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Tourist visits and hijacking the past on Ouidah's Slave Route

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ABSTRACT

Ouidah's "Slave Route" is a well-visited memorial dedicated to the Atlantic Slave trade. In order to respond to an audience seeking information, certain inhabitants began to offer commentary on the visits, gradually creating a "body of guides". Initially informal, this practice was eventually regulated by the City Council in 2007. The article explores the way in which some guides use "narrative strategies" to deflect the official story and introduce individual memories.

Keywords: Touristic guides. Slave route. Ouidah. Narrative strategy. Memory conflict.

■ Tourism and detours

According to James Young, the experience of visiting is fundamental in the production of the meaning of commemorative spaces and, therefore, in the construction of a shared memory:

For public memory and its meanings depend not just on the forms and figures in the monument itself, but on the viewer's response to the monument ... memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce. [Young, 1993: 741]

As "viewers' responses to a monument" are steered by tour guides who find themselves in a "situation where they act as *intermediaries* between visitor and site" [Gellereau, 2005: 35], these guides, while promoting tourism and heritage, also take on the role of mediators and transmit knowledge. In this sense, and more particularly on heritage sites, they become specialized bearers of a cultural memory shaped by an institutionalized collective narrative. For Jan Assman, cultural memory is formalized around particular times and places that define the places of a common "history".

"Entire landscapes can become the medium of cultural memory. In which case they are not so much marked out by signs ('monuments') as elevated as a whole to the rank of sign, that is, they are *semiotized*" [Assman, (1992) 2010: 54].

In Benin, the official memories of slavery and the slave trade have been built in a complex context characterized by superimposed narratives that emanate from institutional structures. In his latest work, Gaetano Ciarcia looks at the deployment of these grammars of memory¹ and plural logics of heritage [Ciarcia, 2016]. Whilst the number of discursive logics grew over the years, from the early 1990s divergent positionings emerged during the two founding events of a "national memory" of slavery, both of which took place in Ouidah, a former slave-trading post from where more than a million slaves set off [Law, 2004]. The Ouidah 92 festival, a national project run in 1993 by Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos (back then a minister counselor and permanent delegate to UNESCO), focused on the memory of slavery by drawing on a cultural and religious aspect. The Vodun religion was presented as the link between the African continent and its diaspora. Thus, on the route from Ouidah's city center to the ocean which evoked the slaves' journey to the slave

ships, around thirty sculptures were inaugurated for this event. These symbolized both chained slaves and the gods of Vodun, a religion strongly promoted during the festival. Several sculptures also depicted Fon symbols originating from the kingdom of Danhomè,² whose rulers participated in the Atlantic slave trade beginning with the 18th century. The intercontinental Slave Route project, which was developed at the same time under the aegis of UNESCO, supported a historical and global approach to the slave-trading past, questioning the mechanisms that had engendered the slave trade as well as its legacies and present-day consequences, in particular the cultural interactions generated during this period. The project became “a framework for a process of reflection, at once global, multidisciplinary and international, designed to elucidate the underlying causes and mechanisms of the slave trade” [Unesco, 1998]. This view was particularly supported by Paulin Hountondji, Benin’s Minister of Culture at the time, who was in charge of launching the project in Ouidah and was against “the, in his view, stealthy reduction of relations with Afro-American diasporas to the religious factor alone, as represented by the emphasis on Vodun” [Ciarcia, 2016: 128].

Besides the accumulating discourses that have emanated from official structures, private enterprises – individual and collective – have taken their place in Ouidah, drawing on national discourses while at the same time putting forward new memorial narratives. On the same memorial trail set up during the Ouidah 92 festival, named the Slave Route, there co-exist different memory regimes, illustrating the social, political, and economic stakes of what has become the basis of “cultural memory” (Illustration 1). Today, several guides offer their services commenting on this memorial trail, which is seen and experienced by many visitors as a “place of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*) [Nora, 1984]. At first informally conducted, guided tours along this route were regulated in 2007 by the local authorities, who thus entered the memorial debate. Codifying these visits helped transform the role of these “unofficial guides” into “tour guides”, imposing on trained individuals a discourse that was an extension of and reinforced the vision established during the Ouidah 92 festival. The guides, who base their descriptions of the route on the symbolism of the sculptures, thus engage in a historical transmission that creates a gap with the commemoration of the slave-trade victims.

