

HISTORY, THEORY AND THE CONGO

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Year Two at the University of Florida, and I find myself still amazed by the wide range of marvelous scholars, congenial atmosphere, and remarkable resources in African Studies, including precious monies to co-organize a Carter Conference.

I spent much of this past year organizing activities and research around the Papa Mfumu'eto Papers, now owned by Special Collections in the Smathers Library. An exhibition or two and a multi-authored catalog will result from 2020 on about this comic-based sequential art work in Lingala, produced in Kinshasa's streets over 20 years from the mid-1980s. I also spent time spearheading a new book series with Achille Mbembe and Juan Obarrio that will feature best new work in African studies and beyond; the first books in this Duke University Press' *Theory in Forms* series will appear in 2019. I also benefitted from hosting scholarly visits by Natasha Sakolsky, Rebecca Hardin, and Katrien Pype during the year.

History & Theory invited me to join a team of scholars in producing essays for a special postcolonial issue. My contribution reviews the methods and concepts I have used in prior research. I will be presenting another paper at Wesleyan University, where *History & Theory* is based, on "ideation" and historical writing. Ideation is a theme inspired by my efforts to grapple with the zany and puzzling sides to Papa Mfumu'eto's comic-based papers as well as new research on vernacular mental health categories across Africa's colonial empires and since. This part of my research will be aided by a Fulbright Expert Award received to spend several weeks between Paris and Niamey in summer 2018 examining shifting diagnostic categories. A top team of Paris-based medicine, health, and STS researchers – Cermes3 – worked with me on assembling the joint Fulbright application, and they are steering contacts and workshops in Paris and Niamey.



I organized a panel at the ASA on “post” aspects to Jan Vansina’s oeuvre and personality, and this took me to his and the Mary Douglas papers at Northwestern over the summer months. This new research became the basis of the five endowed Leclerc Lectures that I gave in the Anthropology Department at Belgium’s chief francophone university, Louvain, in November. The result was a very rough draft for a short book on the history of anthropology in the Congo, from the likes of Mary Douglas, Jan Vansina, and Luc de Heusch, to Johannes Fabian, Filip De Boeck, Katrien Pype, and several more. The intellectual and methodological history of anthropology

embedded in these investigations is just as fascinating as are Congolese terrains and field hierarchies revealed.

Highlight of the year: teaching 22 undergraduates in History how to assemble primary research papers on health, medicine, and racial politics in Africa. Each wrote an original paper, and we journeyed together to the Kingsley Plantation for a stunning lecture about polygamy, labor, and emancipation practices by Professor Emeritus Dan Schafer of Jacksonville. I will be going back, again and again, to this place and potential learning laboratory where Africa and Florida still meet.

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