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Portugal and Africa: Accounts, Connections, Identities

Paris, October 21-22, 2010

Call for Papers. A conference entitled *Portugal and Africa: Accounts, Connections, Identities (Fifteenth through Eighteenth Centuries)* will be held October 21-22, 2010, hosted by the Centre d'Études des Mondes Africains at CEMAf-Paris, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 9 rue Malher, 75004 Paris, France.

The aim of the conference is to revisit the "Portuguese" presence in Africa between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries -- an often neglected era in contemporary research.

For a long time historians have dealt mostly with the so-called Discoveries (from the end of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century), seen then as a glorious moment in Iberian expansion. Scholars tended to pay much less attention to the *longue durée* and consequently fostered the idea of a rapid decline of the Portuguese empire. First, it appears necessary to question the interactions between the "Portuguese" and Africa over the *longue durée* and to avoid periodizations that rely solely on the logic of the Portuguese Empire. Second, it seems essential to do away with two major tendencies: on the one hand, a lusocentric approach which often leads to the writing a "history of the Portuguese in Africa"; on the other hand, an Africa-centred orientation which frequently uses Portuguese evidences less than critically and tends to overestimate or, conversely, underestimate the Portuguese "factor".

To avoid binary interpretations and compartmentalisations, one needs to question and to integrate these different historiographies. It is also necessary to go beyond an essentialist approach to Portuguese, African, or even Luso-African and Afro-Portuguese, societies, as well as to the Portuguese empire. It is fundamental to take into account their heterogeneity and their internal divisions and to re-insert the historical actors in both space and time. Such a position further invites in depth examination of categories and concepts usually employed, such as "Portuguese," "Luso-Africans," "métissage," "connections," "empire," "colony" and so on. Finally, this re-thinking requires historians to go back to the circumstances in which both European and African accounts of this period were produced, so as to consider these accounts as social products: chronicles, missionary works, travel accounts, administrative documentation and local traditions.

To cope with these issues the analysis of connections and transfers, at local, regional and global levels is obviously needed. Past research on the cultural interactions in the early modern era, for instance on the Luso-Africans or Afro-Portuguese of Western Africa, has demonstrated the flexible and multiple nature of identities. Yet such cultural exchanges and transformations all had their limitations and were faced with power struggles and processes of domination, all of which merit renewed examination.

In this manner, through the study of the "modes of interactions" between the "Portuguese" and the "Africans," we seek to shed more precise light on Portuguese societies overseas, as well as those African societies which they encountered.

Interested scholars are encouraged to propose case studies and place Africa within interactions on a global scale (Europe, Asia and America). We invite papers submitted on the following themes, but other related topics are also welcome: Individual itineraries, empire's margins and interstitial positions, urban mixing and hinterland's fiefdoms; Circulation of men and women, items and ideas; Acculturations, solidarities and hierarchies; Depiction of Portuguese, Africans, Luso-Africans and Afro-Portuguese in European and African accounts. In addition, the conference is open to papers that consider Luso-African experiences (Asia, America) in a comparative perspective.

Titles and abstracts are due by November 15th 2009. To apply, please send the following information to both coordinators: Title, Abstract (approximately 300 words in length), Short CV. Conference languages are French and English. According to contributors' specific situations, travel expenses may partly be funded. Coordinators: Hervé PENNEC (CNRS - CEMAf-Aix-en-Provence): pennec@msh.univ-aix.fr; Thomas VERNET (Université Paris 1 - CEMAf-Paris): thomas.vernet@univ-paris1.fr