LEVEL: BEGINNERS

Exploring African Legacies and Ontologies in Northern Greece

Some of the critical issues and keywords that the text below includes:

- National identity
- Turkophone and Grecophone
- Christian and Muslim
- Slavery

Empathy is an important part of understading cultural differences and diverse ontologies than yours. Keep it in mind.

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WHICH EXACT AREAS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The villages of Avato/Beyköyü and Evlalo/İnanlı, which are part of the Xanthi/İskeçe Plain, belonging to the administrative region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace located in North Eastern Greece.



Could you spot the villages on the map?

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

In the villages of Avato and Evlalo, one can find a large mix of cultures, religions, origins, nationalities, and skin colors. Among the two villages, the main ethnic groups consist of Greek Orthodox, Greek Muslim, Greek and Bulgarian Pomak, Roma, Pontic Greek, Albanian migrants, and the so-called, by the greek media, Afrogreeks or Black Greeks. The latter, which this case study focuses on, is a very rough approximate population of 1,000 people of African, possibly Sudanese descent, who are at their majority Muslim, as well as both Greek and Turkish-speaking. Historically, there are a few scenarios of the origin of this population, although very little research has been initiated regarding this specific group.

Popular Scenario:

During the Ottoman Empire, which included the ruling of the area of Thrace, Africans (specifically people from Sudan) were brought to NE Greece as workers of the higher administrative officials of the different villages.

Let us rephrase:

During the centuries of Ottoman Colonialism, which included the colonization of Thrace, people of African descent were taken to Northeast Greece as slaves of the Ottoman ***Beys*** ⁎ in the area.

⁎**Bey = the governor of a district or province in the Ottoman Empire. That is how the one village took its name: Bey köyü = the village of the Bey**

LEARN TO UNLEARN

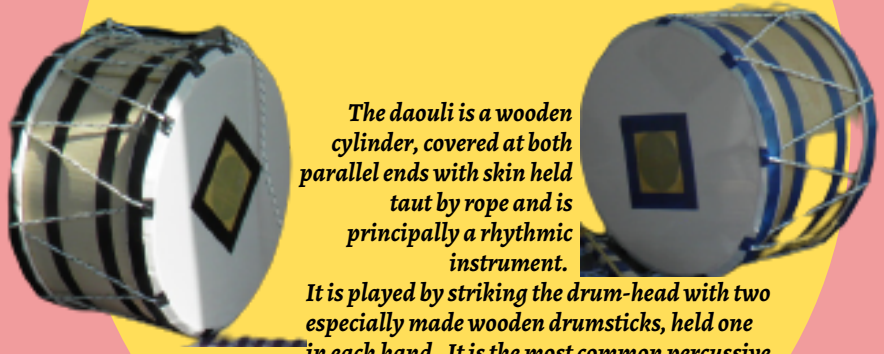
Pay close attention to the various questions and critical thoughts that come up when trying to find out more about hidden/undocumented history.

Regarding scenario of origin : What difference do you find between the two ways in which this sentence has been phrased? Which one uses more politically correct language? Which one tries to sugarcoat brutal historical facts? How would you rephrase it to give respect to the oppressed people, but also, to reveal hidden realities? Is there a difference between an imperial system and a colonial system? Discuss.

For further insights, reading about the difference between a colony and an empire might be of help: Kumar, K., 2021. Colony and empire, colonialism and imperialism: A meaningful distinction? *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *63*(2), pp.280-309. To enrich your knowledge, even more, go to Young, R.J., 2015. *Empire, colony, postcolony*. John Wiley & Sons.

STIMULUS MATERIAL

The Evlalo Market -currently taking place every Tuesday in the central square of the village- brings to life the multiculturalism of the region where Blacks, Whites, Romas, Christians and Muslims occupy the local shops and share a cup of coffee.



The daouli is a wooden cylinder, covered at both parallel ends with skin held taut by rope and is principally a rhythmic instrument. It is played by striking the drum-head with two especially made wooden drumsticks, held one in each hand. It is the most common percussive instrument of Greece, Turkey, and the Black Sea region and was found in the Evlalo Market in July 2022.

Photo by N.C.-M.

Both mosques and churches co-exist in all villages as well as Christian and Muslim cemetaries.





Photos taken in Evlalo and Avato by N.C.-M. (2022)

Muslim women do not have much access to mosques or cemetaries. They may enter the former a few times a year for specific religious training and discussion only. During a funeral, all women gather at the deceased 's house and give their final farewell while the main later take the body for burial at the cemetary.

QUESTIONS, PRACTICES, EXERCISES



An old, undated photo off harmonious living in Avato, generously offered from the community's historical archive.

