The Program in African Studies and the Entrepreneurship & Innovation Hub at Princeton University in collaboration with the African School of Economics invite you to a conference:

The Origins and Legacy of the Agodjie: The Female Warriors of the Kingdom of Danxome

Dates: 16th – 17th September 2022

The African School of Economics (ASE) is a system of pan-African universities that promotes the development of cutting-edge economic research, creates innovative public policy, and develops world-class social scientists and business leaders in Africa. ASE’s campuses in Benin, Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria are training Africa’s upcoming researchers, scholars, and policymakers. The institution further houses five research institutes to inform evidence-based solutions to the most urgent needs of the African continent.

The Institute of African Studies at the ASE conducts qualitative research on African history, anthropology, and sociology. The IAS’ seminal research focuses on the history of the agodjie, or Amazons of the Danxome Kingdom, a unique institution in global military history. Based on the IAS’ research, key findings have been used for the upcoming Hollywood film on the female Amazons of Danxome, “The Woman King”.

The Program in African Studies (PAS) established in 1975, is a multidisciplinary program housed at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies that seeks to put Africa and Africans onto the center stage of academic research and teaching. Africa’s societies, cultures, and environments are richly diverse and the continent’s interactions with the rest of the world make the study of Africa a study of the future of humanity.

Conference Description

The Kingdom of Danxome in pre-colonial Benin presents political-economic structures that engender both male and female representation. Danxomean women served as administrators, titled state officers, ministers, government record keepers, political advisors, policymakers, spies, soldiers, and guards. The Amazons, or agodjie, formed an elite all-female military unit to protect the Kingdom of Danxome against its neighboring enemies and eventually went on to fight against the French colonizers. Initiated under Queen Hangbe and institutionalized under King Guezo, the agodjie represented nearly 30 percent of the armed forces of the Kingdom of Danxome, and vastly contributed to the preservation of its independence from the Oyo Empire and its fierce resistance to the French colonial invasion.

Although the agodjie embody the only documented female army to date, little is known about their history. Most accounts have been written by Europeans who encountered this elite force, either deliberately withheld the existence and competence of the Amazons altogether or represented them through a racialized and sexualized lens that described them as icons of savagery. Research conducted by the Institute of African Studies at the African School of Economics aims at documenting the lives and legacies of fifty-one Agodjie to provide
evidence for social norms on gender inclusion in pre-colonial Danxome and the inner working of the institution as well as its long term social impact.

The Program in African Studies in collaboration with the Entrepreneurship & Innovation Hub at Princeton and the African School of Economics is organizing an interdisciplinary conference to discuss recent advances in the social history of the agodjie and their representation in the visual arts.

We begin with the introduction of West African history and pre-colonial institutions in the Kingdom of Danxome. We will then cover the extended biographic research on the Amazons conducted by the African School of Economics and follow with a panel discussion on the role of women and their representation in the political and economic institutions of pre-colonial Africa, particularly the Kingdom of Danxome. We conclude the first day with a viewing of The Woman King, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood. The second day of the conference will commence with a screening of a short documentary featuring the lives and legacies of 51 Amazons of Danxome under Kings Guezo, Glele and Behanzin. We will conduct a panel discussion on the social history of gender norms and the representation of African women in the visual arts and conclude with a policy-focused discussion.

Conference Structure

September 16

Panel 1: Introducing the World’s First Female-led Military Force – The Amazons of Danxome
Time: 12:45 PM – 2:30 PM

Speakers:
- What do we know? - Lecture on the Literature and Academic Research on the Kingdom of Danxome and the Amazons: Suzanne P. Blier, Professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University
- Introduction to the Book, “Lives and Legacies of Fifty-one Amazons from Danxome Kingdom”, Leonard Wantchekon, James Madison Professor of Political Economy and Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University
  - Additional Comments: Serge Ouitona, Director of the Institute of African Studies, African School of Economics and Amelie Degbelo, Author of Les Amazones du Danxomè, 1645-1900
- Warriors & Queens in Danxome during the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Ana Lucia Araujo, Professor of History, Howard University