This article analyzes the tours offered by four guides authorized by the city council. The ethnographic

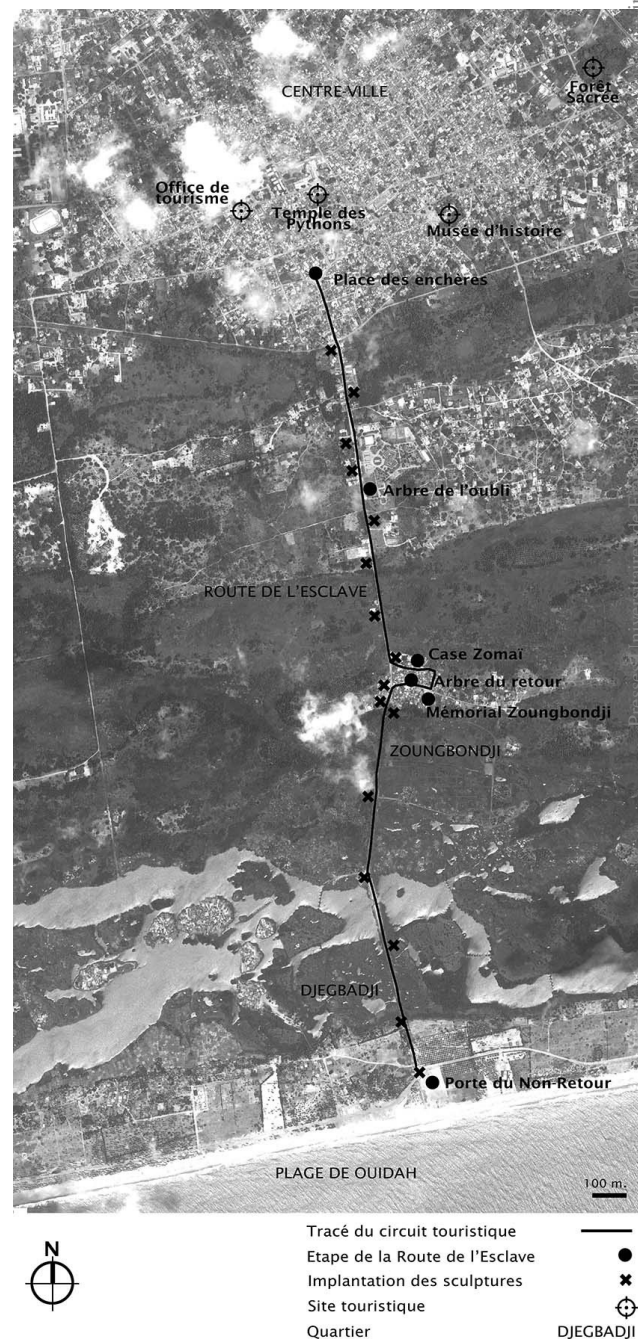


Illustration 1 – Map of the Ouidah Slave Route together with various cultural and tourist spaces (CAD R. Goussanou).

work³ conducted with Anicet, Kpadonou, Georges, and Nadibou⁴ reveals the existence of an alternative discourse to the narrative offered by the tourist office. From one guide to the next, strong similarities

are observed in how they articulate their discourses. Explanations about several sculptures are altered in order to either turn the spotlight back on the figure of the slave, or rehabilitate the memory of the native Xwéda population, which has been obscured on the route in favor of the Fon. Like others, guides interfere with the national narrative to add their historical views to it. They become “memory brokers” [Ciarcia, 2011] actively engaged in rehabilitating local memories. The concept of hijacking or *détournement* [Debord, 2006] is borrowed here to examine the transformation of this place of memory into a space of identity and social expressions. What are the strategies employed by the guides? How does a spatial device become a hijacking tool? What is the “counter-memory” that emerges and in what way?

In order to better grasp the superimposition of memories at work in Ouidah, the first part of this article looks at the context in which the Slave Route appeared, marking the starting point of the construction of a national memory of Benin's slave-trading past. The patrimonialization of this road spurred the emergence of new mobilizations, including the practice of guiding tourists detailed here. This journey back in time will allow us to grasp the way in which Anicet, Kpadonou, Georges, and Nadibou disrupt the established narrative and challenge a dominant memory, which itself varies with the actors involved in promoting the slave past. Precise extracts from guided tours will be used, particularly in relation to four sculptures, in order to illustrate the balance of power that establishes itself between these interpreting guides and official institutions.

