

# EUROTAST

Exploring the History, Archaeology & New Genetics of the Transatlantic Slave Trade



## Starting a New Journey: Key themes and early expectations

**A Narrative Report of the EUROTAST Inaugural Kick-Off Week**

Hosted by the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past (IPUP)

[www.york.ac.uk/ipup/](http://www.york.ac.uk/ipup/)

**JUNE 2012**

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**Image credit:** The cover image is an adapted photograph of a memorial entitled “Le Negre Marron” (The Black Maroon) located in Port-au-Prince, Haiti from 1970. The photograph is taken with kind permission, from database: [The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record](#) by Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite Jr. The database is under copyright: 2012, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and University of Virginia.

# I. Introduction

EUROTAST is a Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN), convened to support a new generation of PhD and postdoctoral researchers to explore the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade across multiple academic disciplines.

Over four years, this pan-European partnership of leading scientists, archaeologists and historians will work with a group of international students, on projects that seek to develop fresh perspectives by addressing questions about the ancestral origins of African descendant communities in former slave colonies, through genetics; and building a more detailed picture of African endurance under inhumane conditions, through archaeological explorations into health, physical trauma and nutrition.

The network's unprecedented focus on genetics and bio archaeology to explore these histories will inevitably enrich the work of EUROTAST's historians, who will concern themselves with questions about the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. They are exploring the ways in which African and African descendant cultural identities have been radically altered by this history, and interrogating how predominantly racialised notions of "authenticity", community and belonging are mediated by these transatlantic communities in the 21st century.

Although the development of pioneering research and critical scholarship is a core aim of the project, EUROTAST also seeks to encourage public engagement with its research themes. The network's two successive postdoctoral fellows will foster necessary links and partnerships for this work, and facilitate outreach and educational initiatives focussed on challenging stereotypes, expanding curricula and raising youth aspirations, particularly in West Africa and the Caribbean.

Fundamentally, EUROTAST has made a commitment to support the personal and professional growth of its 15 fellows, by ensuring that through training and interdisciplinary collaboration they emerge as sensitised, independent and empowered individuals for their continued work in academia and beyond.

It is with these critical ambitions in mind that the EUROTAST network gathered for its first inaugural meeting, from the 11th to 14th June 2012, hosted by the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past (IPUP) at the University of York. The following narrative report aims to outline the key themes that emerged from network discussions and to recapture the early thoughts and expectations of project leaders (PI's), project fellows (ESR's/ER), key stakeholders and invited guests.

## II. Putting first things first

The EUROTAST Kick-Off week began on Monday 11th June with an internal management business meeting lead by network convenors Professor Tom Gilbert and Dr Hannes Schroeder, and comprised of PI's, administrators, EU representatives, and affiliated network stakeholders.

This business meeting provided the first opportunity for the management division of the network to meet one another, and to discuss in detail the legal and financial logistics of running the network. This included collective assessment and consolidation of EUROTAST's ambitious fellow training programme, which will include workshops, symposia and internships hosted by partner institutions over the course of three years. To support the implementation of network activities, emphasis was placed on the need to ensure that a regular reporting structure for research and dissemination outcomes, both for PI's and fellows, was adhered to. In a wider context, it was highlighted that this system of regular reporting and feedback would encourage reflectiveness around research and outreach activities – enabling the network to qualify its successes and areas for development – whilst also informing career planning for fellows.

In addition to consolidating the network's structural formalities and legal responsibilities, the meeting was particularly focussed on developing agreed protocols for an ethical and holistic approach to conducting multidisciplinary research within a highly contested and sensitive area of history; and transmitting the outcomes and implications of this research to wider audiences.

### **Research and Ethics**

Fundamentally the EUROTAST research projects are focussed around three main thematic areas, identified by Dr Hannes Schroeder as addressing specific aspects of the transatlantic slave trade where genetic and bio-archaeological research, in particular, are most relevantly applied. These are:

- 1. African origins and ancestral ties**
- 2. Enslaved health status and physical quality of life**
- 3. Legacies and representations**

Dr Schroeder acknowledged that the research themes were not exhaustive, and had a genetics/biology focus, but maintained that they did offer all the network's researchers opportunities to engage thoughtfully across disciplines, and would enable thinking and responses to other topical research questions around themes –

such as bio-cultural change and adaptation, and modes of African resistance to physical enslavement and its psychocultural effects.

In his presentation on ethical issues, particularly with regard to research development for the projects handling human remains and biological data, Dr Schroeder highlighted the following practical areas for consideration by the network:

- **Informed consent** – ensuring that all biological material taken from ancient remains is extracted, utilised, stored and returned with the full support of host communities, who are fully informed about research intentions and outcomes through clear and accessible dissemination materials and outreach initiatives.
- **Confidentiality** – maintaining stringent confidentiality protocols around sensitive research materials, and ensuring that the network's procedural information and unpublished research is adequately protected.
- **Language and labelling** – agreeing a network-wide standard for the description and referencing of people of African descent in research, publication and presentations. It has been widely acknowledged, as an outcome of the UK's 2007 commemorations of the Abolition of the Slave Trade that the term 'enslaved African person/people' be used instead of 'slave/slaves'.
- **Representation** – ensuring that EUROTAST maintains respectful protocols for the illustration of human remains, and for all other negative/subjective imagery of African people (torture, shackles etc.), in research, publication and presentations.
- **Benefit sharing** – consolidating equitable use and sharing of biological data collaboratively across the network, and ensuring that analytical results from this data be disseminated to host communities, particularly in the case of archaeological research in sites of African ancestral memory.

Noted ethical guidelines that could inform the network's work included:

- *The Vermillion Accord on Human Remains* (Adopted in 1989 at WAC Inter-Congress, South Dakota, USA)

- *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England* (Published on 25 January 2005, jointly by English Heritage and the Church of England, UK)
- *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* (Adopted in October 2005 by the General Conference of UNESCO)
- *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (Published in October 2005 by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, UK).

### **Dissemination and Outreach**

One of the core aspects of EUROTAST's activities is public engagement, through a programme of dissemination and outreach activities that seek to bring awareness about the network's research themes to wider audiences. The ER, Dr Temi Odumosu, is facilitating this work with support from Professor Helen Weinstein at the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past (IPUP). Together they presented their earnest and frank perspectives on the challenges and rewards of developing initiatives around contested histories, and working with communities for whom such histories hold deep and often painful resonances.

It was agreed that the network would need to work carefully and collaboratively with the various African and African descendant communities directly affected by this research, and that lessons should be learned from other projects to ascertain the most beneficial ways in which EUROTAST could meaningfully engage with a wide range of 'publics' – from academic stakeholders and policymakers, to the media, schools and grassroots organisations in West Africa and the Caribbean.