There is a need to see People of African Descent/ Black Europeans as populations not (only) with a recent migration history, but as part of Greek/European history and therefore to show how countries like Greece, without a colonial past, might be part of histories that include slavery and colonialism.

Apart from a lack of data collection on this topic, there is also a lack of knowledge of its history from the community itself. This handbook is trying to provide access to this knowledge in a simplified manner in order for active citizens to pass it on to other groups (students, civil society, NGOs etc).

SET UP A RESEARCH GROUP

Look into a/your country's historical paths, try to seek hidden identities. Do these happen to be of People of Colour? Discuss.

Does the country you live in/are from have some sort of African history? Remember, no region has ever been homogeneous. Cultures and continents always found a way to interact, sometimes revealing brutal histories of the past.

JUST BELOW, CHECK OUT ANOTHER READING TIP

Still too difficult to grasp?

Look at the following activities below for a better understanding



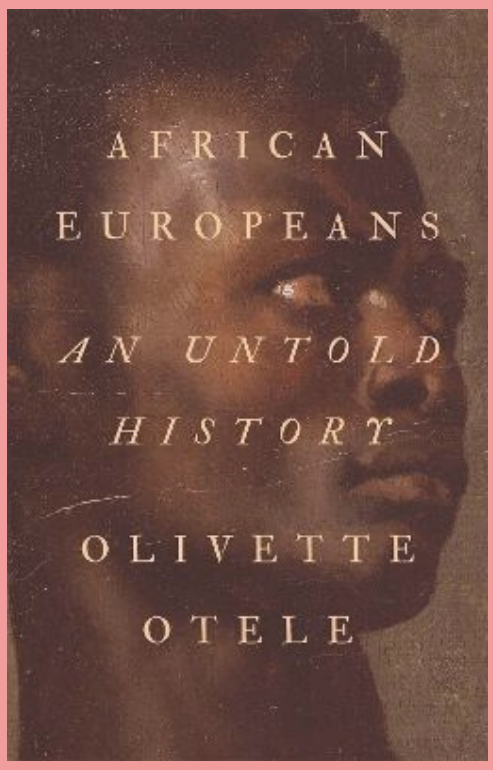
ANOTHER READING TIP

In case you need a place to start from, consider reading:
Otele, O., 2021. African Europeans: An Untold History. Basic Books

Olivette Otele PhD, FRHistS *is a Professor of History of Slavery and Memory of enslavement at the University of Bristol. She is a Fellow and a Vice President of the Royal Historical Society. Professor Otele holds a PhD in History from Université Paris, La Sorbonne, France. Her area of research is colonial and post-colonial History and the histories of people of African descent.*

Professor Otele has been the recipient of several national and international research grants (AHRC, European Commission-RISE, Canadian-SSHRC). She is also a regular contributor to the press, television and radio programmes (BBC, Sky News, Guardian, Sunday Times, Elle Magazine, HuffingtonPost, New Yorker, etc).

Her latest books include a monograph, African European: an untold History (Hurst, 2020) and an edited volume, Post-Conflict Memorialization: Missing Memorials, Absent Bodies (Palgrave-MacMillan, 2020)



SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINERS AND EDUCATORS

LEVEL: BEGINNERS

DISCOVERING AFROEUROPEAN HISTORIOGRAPHIES

COMPLEXITY

This section is meant to engage a group of beginners with little knowledge about Afroeuropean communities, identities, and histories.

GROUP SIZE & TYPE

8-15 participants, ideally students of junior high or high school either from the same country or various.

TIME

90 minutes or 2 hours in case of the need to wrap up and/or set a follow-up activities

OBJECTIVES

- Familiarise with the history and identities of Africans around Europe
- Reflect critically on knowledge of the existence of African histories in each participant's country
- Understand and come to know the high level of diversity of each participant's country along with a series of different ontologies and cosmologies in from a historical aspect
- Stimulate critical thinking and develop research skills through easy-to-handle pieces of minority history, such as: People of Color in European Art History (https://medievalpoc.tumblr.com)

MATERIAL

Internet connection, laptop, projector, flipchart posters, handouts

PREPARATION

- Make sure to review the Greek case study before kicking off the different activities.
- Organise activities in two 45 minute sessions : first half is for research and second half is for each group to present in plenary.
- Divide participants into small groups of the same (imaginary or not) country in order to initiate research activities and have diverse findings to discuss as a follow-up activity.
- Prepare links in advance for the activity.
- Be prepared to open up the discussion among the participants about sensitive topics, such as nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Throughout, make sure that none in the group will feel marginalized or discriminated against.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

If possible, organize a one-day trip to one of the areas that you might be close to based on the research/country results mentioned in this section. For example, if you are having your session in Marseille, France, pay a visit to Musée des Beaux-Arts where one can find Blacks depicted in the Baptism of the Eunuch .