■ Context

The official memory of slavery, established in Benin in the 1990s, was built via a series of public events [Araujo, 2010]. Two events in particular, organized in the city of Ouidah within a year of each other, started the debates around the remembrance of Benin's slave past: the launching of the intercontinental Slave Route project under the aegis of UNESCO in 1994, and the Ouidah 92 festival, conceived by the Beninese head of state Nicéphore Soglo and by Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, which was held in February 1993. While the UNESCO project approached the history of slavery scientifically and educationally, the Ouidah

92 presidential project looked at the slave-trading past through a cultural prism. Celebrating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in America (1492), this event wished to highlight the links between the African and American continents and in particular the continued existence of a common culture. Vodun, a religion practiced in the Gulf of Benin and brought by the slaves to the Americas, was given particular prominence [Ciarcia, 2016]. Several sites linked to the themes addressed were showcased and hosted the festivities: the Sacred Forest of King Kpassè, Brazil House, the House of Daagbo Hunon (one of the leading Vodun dignitaries), and the Slave Route. The first three sites were essentially references to Vodun, supernatural characters, or Benin's daily life, with the exception of one room in Brazil House⁵ entirely devoted to Toussaint Louverture [Rush, 2001]. Only the Slave Route explicitly referred to Benin's slave-trading past.

The “official”⁶ patrimonialization of this site focused on six stages which recalled the ordeals to which the slaves had been subjected: (1) the “Auction Square” symbolizing the moment when the slaves were sold; (2) the “Tree of Forgetting” representing the attempt to make the captives forget their roots by means of a ritual; (3) the “Zomai Cabin” where slaves were gathered while awaiting the arrival of the ships; (4) the “Zoungbondji Memorial” marking the mass grave into which the dead captives were thrown; (5) the “Tree of Return” revealing the ritual that allowed the slaves to return to their native land after their death; and finally, (6) the arrival on the beach, evoking the slaves climbing into the ships' holds. It was at this last stage that the Door of No Return was inaugurated in 1995. The monument, in the shape of a commemorative arch, was funded by UNESCO and marked the departure for the Americas.

The narrative of this trail, whose veracity was questioned by the historian Robin Law [Law, 2004], describes the slaves' experiences, thus corroborating the specter of victimhood that has accompanied the valorization of traumatic memories since the 1950s.⁷ Paradoxically, of the thirty or so sculptures that punctuate the trail, only three depict slaves, who are identifiable by their postures, being chained, gagged, or kneeling.

The other artifacts, designed by artists from the south of Benin,⁸ conjured another imaginary along the Slave Route. Some sculptures expressed religious semantics. For example, the sculpture depicting

a snake biting its own tail was a direct allegory of the deity Dan, while the sculpture beneath the Tree of Return, a humanoid figure with an organic face, became a metaphor for the spirit of the Aziza forest. The mobilization of these Vodun symbols reflected the commemorative nature of the Ouidah 92 festival, which presented the links between Africa and America through the prism of cultural and religious exchanges born during the Atlantic slave trade. Dana Rush interprets the presence of these symbols as a celebration of regained freedom of worship,⁹ but also as a simplified and embellished narrative of the Atlantic slave trade [Rush, 2001].

As for the intermediate sculptures along the Slave Route, they only contained Fon¹⁰ symbols that were royal in nature (sculptures taking up the royal emblems of the sovereigns Ganyé Hessou, Glèlè, Agoli-Agbo, Béhanzin, and Agadja), religious (two sculptures evoking the royal cult of Tohossu),¹¹ military (depictions of horsewomen who made up the Fon female army), and historical (sculptures recalling the parasol sent by King Adandozan to Oyo, or embodying the deified panther). These sculptures, inspired by the bas-reliefs found in the royal palaces of Abomey, can therefore be interpreted as a homage to Abomean sovereignty as part of the construction of a national memory of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. This kingdom, whose capital was situated 75 miles from Ouidah, conquered the latter city in the early 18th century. Having taken possession of Ouidah's trading post, the Fon took over managing the slave trade as well as encouraged the local population to flee. In this sense, in Benin, the collective memory of slavery became an "imposed memory" which Paul Ricoeur likens to an abuse of memory [Ricoeur, 2000].

