

January 16th, 2024 - 5:15 pm



“(S)HE CAME AS A COUSIN AND LEFT AS A GENDARME” BALLADUR “VISA OF DEATH”, KWASSA KWASSA AND (IM)MOBILITY IN THE COMOROS

Speaker: Rémi Armand Tchokothe, University of Vienna

“She came as a cousin and left as a gendarme.” This anecdote captures both the identity paradox of the Comoros and the ‘migration’ drama that has occurred there since the arbitrary 1995 introduction of the Balladur Visa by the French government. Mayotte has been labelled “the biggest marine graveyard in the world” because of the death of thousands of people who wanted to reach Mayotte in teetering boats known as Kwassa Kwassa. How can works of imagination that describe “migration” from the neighbouring island of Anjouan to the ‘French’ territory of Mayotte constitute a kind of collective social therapy and social intervention? This book answers this and other urgent literary, human, and sociopolitical questions through a study of 18 works of fiction, combining literary studies with anthropology, international law, sociology, and history.

This book is the product of nearly 6 years of intensive research, years of doubting standard methods, years of dealing with an anthropology of anger with geopolitical injustices and neocolonial politics, years of meeting the right people, years of developing new relational research methods, years of lockdown unlocking the writing process, years of joy, and years of frustration by the peer review process, etc. These years of struggle have been worthwhile: the book is available in open access format, thanks to funding from the Cluster of Excellence: Africa Multiple: Reconfiguring African Studies at the University of Bayreuth, where Rémi Tchokothe began the project before joining the University of Vienna. In this conversation, Rémi Tchokothe will answer questions from Daniela Waldburger, who is currently designing a research project on Violence in Mayotte.

Rémi Armand Tchokothe has been a Tenure-Track Professor of Comparative Literature with a Focus on African Literatures at the University of Vienna since October 2020.

Chair: Daniela Waldburger

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