In order to ensure clarity for the network, the concepts of 'Dissemination' and 'Outreach' were defined as follows:

**Dissemination** = Translating EUROTAST research to wider audiences over and beyond the academic output in order to prompt interest, forge strategic relationships, and encourage dialogue and discussion around research themes and their implications.

**Outreach** = Public engagement through sustained educational programmes and initiatives that seek to:

- Develop current thinking around research subjects and disciplines
- Challenge ingrained cultural prejudices and attitudes
- Empower "represented" communities
- Influence professional practice, and
- Enhance organizational cultures.

A number of important areas influencing the dissemination and outreach process were highlighted for consideration by the network. These included:

- **Press strategy** – managing media interest in and access to project research through agreed press release dissemination protocols, and strategic discussions/engagement with broadcasters for longer-term media outputs.
- **Branding** – Consolidating standards or templates for network branding so that there is consistency in all published materials, both printed and electronic.
- **Approaching community engagement** – working with integrity and respect for the cultures and individuals with whom the network engages, by cultivating meaningful relationships and enabling the development of initiatives that can have long term benefits.
- **Managing expectations** – Clarifying network aims and objectives for the public so that EUROTAST is not presented as a “solution” to socio-political challenges, but rather viewed as a unique resource that can help to encourage new thinking around the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its contemporary legacies. It was noted that being clear about what the network can and cannot deliver, would also limit the capacity for sensationalism.

Overall it was agreed that EUROTAST would approach its dissemination and outreach activities with sensitivity and mindfulness; and that Professor Weinstein, Dr Odumosu and the next experienced researcher would work towards ensuring that public engagement was fully supported by the network as an integral aspect of its thinking and working practices.



### III. Exploring research perspectives

On Tuesday 12th June the entire EUROTAST network of project leaders and new fellows finally met for the first time. The whole day was presented as a symposium, dedicated to exploring the key research themes of network projects, and hearing critical perspectives on this work from invited speakers. A number of invited guests from the York University scholarly community, as well as other people with associated research interests, also joined the audience. Here was a unique opportunity for all the fellows to listen to a bespoke programme of talks in order to explore current scholarship on the transatlantic slave trade, and to begin to think about the ways in which their individual projects might inform wider discourse. This was critical, in particular, for those fellows in the life sciences for whom the subject was new territory.

Overall the day was conceived as a conversation between overview presentations on the 3 core project themes and more theoretical perspectives/case studies responding to this work. Each project theme was presented by a representative project leader, who outlined the research questions emerging from the PhD projects in their area. The following synthesis will present the core themes and ideas presented to give a flavour of the discussion.

#### **INTRODUCTION: Professor David Richardson on the transatlantic slave trade**

*“One of the main tasks of EUROTAST is to go beyond the coast and look at where enslaved African people actually came from.”*

The day began with an introductory presentation on the transatlantic slave trade given by ESR project leader and economic historian Professor David Richardson from the University of Hull. In this talk the fellows were given a nuanced description of the slave trade as a European wide commercial commitment with devastating cultural, biological, psychological and demographic consequences for the African continent and people of African descent around the Atlantic world.

Critical points of interest for consideration by the network and its research included the prevalence for males and children in the Atlantic trade; the marked distinctiveness between the demands of the Atlantic and trans-Saharan trade; the significant bilateral trade between America and Africa, and within the Americas, that overshadowed the triangular route; and the links between inherited genetics diseases in the Americas with those in specific geographic locations in Africa.



Thinking forwards about the research of EUROTAST fellows, Professor Richardson emphasised the need to draw strength from an interdisciplinary perspective, which would help to enrich the hard data into a historical narrative that highlighted personal stories and experiences – ultimately giving context and place to lives that were ineradicably altered by this human tragedy. Professor Richardson also urged the EUROTAST fellows to “become stakeholders in the slave trade voyages database” – a landmark international virtual initiative, hosted by Emory University in Atlanta, that seeks to build a detailed picture of the port origins and numbers of individuals captured on the African coast and transported to the Americas.<sup>1</sup> As a public initiative the database offers a tangible opportunity for the fellows to make their research relevant in a broader educational context.

### **PERSPECTIVE: Professor Fatimah Jackson on Genetics and African Identity**

*“Your challenge as students will be to get outside of the cultural biases and baggage as you analyse and interpret the genetic messages”*

Project stakeholder Professor Fatimah Jackson, from the University of North Carolina, gave the keynote lecture for the day. Her presentation was a conversation between the ancient African evolutionary past and the present day, providing a multi-disciplinary meditation on the biological, cultural and political identities of African descendant peoples in the Americas under the historical shadow of the transatlantic slave trade. Professor Jackson presented the concept of identity as a “dynamic reality” in which genetic research has provided an opportunity to broker links between people in the transatlantic Diaspora and their African ancestral origins. Yet she also spoke about the challenges of utilising Eurocentric genomic research, which has failed to work from an African basis, where genetic diversity is at its greatest. Professor Jackson therefore urged researchers to challenge old assumptions about African identity as a cultural and political concept linked to particular phenotypes and false geographical boundaries inherited from a colonial past, and with an emphasis on autonomy. She further noted the consequences this has had on research:

*“Our mind set skews the way that we’re envisioning the data. The data is consistent. This is why we are all Africans. But because we have a tendency to focus on regionality, we start seeing divisions that are breaking this normal pattern of continuity.”*

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<sup>1</sup> The Transatlantic Slave Trade database website: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/>

Exploring the links between genetics and socio-cultural issues, Professor Jackson critiqued the interpretive results of commercial ancestry testing companies claiming to offer definitive answers about African origins to Diaspora communities trying to find their roots. She noted that the genetic picture is still limited and that specifying connections to a particular ethnic group or tribe undermines the complexity of the true picture. However, in terms of research, Professor Jackson highlighted the interesting ways in which the “legacies of slavery are revealed in the genetics”, particularly with regard to health issues present in modern African descendant populations. She noted, for example, the proclivity for hypertension and stroke in the Carolinas, which reflect the outcomes of inherited sensitivities to salt in people from the Congo. Furthermore she added how this evidence can be analysed hand in hand with ethnographic research on African cultural retentions and recalibrations in the Americas, to build a rich picture of African agency, endurance and adaptation, in spite of this traumatic history.

Overall, speaking about the ways in which EUROTAST fellows might approach their research, Professor Jackson reaffirmed the core questions underpinning approaches to the transatlantic slave trade in all disciplines, asking again: *“What did slavery mean? Where did the people come from? And how were those people and their descendants transformed over time?”* She also urged fellows to interact with the communities impacted by this research and to enable those communities to take ownership of research outcomes, moreover in their own ways.

