuries of the 'terrible trade', and is extending across the countries that make up Francophone Africa. The iconic image of the infamous British slave ship, *the Brookes* (1789), forms the centrepiece of this growing iconography (see Moridja Kitenge's illustration above for the gallery talk at the Spanish national centre of modern art in June 2013), reflecting a complex analytical engagement with the history of Europe in Africa and its legacy in modern West Africa.

Theoretical underpinnings: Explanations of why change and modernisation do not automatically equate to progress in this region are formulated and theorised in the monograph *Globalizing the Postcolony* (reference below). By demonstrating how gender policy has been implemented in Francophone Africa throughout fifty years of postcolonial rule, it reveals that theoretical configurations of 'development' - and how gender impacts on the policies and practices of development - are drawn directly from post-industrial models with origins in exogenous cultures. It goes on to uncover the how an absence of cultural adaptation with regard to these exogenously-inspired policies plays out 'on the ground'. The evidence presented shows how and to what extent policy aimed at improving the welfare of the female population of the region has both failed and even undermined the relative position of women in relation to men. The research findings provide a theoretical and pragmatic explanation of this failure in terms of the cultural distance that separates those who are formulating and funding policy for 'development' in the region, and those who are experiencing the impact of those policies, namely the weakest and most disadvantaged members of societies located in the most economically vulnerable and under-developed region of the world.

Methodological advances: The underpinning research provides a new framework in which to evaluate 'development' but also flags up the need to map emerging discourses of development as they are experienced and expressed outside of the formal structures of the State and international development communities. Just as *Globalizing the Postcolony* was the result of interactions over ten years between the key researcher and stakeholders across the region (government ministers, national agencies, international development workers, as well as target groups), this project is formed by research methodology that provides a space for communication across traditional divides that separate academic research from professional practice. *Visions of Development and Slavery in Contemporary Francophone African Art* provides an interactive space within which those working in this area of the creative industries in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa can engage with academic research to explore, critique and continue to represent 'development' in their region through art practice. By interacting with that practice the project brings new ways of thinking about development in Africa to multiple audiences within and beyond the continent.

3. References to the research

- Claire H. Griffiths. (2010). *Globalizing the postcolony: contesting discourses of gender and development in Francophone Africa* (Lexington Books, USA). ISBN 978-0-7391-4382-7
- Claire H Griffiths and Kevin Bales (2010). 'Behind closed doors: exposing modern slavery on a global scale', Professional Insights, *Equality & Diversity International*, 29, 7, 716-21.
- Griffiths, C.H. (2008). «French Colonial Education» in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires* Prem Poddar, Rajeev Patke, & Lars Jensen, Editors. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). ISBN 10 0-748 62-394-9
- C.H. Griffiths. (2011). "African women writers: configuring change at the interface of politics and fiction", *RELIEF, Revue internationale électronique de la littérature d'expression française*, November edition, Online journal. ISSN 1873-5045
- Claire H. Griffiths. (2013). "Post-slavery, post-imperial, post-colonial?", in Claire H. Griffiths. (2013). Editor. *Contesting Historical Divides in Francophone Africa*. (Chester, University of

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Chester Press). p1-20. ISBN 978-1-908258-03-8
 - Claire H Griffiths. (2013). "Engendering Humanism in French West Africa: patriarchy and the paradox of empire". *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. Vol 46, No 3, 2013. Accessible online from December 2013 at www.bu.edu/africa/publications/ijahs/. ISSN 0361-7882.

Evidence of quality: *IJAHs* is ranked International 'A' in the US, namely of high international significance and reach. The remaining publishers are regarded as publishing work of international excellence. Griffiths received four university awards, including an International Research Excellence Award (2012/13), to undertake fieldwork on *Visualising Development in Francophone Africa* from 2010 to 2013. These are in addition to external grants for the underpinning research summarised below.

Award	Sponsor	Dates	Value
Small grant to the Social Sciences	The Nuffield Foundation	Jan-Jul 2000 Jan-Jul 2004	£2,632 £3,500
AHRC research leave	AHRC	Sep-Dec 2003	£15,500
Travel award	The Reckitt Educational Trust	Jan-Jul 2000 Jan-Jul 2004	£300 £300
FP7: History of European Slavery <i>Eurescl</i> project	European Union	Mar 2008-Jan 2012	€36000 (personal allocation within institutional award to WISE Institute, University of Hull)

4. Details of the impact

Context: The key researcher's extensive periods of fieldwork in Francophone Africa, her research career in Francophone African development studies and more latterly in the history of slavery in the region, combined with her technical and theoretical knowledge of visual cultures, provide a unique academic platform on which to engage with contemporary artistic practice, interpret the development discourses in Francophone African visual cultures and present these to professional and public audiences.

Impact has taken place in a variety of forms including public lectures, workshops, interviews, cultural festivals, consultancies, contributions to exhibition design and the presentation of African visual perspectives in public exhibitions.

By engaging with professionals and interpreting cultural products and practices for audiences external to the academy, Griffiths is helping to shape professional and public understanding of Francophone African art. In essence, the impact aims at bringing African experiences of development to a new public across continents, while simultaneously benefitting professional practice in the creative and development industries.