The confusion that stemmed from the "public memory" of slavery, shown in this quick semiological survey of the Slave Route, was pointed out by Nassirou Bako-Arifari. According to him, these inconsistencies were linked to, on the one hand, the country's socio-historical context (the plurality of roles during the Atlantic slave trade, ranging from the captives, the raided, and customary slaves to sellers and returning slaves, made it difficult to create national cohesion after independence) and, on the other hand, the memorial context (the permanent stigma of slavery and the need to designate a "culprit") and, finally, political tensions (conflict around the control of power at the top of the state). Thus, in an article on

the emergence of the memory of the slave trade in the political arena, he described the memorial discourse as being ambiguous, monophonic, and fragmentary [Bako-Arifari, 2000].

■ Superimposition

In the late 1990s, the Beninese state continued the construction of a public memory of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. Various public remembrance policies rearranged the memorial discourse around a new axis, while at the same time obscuring the local consequences of slavery. The reconversion of President Kérékou (1996–2006), who succeeded Nicéphore Soglo, to the Pentecostal religion overturned the religious frame of reference within which the memory of transatlantic slavery was approached. It was through the prism of forgiveness and reconciliation that a link was created between Benin and the American continent [Mayrargue, 2002]. Initiatives for commemorating slavery, particularly the Forgiveness Summit (1999), the setting up of the Beninese Association for Reconciliation and Development headquartered in Cotonou (1999), and the "Gospel and Roots" festival (2002), were colored by this redemptive vision. Commemorative activities were also largely associated with the notion of "development", particularly thanks to the rapprochement between the Beninese and their diaspora.

The centralization of commemorative activities in the capital and then the government's gradual disengagement under President Boni Yayi (2006–2016) led to the neglect of Ouidah's memorial route. Paradoxically, it was during this same period that various applications to have Ouidah's Slave Route listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site were submitted (in 1996, 2001, 2007, 2011, and 2016)¹² on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, Crafts, and Tourism, thus testifying to the multiple logics present within the state organs. The lack of political continuity between the different mandates was sanctioned by UNESCO, who systematically rejected these applications. According to the international body, the presence of constructions built by private individuals distorted the city's historical authenticity, while the conservation state of some sites pointed to mismanagement.

The establishment of multiple projects and positionings, at times divergent albeit supported by official

structures, engendered a fluctuating public memory which gave rise to new forms of memorial mobilizations on the Slave Route. While they did partially borrow elements from the dominant narratives, these initiatives produced new contradictory or recreated narratives.

Religious leaders, for example, who had already been involved in the work of remembrance,¹³ took advantage of the publicization of the slave-trading past to promote sacred sites [Ciarcia, 2008] and develop new discourses [Tall, 2009]. On the occasion of the National Festival of Endogenous Religions, held every year on 10 January, a “transatlantic identity” was defended by conferring ancestral status on the diasporic public [Sutherland, 2002].

Other actors joined this route temporarily by attending marches, seminars, or artistic performances, or more permanently by constructing buildings. The Zomachi memorial, also known as the Square of the Duty to Remember Slavery, and the Door of Return are some of the sizable buildings that sprang up in the immediate vicinity of the Slave Route. Both were the initiative of Beninese intellectuals¹⁴ but targeted different audiences, developing complementary approaches. The Zomachi memorial promotes repentance, whereas the Door of Return is more focused on the African diaspora, which it welcomes upon its “physical return” to the African continent. These differences in memorial narratives can be observed during the tours offered by the guides working for these structures, or during group events such as the “Repentance March”, in the first case, and the “Roads of Remembrance”, in the second.

The emergence of these new structurings was a response to the growth of dark tourism [Lennon and Foley, 2000], a concept that describes the popularity of heritage sites dedicated to traumatic historical events and tragedies (genocides, wars, slavery). Thus, in parallel with this superimposition of artifacts, in the 2000s some residents of Ouidah took advantage of this tourist dynamic [Araujo, 2010] by taking up full-time self-taught “guiding”. To make up for the lack of mediators and satisfy the demand for information from a growing number of visitors, locals have offered commentaries on the artworks found on the Slave Route but also in Ouidah's various tourist areas.¹⁵ A certain number of people, sometimes children, thus take on the role of “guide” for a fee. Jung Ran Forte has written an article on the emergence of these “local responses” following the development