Moderated by Herbert Cole, Emeritus Professor of Art History, University of California, Santa Barbara

Panel 2: Social, Political & Economic Conditions in Danxome
Time: 2:45 PM – 4:30 PM

Speakers:
- Pre-colonial Political and Economic Institutions in West Africa: J. Cameron Monroe, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz
- Gender Norms in the Kingdom of Danxome: Douglas J. Falen, Chair of Sociology & Anthropology, Agnes Scott College
- Preservation of the Legacy of the Agodjie: Blandine Opêoluwa Agbaka, National Institute of Crafts, Archeology and Culture, Abomey-Calavi University
Promoting and Preserving the Historical Legacy of the Kingdom of Danxome: Mr. Gabin Djimasse, Director, the Abomey Tourism Office

Moderated by Barbara Cooper, Professor of History, Rutgers University

Movie Screening: The Woman King
- Recorded Message by Gina Prince-Bythewood, Director, The Woman King

September 17

Panel 3: Thoughts and Reflections - Discussion on the Woman King
Time: 9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Led by Leonard Wantchekon, James Madison Professor of Political Economy and Professor of Politics and International Affairs

Screening of Documentary on the Amazons of Danxome: Based on Evidence from the Descendants of the Amazons
Time: 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM

Panel 4: Representation of African Women in the Visual Arts
Time: 11:00 AM – 12:45 PM

Speakers:
- Boukary Sawadogo, Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Black Studies, CUNY
- Apolline Traore, Filmmaker and Producer; Director of Borders/Borderlines (2017) and the Price of Ignorance (2000)
- Herbert Cole, Emeritus Professor of Art History, University of California, Santa Barbara
- Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda, Filmmaker, Writer and Poet; Director of Le Damier – Papa National Oyé (1996), Article 15 Bis (1999) and AFRO@DIGITAL (2001)

Moderated by Chika Okeke-Agulu, Professor, Department of African American Studies & Department of Art and Archaeology and Director, Program in African Studies

Panel 5: Preserving and Building on the Legacy of the Amazons – Future Directions and Policy Recommendations
Time: 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Speakers:
- Juste Codjo, Assistant Professor of Security Studies, New Jersey City University, and Major (retd.), Benin Armed Forces
• Djoudath Alidou Dramane, Associate Professor of Finance, University of Parakou, Benin and Coordinator of the Regional Program on the Economic Empowerment of Women from the Sahel (SWEDD-BENIN)
• Elisabeth Fourn, Professor of Sociology, University of Abomey Calavi, Benin

Moderated by Tanushree Goyal, Assistant Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University

**Program Agenda**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch (Panelists Only)</td>
<td>11:30 AM – 12:45 PM</td>
<td>16th September</td>
<td>Prospect House</td>
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<td>Panel 1: Introducing the World’s First Female-led Military Force - The Amazons of Danxome*</td>
<td>12:45 PM – 2:30 PM</td>
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<td>Arthur Lewis Auditorium, Robertson Hall</td>
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<td>*Lunch will be served for participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>2:30 PM – 2:45 PM</td>
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<td>Panel 2: Social, Political &amp; Economic Conditions in Danxome</td>
<td>2:45 PM – 4:30 PM</td>
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<td>The Atrium, Louis A. Simpson International Building</td>
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<td>Welcome reception *</td>
<td>5:30 PM – 6:45 PM</td>
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<td>Princeton Garden Theatre, Nassau Street</td>
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<td>*All participants</td>
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<td>Screening of the Woman King</td>
<td>7:00 PM – 9:00 PM</td>
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<td><strong>Day 2</strong></td>
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<td>Panel 3: Thoughts &amp; Reflections – Discussion on the Woman King*</td>
<td>9:00 AM – 10:00 AM</td>
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<td>Bowl 16, Robertson Hall</td>
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<td>AM 12:45 – 1:00 PM</td>
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<td>PM 1:00 – 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Panel 5: Preserving and Building on the Legacies of the Amazons - Future Directions and Policy Recommendations</td>
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1 Bay, Edna G. *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Danxome*. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1998. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb02559.0001.001](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb02559.0001.001), EPUB.