

Travelling Gods, Ritual Memory and Slavery in Contemporary Benin

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For more than two centuries the Bight of Benin participated to the Atlantic trade; slavery saturated the everyday life of the region and made the richness and the cosmopolitanism of these trading settlements. Today, along the same coastal region, it is possible to encounter Tchamba, the spirits of foreign slaves from the northern savannah. Tchamba ritual practice – part and parcel of the Vodun religion – narrates peculiar stories of domestic slavery and the Atlantic trade, of struggles for emancipation, love and trade, women and men, slaves and masters. But most of all, its worship questions the notion of memory, in both discursive and embodied forms, and the ways in which we create linkages between practices, narration, history and the experience of time.