### **EUROTAST Research: African Ancestry & the Search for Origins**

Dr Hannes Schroeder presented the first overview package on PhD projects investigating African origins across all EUROTAST disciplines. This research comprises a large percentage of network projects and seeks to redress questions around ancestral origins revealed not only through archival research, but also in the forensic analysis of ancient bone samples, and contemporary genetic data. This work seeks to develop new approaches for working with African biological data, on a genome-wide level, particularly for historical individuals who show a less mixed, and therefore clearer, genetic picture. Similarly this research will further investigate whether it is possible to provide a more accurate picture of ancestral ties for modern African descendant peoples, beyond ethnic groupings linked to trading ports of enslaved departure. Acknowledging the value and meaning of family and community connectedness to people of African descent, the “hard data” will be complemented by a humanities-led exploration of the sociocultural motivations for genetic Ancestry testing, its uses and implications for people in the transatlantic Diaspora.

As projects forming the bedrock of EUROTAST research Dr Schroeder re-urged the students in this area to work collaboratively and inventively, using the historical data in established databases (such as Slave Voyages) to compliment and inform their analysis, whilst similarly helping to develop content for these critical education resources.

The PhD projects encompassed by this theme are:

- *ESR3, Isotopic perspectives on slave origins and forced migration*  
Judy Watson, University of Bristol
- *ESR4, Documenting the Ethnic Origins of Captives in the Atlantic Slave Trade*  
Carlos da Silva Junior, Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE), University of Hull
- *ESR5: Charting the ancestry of African Americans*  
Tanja Heinz, University of Santiago
- *ESR6: Tracing the Origins of the Noir Marron in French Guiana*  
Cesar Fortes Lima, AMIS, University Paul Sabatier
- *ESR7: Tracing the origins of African captives in the slave trade using aDNA*  
Marcela Sandoval, University of Copenhagen
- *ESR8: Developing bioinformatic tools to study biogeographical ancestry*  
Hákon Jónsson, University of Copenhagen
- *ESR11: Computational reconstruction of Hans Jonatan's genome*  
Anuradha Jagadeesan, University of Reykjavik
- *ESR12: The New Genetics and the Search for African Identity*  
Sarah Abel, Le Centre International de Recherches sur les Esclavages (CIRES), Paris

#### **PERSPECTIVE: Dr Nicolas Brucato on the Genetic Ancestry of the Noir Marron**

*“In this research area, two fundamental questions can be addressed by genetics. First, is there a direct correlation between culture/cultural expression and genetics? And second, can we still find in modern descendant DNA a trace of their ancestral origins in Africa?”*

To complement the theme of African origins, Dr Nicolas Brucato from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, presented a case study on his doctoral research, which explored the ancestral origins of Maroon communities in Surinam and French Guiana. The “Noir Marron” are descendants of formerly enslaved African people who rebelled and reclaimed their liberty, retreating into the Amazon forests to live as a segregated group. Dr Brucato’s case study provided a tangible example of the ways in which genetics could be used to answer questions about cultural and biological inheritance, particularly with the Noir Marron who had limited mixture with non-African peoples, and continued to maintain rituals inherited from the West African spiritual pantheon (particularly Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria). However, Dr Brucato also noted the ways in which the Noir Marron adapted to a hostile environment by borrowing from colonial European languages and social hierarchies, as well as utilising Amerindian survival mechanisms and building techniques.

In attempting to determine the genetic diversity and ancestral origins of the Noir Marron, Dr Brucato’s collaborative research adopted four types of molecular analysis: Mitochondrial DNA (Maternal lineage), Y- Chromosome (Paternal lineage), Immunoglobulin G (Blood work), and HTLV1 (transmission patterns of HIV from males to females). Across the board it was determined that the Noir Marron preserved a clear West African ancestry, as well as a genetic diversity typical of this region; therefore linking this unique community to origins in the “Bight of Benin” that show them to be examples of the direct legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Overall Dr Brucato’s research raises critical themes concerning endurance and African resistance, by highlighting how this Maroon community preserved their cultural and biological Africanism by isolating and protecting themselves from the horrors of enslavement.

## **PERSPECTIVE: Dr Richard Benjamin on Representing Enslavement in Museums**

*“You don’t always take the easy option...and we are not a shop of horrors”*

EUROTAST research emerges primarily from within an academic frame and yet the network’s findings will have far reaching consequences. Dr Richard Benjamin, Director of the International Slavery Museum (ISM) in Liverpool, spoke candidly about the challenges of public engagement with this history and its legacies for both local and international communities. Based within a constituency troubled by institutional racism and fragile intercultural relations, Dr Benjamin’s presentation described the ISM as a politicised space on the front line with implicit responsibility to the diverse communities it represents, and tasked with the role of challenging

stereotypes and falsely inherited attitudes about identity and difference. We were reminded that the museum is situated in a city that still sells mementos of the racist stereotype of the Gollywog doll; where racist crimes have cut young lives short; and whose street names memorialise plantation owners and slave traders.

Dr Benjamin highlighted the sensitive and provocative nature of the museum's focal themes of 'Freedom' and 'enslavement', for all communities, which makes decisions about display and interpretation much more complex, since the galleries indirectly serve as a space for cultural mediation.

The International Slavery Museum is broadly split into three thematic zones, namely 'Life in West Africa', 'Enslavement and the middle passage', and 'Legacy'. Although different in tone, each space provides both discursive and experiential elements that encourage independent thought as well as direct engagement with museum displays. As a space with pedagogical, capacity building, and museological concerns, Dr Benjamin emphasised the need to reinforce positive messages around Black achievement and African agency as an antidote to the negative representations of enslavement and material racism. Thinking forwards about the future of museum displays and outreach initiatives, he encouraged EUROTAST researchers to engage with the museum by supporting the development of new approaches to public engagement that maintain social, cultural and intellectual relevancy.

### **EUROTAST Research: African Health & Nutrition during the Slave Trade Era**

Dr Kate Robson-Brown, EUROTAST project leader from the University of Bristol, presented the second overview package on the health and nutrition theme. These projects are focussed exclusively on osteoarchaeological research working with African descendant human remains in established collections, on archaeological excavations in sites of ancestral memory, and through forensic analysis in laboratories. For the benefit of non-specialists, Dr Robson-Brown detailed the ways in which this kind of research could be used to illuminate life histories of individuals, particularly when placed in the context of humanities led interpretation.

In essence this hands on research aims to use skeletal material to document stages of life and reveals patterns of disease and trauma, which signpost events that happen to individuals in their lives. Additionally this material can address demographical questions detailing who is represented through their age, sex, and nutritional status before and at death. Dr Robson-Brown noted that the benefits of this data lie in economies of scale, where the collated evidence allows for assessment on both an individual and population level. Taking the skeletal analysis

one step further, EUROTAST researchers will also be investigating the biological characteristics of tissue taken from teeth in two ways: using protein mass spectrometry to provide more detailed insight into diet, and strontium isotope analysis to build a picture of local identities within an archaeological site to determine which communities are represented and from where they originated. Ultimately, in the context of EUROTAST themes, this research leads to a greater understanding of the overall context and quality of enslaved life, and can provide answers about African endurance and resistance to inexorable conditions.