of the memorial and cultural tourist industry [Ran Forte, 2009]. She has particularly focused on guiding, describing the remarkable and atypical career of Martine de Souza. After having studied history and literature in Ghana, the latter was employed as an interpreter by an American researcher conducting studies on Vodun.¹⁶ Her knowledge of the region, language skills, reconversion to Vodun, and involvement with heritage led her to develop many activities in the cultural sector, becoming an important public figure in the Beninese tourist landscape. Her rise is also indicative of a form of “symbolic privilege” claimed by some of the respondents in support of their right to guide.¹⁷ Indeed, each one's lineage and social situation confer a certain legitimacy to be the bearer and mediator of a memory. The status of “someone who knows” is conferred by one's family background, which guarantees both knowledge and power. Martine de Souza justifies her heritage by claiming to be a descendant of Ouidah's most famous slave trader, Francisco Felix de Souza [Law, 2004], while at the same time distancing herself from any moral collusion with her ancestor [Ciarcia and Monferran, 2014].

Anicet, Kpadonou, Georges, and Nadibou were among the locals who decided to take up guiding. Anicet, now almost in his sixties, was the first guide to set up near the Door of No Return in the late 1990s.¹⁸ He noticed that a German offered to interpret artworks and particularly the Door of No Return for tourists who were a little disconcerted by the lack of explanations along the Slave Route. A few years later Anicet was joined by twenty-or-so-year-olds whom he trained as guides: first Georges (nicknamed Géo) around 2005, then Nadibou and Kpadonou in the early 2010s. Like the other guides, they illustrate how ways of doing things “constitute the myriad practices through which users appropriate the space organized by the techniques of sociocultural production” [de Certeau, 1990: XL]. Guides offer visitors different options for following the Slave Route (Illustration 2). They can either go on foot, by car, or by motorbike to each of the six stages of the memorial trail for a complete tour. Or, if visitors are short of time, they can have a summary of these different stages on the esplanade of the Door of No Return.

In 2007, Ouidah's municipal team introduced several measures to protect and regulate the city's cultural and historical heritage, including the Slave Route. A tourist office and a formal group of guides were set up, with several people receiving support. Rachida de



Illustration 2 – Guided tour of the Slave Route conducted with a group of French visitors. The guide is describing the sculptures depicting people in chains at Zoungbondji, in front of the mass grave (Ouidah, 2018, photo by R. Goussanou).

PresSES-Universitat de València. Downloaded on 06/09/2016 from https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.217.92)

Souza-Ayari, in charge of Ouidah’s cultural heritage during this period, participated in this support work:¹⁹

Once the Tourist Office was set up, one of the projects I worked on, besides developing and running micro-projects, was to create a formal group of guides. We were successful, but only half. We were successful in that there were two or three training courses, I can’t remember the dates now, and some were officially recognized by the city council as accredited guides.

This decision was not a means to put an end to an informal practice, but rather to legalize the presence of guides on this memorial trail. Thus, following their training, Anicet, Nadibou, Géo, and Kpadonou were given a badge that certified their guiding skills and regularized their presence on the memorial trail. The way in which tours were operated changed as a result of this reform. Guides had to first attend the new tourist office before each tour in order to provide visitors with a receipt attesting the quality of their services. Regulation introduced administrative, pricing, but also discursive norms that guides would have to observe. The training courses provided sought to standardize and homogenize what they

said about the Slave Route. The narrative mobilized by the tourist office revived the vision introduced by the launch of the memorial trail. Guides were thus encouraged to evoke the violence to which the captives were said to have been subjected, both physical (people being branded, chained, locked up, and thrown into mass graves when dead or dying) and symbolic (human beings being sold, told to forget, and sent to unknown places). They were then asked to comment on each of the sculptures along the route. By asking guides to remain faithful to the description of the religious symbols and assumed names of the former kings of Dahomey, a whole ideology was being reinforced. The history of this kingdom, serving as the basis for a dominant memory, did not match the memory of the victims of slavery commemorated along this route.