Collaboration beyond the academy: Since 2010, the project has focused on an increasing number of Francophone African artists as the engagement with development and its representation through an iconography of slavery has become more widespread. Three of these artists, Viya Dibé from Senegal, Pélagie Gbaguidi from Benin; and Moridja Kitenge from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have provided original material for the project. As a practitioner and academic, Viya Dibé has contributed in interviews, follow-up discussions and exchanges between June 2008 and June 2010 to framing the project in an African visual context. New work for inclusion in the research project's public outputs (Kitenge and Gbaguidi) has enriched the evidence base used to illustrate and explain the conceptualisation of progress and development across different cultures and economic worlds. Drawing on the researcher's historiographical expertise to interpret and contextualise development in relation to cultural practice, the participating artists have experienced the impact in their own professional practice (Kitenge and Gbaguidi). The works of five further artists (Romuald Hazoumé, Julien Sinzogan, Barthélémy Toguo, Jems Robert Kokobi, Guy Wouaté) are included in the public talks and dissemination events providing a wider representation of how images of slavery are entering the contemporary artistic vocabulary in West Africa. Discussions on the themes and objectives of the project have been conducted with the UK agent for these artists. Kitenge produced the illustration for the public poster produced by the Spanish national centre for modern art (see title of project above) to advertise Griffiths' public lecture in Las Palmas, Spain, in June 2013.

Impact on Public awareness: The impact from this project has been disseminated to non-academic audiences and professionals (artists, curators, critics) in the UK, Belgium, France, Germany, Senegal and Spain. A series of exchanges and events has enabled public and professional stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the role of art in Francophone African society, and has facilitated the interpretation of creative practice for new audiences beyond the academy. This knowledge serves to reveal, both in Africa and beyond, what Francophone African art can teach us about development in the continent. By communicating academic research on African development issues in the public art gallery through the medium of painting, the research is raising public awareness among new audiences of the problems facing societies living in the world's most disadvantaged region. Public events have included:

- Guest speaker at *Legacies of Slavery: A Documentary Film Festival* (part of the EF7 Euresc international slavery studies project) – Guest speaker on contemporary slavery and visual cultures in Francophone Africa and round table participant. 45 participants at the Hull History Centre, Hull, UK. Saturday 13 March 2010, 10.00am – 4.30pm.
- Public lecture: *How is art made in Francophone Africa? We Face Forward* festival of African arts and culture, Manchester City Art Gallery, 2.30pm, Saturday 8 September 2012.
- Roundtable discussion. *We Face Forward* festival of African arts and culture. Manchester City Art Gallery, 3.45pm, Saturday 8 September 2012.
- Public lecture *La esclavitud en el imaginario del arte africano actual*. 55 participants, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 19-21h, 12 June 2013.
- Roundtable discussion. *La esclavitud en el imaginario del arte africano actual*. Casa Africa, State Institute for Spanish-African Cultural Relations, Las Palmas, Spain, 14-15h, 14 June 2013.

The public lecture *La esclavitud en el imaginario del arte africano* is disseminated as a podcast by Casa Africa, State Institute for Spanish- African Cultural Relations.

Impact on Professional practice: On-going exchanges and collaboration with curators of African art exhibitions have opened up a channel for the flow of knowledge from the research project into professional understanding and practice. The conceptual design of the exhibition of African puppets and artefacts, *Asyl stadtmuseum - Afrikanische Theaterfiguren in einer künstlerischen Installation*, curated by Pélagie Gbaguidi and Stefanie Oberhoff (16 October 2013 to 2 November 2014) has benefitted from research conducted within this project by the key researcher. Griffiths was consulted (March-May 2013) on the historiographical framing of the exhibition. Her text on this is displayed in a wall plaque within the exhibition. Griffiths supplied the English-language version of the guide to the exhibition and organised the production of the Spanish and Chinese exhibition guides. Likewise on-going discussions and explorations with Congolese artist Moridja Kitenge currently working as cultural adviser for African collections at the Montreal city art gallery in Canada, has extended the reach of the impact. Other professional consultancies have included the *We Face Forward* festival of African art in Manchester June-September 2012, and preparations for an exhibition *Transatlantic Migrations* at Casa Africa Las Palmas, June 2013 and on-going.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. The University holds on file email correspondence with Francophone African artists which corroborates the impact described under 'Collaboration beyond the academy'.
2. For media coverage of the events described under 'Impact on Public Awareness' see:
 - http://www.caam.net/es/130612_conferencia.htm
 - <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/around-yorkshire/local-stories/festival-uncovers-grim-legacy-of-slavery-1-2566532>
 - http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/humberside/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_856500/8565210.stm

In addition, the University holds on file email correspondence with the Manchester City Art Gallery and Whitworth Gallery, and an art critic, jury member and expert on Francophone African art which provide corroboration of the impact on public awareness described in section 4.

3. The University holds on file email correspondence with curators and Casa Africa which corroborates the 'Impact on professional practice' described above. See also:

<http://www.muenchner-stadtmuseum.de/sonderausstellungen/asyl-stadtmuseum.html>