Dr Robson-Brown emphasised the need to manage expectations about the questions that can be legitimately asked of the biological material, and to be clear about the limitations this methodology presents. However she was hopeful that this research perspective would provide unique dimensions and opportunities for the EUROTAST interdisciplinary framework.

The PhD projects encompassed by this theme, and utilising skeletal materials are:

- *ESR1: Osteoarchaeological perspectives on slave health and nutrition*  
Erna Johannesdottir, University of Bristol
- *ESR2: Molecular perspectives on slave health and disease*  
Jessica Hendy, University of York
- *ESR3: Isotopic perspectives on slave origins and forced migration*  
Judy Watson, University of Bristol
- *ESR9: Documenting the material legacy of slavery in the Dutch Antilles*  
Ryan Esperson, Leiden University & SIMARC

#### **PERSPECTIVE: Dr Jay Haviser Case Study on ‘The Zoutsteeg Three’**

*“I want you to think about these specific elements of cognition and sociocultural impact involved in the historical relationship between Africans and Europeans, and particularly to understand that this connects to the bigger picture of communicating research to populations. It’s not just cut and dry bones and samples, it’s about bringing the human into our work.”*

EUROTAST project leader and archaeologist Dr Jay Haviser from the St. Maarten Archaeological Center in the Dutch Caribbean, presented a complimentary case study on the results of a local excavation in Phillipsburg St. Maarten, conducted due to city redevelopment. The site revealed the remains of three individuals, buried

closely together, directly into shallow ground, and surrounded by 17th century artefacts. They were found in an area, which was formerly connected to Salt mines, hence the street name 'Zoutsteeg' (Salt street). Most uniquely, all three individuals exhibited examples of artificial teeth modification, with chipped and pointed incisors. Collaborative DNA analyses did not reveal familial connections between the 'Zoutseteeg Three', as was first assumed. Thus their burial clustering suggests connections based on social/cultural affiliations, or possibly the result of a shared disease exhibited by their eroded bone quality.

Highlighting the ways in which nuanced interdisciplinary thinking can be applied to archaeological finds, Dr Haviser focussed on the tooth modification as an unusual skeletal indication that nevertheless has significant cultural associations and meanings. He showed examples of this ancient practice amongst diverse communities across the African continent, that are still in practice today. Further historical examples have also been found in ancestral excavation sites around the Americas, from Campeche in Mexico to the New York African Burial Ground and Newton plantation in Barbados. Critically, however, Dr Haviser emphasised the fact that this practice did not appear to have been transferred to second and third generation African descendant communities in the Americas, making it a distinctly African cultural marker - potentially discontinued due to detribalisation and enforced submission, which disenfranchised African practices (particularly those with visual signification) in a colonial context.

To contextualise the ways in which this form of aesthetic expression impacted African representation in the popular sphere, Dr Haviser described the case of a Congolese pygmy named Ota Benga, who was permanently exhibited as a human curiosity in the Bronx Zoo for two years at the turn of the 20th century. His modified pointed incisors were a prominent physical feature he displayed, which codified stereotypes of African savagery prevalent at the time. This example poignantly highlighted the challenges of engaging in research dominated by a European cognitive framework, focussed on taxonomy and differentiation. Dr Haviser emphasised this point to EUROTAST scholars as an important influence and bias impacting their work.

To bring these ideas into further focus, Dr Haviser reflected more generally on the ways in which intercultural relationships in former European colonies were mediated by various social practices. He used the example of European children mothered by African nannies known as "YaYa's", as an intimate colonial relationship that allowed for sympathetic engagement in a way that young African children were unable to develop with European adults. Similarly he noted how such spaces of syncretism between the two cultures allowed for African cultural expressions to develop unchallenged, for example in language, diet and religious practices, where African



communities appropriated the veneration of Catholic saints for spiritual connection with their own camouflaged deities. Overall Dr Haviser emphasised that understanding the nuances of Afro-European encounters, relationships, and cognitive processes impacting engagement and representation, is critical to the development of meaningful research and subsequent outreach.

## **EUROTAST Research: Legacies and Representations of African Enslavement**

A key theme running through all of the presentations throughout the day was the need to understand and emphasise the impact and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade for African descendants in the Diaspora, and also on global cultures in Africa, Europe and the Americas, so fundamentally altered by this history. EUROTAST project leader Dr Paul Lane, from the Department of Archaeology at the University of York, gathered these ideas into focus through his discussion on the themes addressed by the 'Legacies' research package.

As a network with the potential to influence attitudes through public engagement, Dr Lane emphasised the need to look at expressions of interest towards this history in the public sphere - in museums, slavery heritage sites, TV documentaries, ancestry testing, genealogy websites - as a reminder that EUROTAST is responding to a public desire to understand identity, and further to "place the 'self' within a larger global history." These publics are wide and varied, and it was highlighted that researchers should be aware of the real life prejudices that interrogation into these histories can encounter. Similarly Dr Lane cautioned against the essentialising of African identity, as the network's research navigates both individual and collective histories often emerging in contexts where European perspectives, ideals, and notions of whiteness, are seen as normative.

Dr Lane therefore urged EUROTAST students to complicate their views on research, in order to accommodate the multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature of the network's aims to influence academic discourse and uncover new historical narratives. He noted that the presence of archaeology would help to complicate and nuance EUROTAST research methodology, since by its very nature the discipline deals with physical and material traces that are incomplete and often disconnected from their original contexts.

Exploring former museological approaches to the representation of the transatlantic slave trade, Dr Lane highlighted the ways in which narratives have been focussed on the achievements of social reformers in abolitionist campaigning, and the delineation of the trade itself by illustrating its commercial aspects, as well as its violence and inhumanity. Dr Lane noted the attempts made in the UK's 2007

commemorations of the abolition of the slave trade to redress these simplifications of the story – particularly signposting the ISM in Liverpool as an example of a museum sensitised to the need to highlight Black achievement as a focal starting point rather than end. However, Dr Lane maintained that overwhelmingly African stories are only presented in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, which codifies African identity in the public sphere with historical violence and injustice. Thus in the context of EUROTAST, he poignantly noted:

*“We can all feel proud to try to change a negative history by focussing our research on this topic, but the very act of focussing on it, puts it once again in the public domain. So there is a balance that needs to be struck here.”*

EUROTAST research on Legacies will also explore themes of invisibility and historical amnesia. This work will interrogate contemporary narratives in contested sites of memory linked to the slave trade (such as plantations), which serve as public heritage spaces but often subdue, decontextualize or sometimes completely omit direct references to their former histories. Similarly this work will explore commemorative memorials to the slave trade, as well as to figures associated both positively and negatively with this history. Dr Lane emphasised the importance of these studies to EUROTAST’s research portfolio, noting that:

*“Commemoration is always partial. Elements are selected and commemorated, and in that process of selection, a silencing takes place. And it is our challenge as researchers to explore those ‘mentions’ and ‘silences’ - in the historical texts, and in the archaeological, genetic and osteological records.”*

Finally this research will address contemporary attempts by African descendant communities, with economic means, to build a sense of identity using commercial genetic testing companies, and embarking on “roots tourism” initiatives in West Africa. Exclusive and therefore refractory in its own ways, Dr Lane noted how roots tourism in countries like Ghana are being promoted as gateways of African welcoming, by offering cultural and ritualistic experiences of return. He maintained that the promotion of renaming ceremonies and engagement with spiritual representatives such as village elders, constructs a false dichotomy between a Westernised space of hypermodernity and a timeless, historicised Africa. Ultimately these initiatives reflect a desire by African descendants in the transatlantic diaspora to establish a sense of place and belonging, and offset histories of inhumanity and injustice. It is this delicate space that EUROTAST research will need to negotiate and honour.

The PhD projects encompassed by this theme are:

- *ESR9: Documenting the material legacy of slavery in the Dutch Antilles*  
Ryan Esperson, Leiden University & SIMARC
- *ESR10: The genetic legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Europe*  
Petr Triska, University of Porto
- *ESR11: Computational reconstruction of Hans Jonatan's genome*  
Anuradha Jagadeesan, University of Reykjavik
- *ESR12: The New Genetics and the Search for African Identity*  
Sarah Abel, Le Centre International de Recherches sur les Esclavages (CIRESC), Paris
- *ESR13: Public Understandings of the Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery*  
Winston Phulgence, University of York

## IV. Keynote lecture overview

On the evening of Tuesday 12th June, Emeritus Professor James Walvin, a leading scholar on the transatlantic slave trade and former lecturer at the University of York, delivered a special public lecture to mark the beginning of the EUROTAST journey. Titled **Then and Now: Viewing the Transatlantic Slave Trade Over Forty Years**, the lecture was held in the Bowland auditorium of the Berrick Saul Building, which houses the Humanities Research Center (HRC), and was a public event advertised as part of the York Festival of Ideas. The event was chaired by Professor Helen Weinstein and welcomed by Professor Judith Buchanan, Director of the HRC, who outlined the holistic synergies between EUROTAST's interdisciplinary research inquiry and the work of the HRC as a space for the sharing of ideas and research in the academy and across unconventional knowledge transfer channels. Professor Buchanan noted that it seemed apt to initiate EUROTAST from within a vibrant research culture that will serve as a home for several of the network's fellows.

Professor Weinstein introduced Professor Walvin as an influential member of the York research community who has been a seminal figure in historical discourse on the transatlantic slave trade. He has published more than 40 books on the subject, many of which have become standard texts for students and researchers - including *The Zong: A Massacre, the Laws, and the End of Slavery* (Yale University Press, 2010); *The Trader the Owner, the Slave* (Random House, 2008); and *Black Ivory, Slavery in the British Empire* (Random House, 2001). In addition to his writing, Professor Walvin has also worked extensively in the public realm as an exhibition advisor and public communicator, lecturing extensively, and through numerous appearances on television and radio programmes.

Professor Walvin spoke to a full auditorium, including EUROTAST fellows and representatives from the local university, heritage and cultural community. In a reflective and candid talk he described his personal journey with this subject from a peripheral to essential aspect of historical discourse. In particular he highlighted the significance of the UK's commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade in British ships, in 2007, as critical moment of awareness and heightened national sensitivity to this history and its legacies. He spoke of the unprecedented institutional impetus to bring this formerly unacknowledged history to the fore, and similarly highlighted the complex ways in which slavery and the slave trade were embedded into the fabric of British politics, commerce, industry, and material culture.

To support this discussion Professor Walvin meditated on the wider place of slavery in public memory as reflected in heritage sites linked to this history around the world. He raised interesting questions about how different countries represent and

memorialise the slave trade through determined presences and silences; and revealed myths and fictions linked to the story of the trade that have nevertheless helped to encourage public interest and engagement with the history. Taking the discussion further he described the particularly difficult place of slavery in American consciousness, and explored the slow process of representing the realities of this history in physical landmarks directly connected to the trade – namely state and private plantations.

Complimenting this discussion, Professor Walvin explored the significant transformations in scholarship on this history, using his personal research journey as a critical window. He revealed how, over forty years, research interest on the transatlantic slave trade had developed from being a specialised preoccupation for a handful of scholars, to a necessary element of history teaching in universities. Signposting reasons for this shift, Professor Walvin described some of the complex changes in political and social mores instigated by the zeitgeist movements of the 1960's, which included the American civil rights movement and its political interventions into universities; the rise of African nationalism and independence; and consequently the development of localised and culturally relevant history curricula for universities in Africa and the Caribbean.

Overall, Professor Walvin placed African people historically at the critical centre of 'New World' prosperity; and further spoke to a clear expansion of consciousness in the area of social justice, which has driven movements to interrogate the origins of racism and challenge its institutional and cultural legacies.

At the end of his lecture, long time friend and former student, lawyer Ian Bloom, honoured Professor Walvin in a vote of thanks. Here he acknowledged Professor Walvin's *"life-long achievement in exploring, explaining, rescuing and restoring identities to those who were not even footnotes in the history books of the 1960's."* Ian Bloom presented Professor Walvin with a framed historical memento of an old lecture poster, advertising a series of his talks on the Black presence in British history, which further highlighted his longstanding commitment to this subject area.

Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Jane Grenville closed the proceedings by reflecting on the ways in which Professor Walvin's lecture had demonstrated critical synergies and ruptures between contemporary politics and academic research. As an archaeologist, she also noted the ways in which the EUROTAST interdisciplinary research model could offer fascinating insights in an area of contested history by allowing the disciplines to work hand in hand to reveal the true workings of the human experience.

## V. Key messages and questions

With bold ambitions, the EUROTAST network has set itself a challenging task by addressing questions in a highly contested area of history. The third day of closed sessions for PhD fellows provided the opportunity to collectively explore key themes directly impacting this work. In particular the days sessions - which were centred on the PhD process, outreach considerations and ethics – highlighted the need to establish holistic research practices at the **start** of the PhD, to ensure that best practice is meaningfully embedded.