■ Hijacking

Faced with this imposed memory, the guides devised strategies giving rise to a new “chronotope” [Bakhtin, (1978) 1996] that shifted the timeline, which

residents of Ouidah, the Xwéda, from whom Géo, Anicet, and Kpadonou were descended. All three of them bore ethnic marks on their faces signaling that they were carriers of this lineage. The Xwéda identity is based on the history of the pre-colonial kingdom of the same name, whose capital was Savi, located a few miles away from the coast. Several versions relate the founding of the city of Ouidah, however, the dominant narrative recounts that it was Kpassè, king of the Xwéda, who founded a small farm called *Gléhoué*, which was renamed Ouidah as the Atlantic slave trade developed along the Golf of Guinea. Indeed, until the early 18th century it was this kingdom that dealt with European slave traders, at first under the control of the neighboring kingdom of Allada, and then independently. This political autonomy was short-lived since in 1727 the Fon conquered Savi and then Ouidah, forcing the Xwéda and their king Houffon into exile. As the slave trade was taken over by the kingdom of Dahomey, the Xwéda regularly engaged in acts of rebellion. It was around 1741 that the Fon finally established their domination over the city after a bloody battle which dislodged the Xwéda [Law, 2004].

These historical events are still very much present in the Fon and Xwéda collective memories, as is the identification of a part of the population with one or the other of these social groups. Oral and intergenerational transmissions ensure the continuity of a dynamic body of knowledge and historical identity. Géo, Anicet, and Kpadonou were bearers of these narratives, which made up a large part of the sources mobilized in their knowledge of the site. Initially, their knowledge of Ouidah and the symbols conveyed by the commemorative stelae was not academic but the result of oral transmission. “I started guiding a bit at a time and I was lucky to meet resource persons when I first arrived. I met some great characters who said to me: ‘Come to my place, we’ll have a chat,’” explained Géo. The guides would occasionally evoke these sensitive memories and introduce references or allusions to the history of the Xwéda people. Two sculptures in particular were used by the guides in order to reintroduce mythical figures and conjure up a local imaginary. The sculpture depicting “a monkey eating a corn cob” (Illustration 3) was “hijacked” from its initial context. According to some local interpretations, this statue was meant to be a transposition of the bas-relief recalling Adandozan rebelling against the annual tribute of slaves that had to be paid to the kingdom of Oyo. This Abomean king

had apparently sent a parasol on which a monkey was depicted gorging on corn to signify that the neighboring kingdom’s demand was excessive. Instead of explaining this historical anecdote, the symbol of the monkey was taken to represent the Europeans’ view of the first people they met in Ouidah. “That is the monkey, the first man to meet the Whites here,” explained Anicet. Nadibou’s presentation was virtually identical:

That is a monkey. This symbol is intended for a king of Abomey called Adandozan. But on the Slave Route, it also shows the Europeans’ first look at the black man and what happened. We first met the Europeans in 1580. . . . So in 1580 there were two men, Zingbo and Kpaté. They saw a ship sailing along the coast toward the shoreline.

Presenting this sculpture helped reintroduce the characters of Kpatè and Zingbo, who have become legendary in Ouidah. The two Xwéda men were supposedly the first to meet the Europeans. According to the historical legend, recounted in the book by Casimir Agbo, Zingbo took fright and fled, while Kpatè signaled to them from the beach and welcomed them [Agbo, 1959]. Nadibou continued his explanations by giving further details of Ouidah’s founding myth: “So as he [Kpatè] was wearing a small loincloth made of raffia, he took it off and began to wave it. And when the Portuguese sailors saw this from afar, they thought it was a monkey.” To make up for this hardly flattering portrayal of Kpatè comparing him to a primate, a sculpture located a few feet away, which symbolically depicted a male follower of the Tohossu royal cult, became Kpatè’s portrait. “So here is the first person who saw the white man on Ouidah beach. His name was Kpatè. This is his physical portrait. He’s a dwarf, that is, a short man.”

Through this reinterpretation, the guides enabled the continuity of endogenous and familial memories despite the introduction of official narratives on Beninese memory. Over and above the presentation of a route that had become a tourist attraction, it was the memorial expression of their identity group that was conveyed. During guided tours, other references to the Xwéda kingdom were equally made to rehabilitate its place in the city’s history, particularly at the Auction Square or upon arriving on the beach, where the Xwéda’s flight to the lagoon islands was recalled.



Illustration 3 – Sculptures along the Slave Route used by the guides for their own “hijacking” purposes (Ouidah, 2016, R. Goussanou).

■ Conclusion

The tension between collective memories and official memories was particularly explicit in Ouidah, where narrative struggles co-existed around memories of slavery. Like several actors presented here (religious leaders, public personalities, intellectuals, but also other local guides), the four respondents tried to promote a singular historical vision around official projects. Besides expressing a balance of power between a past that glorified the kingdom of Abomey and diminished the experiences of the Xwéda, this dual reading of commemorative sculptures expressed a latent tension between the dissemination of a monumentalized memory and an oral memory.