### **Starting and finishing a PhD**

Dr Luisa Pereira, project leader from the University of Porto began the days discussions by detailing the formal requirements of EUROTAST participation and what is necessary to obtain a PhD in each fellow's respective institutions. She highlighted the need for students to become acquainted with their organisational protocols with regard to thesis guidelines and departmental reporting; and to organise themselves from the outset in order to simultaneously manage their institutional and network requirements. She further outlined the EUROTAST training and symposia schedule as discussed in the Monday business meeting, and asked students to cultivate a reporting habit that enabled them to produce feedback for the European Union. Dr Pereira further emphasised that they should speak regularly with their project supervisors for guidance on reporting and to develop their career development plans for submission to the EU.

### **Dealing with slavery research**

To compliment the outlined formal process of PhD development, Dr Temi Odumosu provided a personalised case study describing the everyday realities of PhD research, and particularly on a subject linked to the transatlantic slave trade. As an 18th century scholar she first introduced fellows to the historical attitudes and ideas about human variety and difference that racialised people of African descent in peculiar and diminutive terms. She urged fellows, particularly in the life sciences, to acquaint themselves with this history, which has provided ideological and linguistic biases still in use today.

Dr Odumosu further described her own personal experience of conducting primary research on the history and representation of the transatlantic slave trade, which she conceptualised as a process of “unsettling the dust” that sometimes prompted unexpected emotional responses that needed to be honoured and negotiated. She therefore encouraged fellows to draw strength from the network as a support system, and to find positive spaces, individuals and personal activities that help to offset some of the challenges of doctoral research.

## Representing the un-representable

Following on from the week's discussion about the narration and presentation of the transatlantic slave trade in the public sphere, Professor Helen Weinstein led an informal discussion around the International Slavery Museum "immersive film", which is currently part of a display focussed on the middle passage experience. The group first watched the 2-minute clip, which presents a combination of visceral sounds and images of Black people in the bowels of a creaking ship. The film shows people manacled, bruised, vomiting and sweating to a soundtrack of people suffering and in pain.

Professor Weinstein emphasised the challenges of watching the film out of context, in a lit environment and as a group, which is not the experience in the museum - where visitors view the film on multiple screens in a darkened and enclosed space. But she asked fellows to respond honestly about their initial feelings to the footage and to think about whether it provided a useful representation of the middle passage for non-specialist audiences. Some initial responses from fellows included:

- *"It's very emotional. It displays really intense human suffering"*
- *"It didn't promote any really concrete thoughts, it was for me more a sort of bodily reaction. The thing is the film doesn't portray any whole people it just portrays parts of bodies, and the really physical aspects, so it's really difficult to get anything from that apart from just a feeling of sickness"*
- *"I think it highlights that this area of study is one that isn't necessarily comparable to others. I mean for example with historians, only certain historians can study the holocaust because its hard not to keep objectivity in study, and I think slavery is the same."*
- *"I think you can relate more to this than an object in a museum"*
- *"As a historian I have been studying the history for almost 6 years, but looking at this I still have an emotional response. So if as a historian I can feel this way, then I think it will have a very strong impact on people who haven't even studied it."*
- *"But I think it should be highlighted that it doesn't tell the story of the middle passage, it just gives you that very difficult feeling to attain. Its designed to force people into the place of enslaved people. But it doesn't tell you any more. Its just a small snapshot."*



- *“I think it’s not quite enough, because you are not horizontal and you can’t not move, and you aren’t swimming in your own filth and the vomit of everyone else around you. You can’t quite recreate that. I think the audio was really good, but experientially I just think there is a lot of other information about the experience, which I don’t think could be conveyed in a museum.”*
- *“I think the film helps to reinforce that you cannot trivialise this part of history”*
- *“I think its important to establish whom the audience for this film is, because it creates such strong, negative emotions, and I believe this could be harmful – especially for school kids. I can imagine if I was an African school kid and I saw this at aged 5 or 7, I might feel probably strong anger that someone did this to my ancestors. But perhaps now I might feel hate towards the people who did this. I think this could be potentially dangerous.”*
- *“I think the film’s purpose is to clarify some aspects of the transatlantic slave trade. As scholars we talk a lot about this history, but most people don’t have any idea about what it was and how it happened. I don’t think the museum is trying to create rivalry between cultural groups, but simply illustrate the history.”*
- *“In a lot of ways, I think the Brookes slave ship diagram of how the bodies are placed, almost had more of an effect on me than this did. Because its clear about how human beings were packed like sardines.”*
- *“This film gives you really strong images that are very focussed on the ship, that need to complemented with other aspects of this history.”*
- *“Before I watched it, I wondered if they would include any dialogue, which I thought might trivialise the film. But at the same time without dialogue, it presents people as individuals alone, without any familial connections or attempts at resistance.”*

### **Harewood House intervention**

The discussion on representation was followed by a last-minute addition to the programme, which helped to further contextualise the day’s themes about dealing with contested pasts. A short presentation was given by Terry Suthers retired Director and CE of Harewood House Trust, the governing charity managing Harewood House. This is the Yorkshire property of the Lascelles family whose fortunes were made through interests in the slave trade in Barbados as sugar merchants, slave traders, plantation owners, customs collectors, money lenders

and suppliers to the Navy. The Harewood estate represents the direct material outcomes of profits made from slavery and the slave trade.

Mr Suthers noted how muted the discussion of the slave trade had been at the historic property, until recently, although a singular line in promotional brochures did acknowledge their West Indies connection as customs collectors. With the help of Professor James Walvin and his research team (particularly Dr Simon Smith), a more substantive narrative was developed using the estate archives that helped to put the house and its owner in greater context.

Leading up to the 2007 commemorations, the trust made a concerted effort to delineate and acknowledge their history for public engagement, through exhibitions, conferences, publications, professional training and archive sharing. Mr Suthers also highlighted that the trust has now entered into a research partnership with the University of York, University of the West Indies and the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, reified by a memorandum of understanding. In addition to making archival records available for research, the trust has been focussed on outreach with its local Afro-Caribbean community who are the largest in Yorkshire.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Suthers therefore ended by showing fellows a moving recording of a musical performance that was part Harewood's truth and reconciliation initiatives. The performance called

- To examine and analyze pre-existing biases and assumptions about Africa and African people.
- To develop strategies to see “beyond oneself and one’s self interest” in the creation of interpretations and explanations of data.
- To testify against the actions of one’s own lineage history
- To seek collaboration with and validation from the African descendent communities
- To promote community-engaged research at each level of the study.

Furthermore, Professor Jackson clearly outlined what she saw as the key EUROTAST procedural elements necessary for cultivating best practice:

- Identifying, excavating, handling, storing, measuring the skeletal material and artifacts with respect and dignity
- Respecting community norms with reference to human biological materials, including issues of ownership and inherent value
- Returning restored research materials with culturally appropriate procedures to community-designated locations.
- Reporting all research results to the descendent community as well as to the scientific/academic community for community input and interpretation.