Although the guides were able to legalize their practice, their rereading of the works (and therefore of

History) overturned the tacit pact established with the tourist office. They created a balance of power between an official memory defended by this institution and the collective memory borne by the four respondents. As Rémi, a former heritage manager with Ouidah's city council, explained: “In fact, the three who are there, the three who are at the office, I know they regularly do what we call ‘capacity building’. But the ‘Anicets’ are gone, we added them but they are gone and they say whatever they want. That’s the real problem.” This clash of narratives led Anicet, Géo, and Kpadonou to once again be deemed “unofficial guides” by public officials, despite the fact that a few years previously they had helped them gain official recognition.

The emergence of an alternative discourse, conveyed by the “Door guides” around several commemorative stelae, explains the labile character of this commemorative place buffeted by plural, traumatic memories. Today, the inclusion of the Xwéda past in the national narrative is even more pronounced. President Patrice Talon's current project for redeveloping Ouidah's Slave Route has made this “competition of memories” visible. Whereas the scenography proposed for its restoration reinforces the specter of victimhood by centering visits on the captives' departure and experience of the crossing,²⁵ local Xwéda memories are trying to find their place. Last December, Daagbo Hunon Huna II, a high dignitary of the Vodun religion living in Ouidah, spoke on the local radio station *Radio Kpassè*,²⁶ expressing his support for the production of a new common memory:

It is said that it was King Kpatè who allowed the Europeans to set foot in Ouidah. But nobody speaks of him! What should be done? He should be rehabilitated! ... And the kingdom of Ouidah, with its King Houffon, who was one of the most important kings in the subregion and who defied the king of Abomey, particularly King Agadja, nobody speaks of him. We should be able to rehabilitate him. The Xwéda of Gléwé should have a special mention.

What levers will be put in place to include these minority narratives? What place will this remembrance claim have in the consultations on the future project? Will the redevelopment of Ouidah's History Museum include these objections? The next few years may be significant in the attempt to build a new common “national” narrative that brings together the different historical identities present in Benin. ■

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I RÉSUMÉ

Visites touristiques et détournements du passé sur la Route de l'esclave à Ouidah

La « Route de l'esclave » de Ouidah est un lieu de mémoire de la traite atlantique très visité. Afin de répondre à la demande d'un public en quête d'informations, des habitants se proposent de commenter les visites, créant progressivement un « corps de guides » informel, puis réglementé par la municipalité en 2007. Cet article interroge la manière dont certains guides usent de « stratégies narratives » pour détourner un récit officiel et introduire des mémoires particulières.

Mots-clés : Guides de tourisme. Route de l'esclave. Ouidah. Détournement. Conflit mémoriel.

■ ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Sightseeing-Touren und Geschichtsumschreibung auf der Sklavenroute in Ouidah

Die „Sklavenroute“ von Ouidah ist viel besichtigter Erinnerungsort des Atlantikvertrags. Um der Bitte der Öffentlichkeit nach Informationen nachzukommen, erklärten sich einige Einwohner dazu bereit, als Fremdenführer zu agieren und schafften schrittweise ein „Führergremium“, das zunächst informell war, bis es 2007 von der Gemeinde reguliert wurde. In diesem Artikel wird die Art und Weise hinterfragt, mit der einige Fremdenführer Erzählstrategien nutzen um, um eine offizielle Erzählung umzuschreiben und bestimmte Erinnerungen einzuführen.

Schlagwörter: Fremdenführer. Sklavenroute. Ouidah. Erzählstrategie. Geschichtsumschreibung. Erinnerungskonflikt.

■ RESUMEN

Visitas turísticas y desvíos del pasado en la Ruta del Esclavo en Ouidah

La “Ruta del esclavo” de Ouidah es un lugar de recuerdo del Tratado del Atlántico muy visitado. Con el fin de responder a la solicitud de un público en busca de información, los habitantes proponen comentar las visitas, creando gradualmente un “cuerpo de guías” inicialmente informales, antes de ser regulados por el municipio en 2007. Este artículo examina cómo algunos guías usan “estrategias narrativas” para desviar una narración oficial e introducir recuerdos particulares.

Palabras-clave: Guías de turismo. Ruta del Esclavo. Ouidah. Desvío. Conflicto conmemorativo.