Overall, Professor Jackson maintained that these ethical guidelenes for biological research should be funamentally rooted in holistic values centred on **care** and **justice**, with outcomes that would enable the empowerment and uplift of African descendant communities in the transatlantic Diaspora.

## VI. Training outcomes

The EUROTAST kick-off week was primarily an opportunity for the whole network to meet one another and to hear about the network's research and associated perspectives. However, the week did provide a number of additional learning opportunities for all fellows. The following list provides an overview of training outcomes resulting from the week's activities:

- **ER1 Media Training (before):** Temi Odumosu worked with Professor Helen Weinstein at IPUP in the weeks prior to the kick-off week to develop a local press strategy for EUROTAST inaugural activities. This included writing press releases for use within the University of York; preparing consent forms to be used for interviewing; and appearing with Professor Weinstein in an interview on BBC Radio York to promote the network, the York archaeological research projects, and Professor Jim Walvin's public lecture.
- **ER1 Media Training (during):** Temi Odumosu received substantive hands on media training over the course of the kick-off week, primarily in interviewing and its associated audio and visual technologies. Jon Calver and Ross Casswell from **Historyworks**, provided this training.
- **ESR Publication development:** Creating a monograph outlining the network's research is a potential outreach product for network fellows. To support this idea fellows were given an introduction to the monograph publication process and utilised the opportunity to collectively reflect on the themes that had been discussed during the week. Taking things further they independently spent further time to explore the possibilities for creating a monograph with applied educational, and other multimedia, outcomes.
- **ESR Introductory Media Training:** PhD fellows were given introductory media training by **Screenhouse media**, who specialise in supporting academics (particularly in the sciences) to develop their engagement with the media. Fellows spent an entire day working with Patrick Titley and Paul Bader to explore the multiple ways of describing their research to non-specialists by finding their unique story. They learned how to write press releases to encourage media interest, and complementarily to negotiate the common pitfalls and challenges of working with media. As part of the day fellows were also given unique access to a state of the art, professional TV studio set up at the University of York's Department for Theatre, Film and Television (TFTV). Here they practiced TV interviewing, and hands on camerwork and production skills.

## VII. Fellows reflections

The following personal responses to the Kick-Off week are provided by the PhD and Postdoc fellows currently employed by the EUROTAST network.

**Temí Odumosu**

**ER1, University of Copenhagen**

*“This was a really important week for me as the postdoc for this network. The presentations on our research and perspectives were excellent in giving me a much fuller sense of the journey we are about to begin. It was also really heartening to meet all the other fellows and project leaders, and to see such dynamic interaction between everybody. This week was also a training opportunity for me as I was able to interview PI’s, invited guests and fellows. So I feel like I got a special insight into the ways passion, commitment and determination yields such fruitful outcomes. I was also surprised at how quickly my awareness about sound levels and light sources developed, as a direct result of training from my fantastic coaches Jon Calver and Ross Casswell from Historyworks.*

*Over the course of the week it dawned on me just how much responsibility I (and the network) have, to ensure that we honour the histories of African descendants around the world – and the histories of my own ancestors also. Thinking about genetics in particular made me pause and reflect about the differences between cultural and biological identity, which do not necessarily coexist, and I asked myself: “In the end, which is it to be?”*

*This is a really sensitive area of research and one that I hope I can support the PhD fellows with, just by being there as a support and as someone who has already taken this kind of academic journey. Certainly I’m looking forward to seeing the network develop and flourish, and to witnessing the impact our stories will have in public engagement work. I’m also really excited about developing my cultural outlook through my experiences in Copenhagen and travels around all the network locations. But most of all, I look forward to those unexpected, magical and transformative conversations (particularly with my colleagues), which so often happen over tea or whilst waiting for your next train!”*

**Erna Johannesdottir**

**ESR1, University of Bristol**

*“I felt both very good about the week in York and also a little bit confused. It was great to meet all the other PhD students and their supervisors and to see how enthusiastic they were about the subject and the interdisciplinary approach of the*

*project. It was also very interesting to listen to the presentations. They did not necessarily give me a new perspective on the Atlantic slave trade but they put things in context for me and I learnt a lot from them. I got a little confused though after some of the presentations as I felt that archaeology was described quite differently than how I have experienced it in the field. I felt as an osteologist that somehow it was presumed that as a researcher I might be quite disrespectful when handling human bones, which isn't the case, and I felt myself wanting to correct that perspective with the other PhD students afterwards.*

*I am really looking forward to studying more about this event in our history and to see what information the people in the network and other people can provide. I feel grateful to be part of an interdisciplinary network, which deals with a subject that is important to me and so many other people.”*

**Jessica Hendy**

**ESR2, University of York**

*“I was really looking forward to the kick-off meeting, not least because it was the first time I would meet my supervisor, see the University where I will be working and learn more about my PhD topic. For me, because I have a background in both anthropology and chemistry, I liked hearing scientists, historians and anthropologists with different perspectives and backgrounds having a common agenda. What I really like about the project is the range of approaches that are being used to study the transatlantic slave trade. In particular during the week, I learnt a lot about ancestry testing and how genetic information is used in connection with identity, which is something that I had not really come across before. What I also took away is how important it is to treat this topic sensitively and respectfully. For example, how Professor Fatimah Jackson explained the difference in using the terms 'enslaved Africans' versus 'slaves'. I am looking forward to exploring our book ideas and putting those into action as well as getting started on my own project.”*

**Judy Watson**

**ESR3, University of Bristol**

*“The week was intense and exhausting and good. I felt grateful for Temi and Hannes. I was surprised and delighted that such a disparate group gelled so well, communicated effectively, and seemed to be able to agree on issues, broadly speaking. During the experience I learned that traditional media is a dinosaur with nifty toys, and that anti-science/technology feeling is stronger than I anticipated. On the flip side of this I also learned that people feel alienated, disempowered, and betrayed by science, which I feel strongly motivated to address/redress. I'm looking forward to collaborating with this group to achieve something meaningful in both research and outreach/dissemination.”*

**Carlos da Silva Junior**

**ESR4, WISE, University of Hull**

*“The Kick-off meeting was important in different ways. Firstly because I had the opportunity to meet my supervisor, Prof. David Richardson and, secondly, I met other colleagues who are interested in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As a historian, this kind of network with people from other backgrounds (Anthropology, Media, Genetics, Archaeology) will play a critical role in my own research.*

*The most relevant things I learned over the course of the week, was how to prepare myself for the three-years PhD. I also learned more about the other academic fields engaged in this research. All the lectures, but particularly those of David Richardson and Fatimah Jackson, helped me to understand better the different perspectives on the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I’m looking forward to the next meeting and hope we have more time then to discuss our individual topics.”*

**Tanja Heinz**

**ESR5, University of Santiago**

*“I think the kick-off meeting was a great opportunity to get to know the network and all the people who are involved and I’m looking forward to the other meetings which will be held in future.*

*The topic “Transatlantic Slave Trade” is new for me as I am used to working on genetically related topics. During the meeting I got a first impression about what has been done before on this topic in different disciplines. I became aware of ideas like those presented by Professor Fatimah Jackson about the ancient migration out of Africa, thus making us all African. But besides genetics, some interesting thoughts/questions were mentioned, like those questions about identity for which I haven’t found a good answer so far and which cannot be explained just by genetics.*

*I’m looking forward to exchanging experiences, thoughts and ideas within the network on the transatlantic slave trade. As we are from such different disciplines I think this could be a very inspiring environment for each fellow to develop oneself in research on this topic.”*

**Cesar Fortes Lima**

**ESR6, AMIS, University Paul Sabatier**

*“The initial York meeting was an amazing start for the EUROTAST network, indeed I am really impressed by the high academic level of seminars, workshops and lectures, particularly with multi-disciplinary thinking around the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As a molecular anthropologist, I found it especially interesting listening to the model of Ethnogenetic Layering proposed by Professor Fatimah Jackson. I think this project will make important contributions in different anthropological subfields.”*



**Marcela Sandoval Velasco**

**ESR7, University of Copenhagen**

*"I found the meeting extremely interesting and enjoyable. It was great to get to know all the people that are going to be involved in this major task, and to share our own ideas, visions and opinions about our projects.*

*The meeting was really useful in several ways. Hearing about the work of experienced scholars, from very different fields, trying to understand and complete the history of the transatlantic slave trade, gave me a better idea of the variety of research on this subject - what is already known and the questions yet to be answered. Personally, it allowed me to reflect on the important issues and themes that will surround my own project and that I must consider when developing my research.*

*The meeting experience helped to emphasize the importance of thinking and considering the task of making the research matter at the community level. It made me reflect about the scope of the network and how the study of the transatlantic slave trade goes far beyond particular and independent projects, as it is something globally relevant. I really liked that the ethical, cultural, and political issues around this topic were exposed during the meeting. I think it gave a whole different meaning and relevance to the aims of this project.*

*The fact that we are dealing with population origins and identity concerns in a historical context of great susceptibility, requires that we consider all the geographic, ethnic, genetic, cultural, lingual, and historic information that we can, in order to try to clarify implications and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade.*

*Overall I think the meeting confirmed that the EUROTAST project is going to be CHALLENGING, in all aspects. But as Professor Fatimah Jackson said: "How else do we evolve as people without challenges?". It is really exciting to feel the hints of what is coming. Hopefully at the end, by joining all of our efforts, we reach all of our aims."*

**Hákon Jónsson**

**ESR8, University of Copenhagen**

*"The kickoff meeting was a fruitful learning experience that allowed me to have a better understanding of this dreadful part of human history. I would have wanted to see more introduction on the sciences that will be used in the project but I am probably biased because of my scientific background. The main thing I took from this meeting was the glimpse into the mindset of the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade, and the fact that identity in a global context is a complex*

*issue. After the York meeting I am excited about the next events, especially the field school in archaeology.”*

**Ryan Esperson**

**ESR9, Leiden University & SIMARC**

*“I felt that the kick off week, overall, was well planned and organized. The lectures covered a range of topics pertinent to each ESR, yet carried different opinions on certain matters, which spurred internal debates to develop your own epistemology concerning the study of the transatlantic slave trade. They also touched on material that I am not well versed with, such as the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches of DNA analysis. It was also interesting, through conversations with other fellows, to discern the different boundaries of "Africanness" among people of African descent that exist between the Caribbean, the U.S.A., and countries in Western Africa such as Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Ghana. With regards to the network as a whole, I see the foundations of a network that will persist beyond the EUROTAST project, with the potential to exemplify the importance of interdisciplinary research towards the study of the past. Following the completion of EUROTAST, I look forward to collaborating with the fellows on edited volumes on issues concerning the transatlantic slave trade and other relevant topics.”*

**Petr Triska**

**ESR 10, University of Porto**

*“The meeting was very nicely organized. I appreciate all the talks and activities that were arranged. In particular, I liked that we had an opportunity to hang out with other fellows and supervisors, so we knew each other personally soon after the meeting started. I consider this very important. I like the people in the project and I think we've become good company, and I am looking forward to meeting them again.*

*Most of the talks were interesting. Speakers had good presentations that caught my attention instantly. However, the time schedule was quite tight and the number of talks was high, so I had a problem following some of the talks, especially in afternoon.*

*What I really look forward is the opportunity to exchange scientific expertise by visiting other fellows, and learning about their fields to broaden my horizons. I am also excited about the publication and I am happy that other fellows seem to be motivated as well.*

*Last but not least, I would like to mention, that I appreciate the comfortable hotel and good food the network arranged for us.”*

**Anuradha Jagadeesan**

**ESR11, University of Reykjavik**

*"I was inspired by the talks given during the kick-off week. Their commitment, their quest to find answers about our past was admirable, but the most important thing that struck me was that they were also compelled to act towards the path of moral obligation. I especially liked the sessions by Professor Fatimah Jackson and Dr. Odumosu. I felt like I had a support group, the entire EUROTAST team, where I could share my problems and ask for advice.*

*The key thing I learnt was that good research bears its fruit, only when it has been communicated to the right people. Our research areas deal with enslaved African people and their descendants, we owe our answers and results foremost to them. It is important to educate everyone, present the results in a manner, which does not offend anyone. It is vital that we learn from the mistakes of the past rather than to repeat the same mistakes.*

*I look forward to more learning and sharing experiences with all the ESR fellows, PIs and researchers involved with EUROTAST."*

**Sarah Abel**

**ESR12, CIRESC Paris**

*"The kick-off week exceeded all expectations and was a fantastic start to what looks like a really exciting, interdisciplinary project. On a fundamental level, it helped me understand how the projects fit together, and to appreciate how we will all be able to benefit each other by sharing the findings of our individual research. The presentations also provided a good introduction to the scientific methods involved in genetic mapping and tracing ancestral lineages, while the talks from representatives of the heritage sector helped demonstrate the relevance of these techniques to the wider public. I am looking forward to keeping in touch with the fellows and supervisors in the network to see how our research develops over the next three years, and to pooling our knowledge as we work on our book."*

**Winston Phulgence**

**ESR13, University of York**

*"I thought the kick-off week was very insightful and it definitely made all of the researchers think about their individual research and the whole project as an inquiry into the human past, rather than just a laboratory project. As a group, we are now a lot more sensitive to the possible implications of the research to be carried out. I am looking forward to seeing how the cutting edge research that is part of this project will impact on the historical narrative of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Because of the nature of the project it has the potential to challenge much of what has been accepted as a given in this area of research."*

*“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”*

► Dr. Maya Angelou