
”The Bloodless Conquest of a Continent”: Notes on the Use of Images in the Narration of La Croisière Noire

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Résumé

This presentation draws on my research into La Croisière Noire, the 30,000 km overland journey across the African continent from Algeria to Madagascar, organized by Citroën and the French military, and sponsored by Louis Vuitton, that took place in the years 1924-5. The visual documentation of La Croisière Noire was unusually extensive. The team of participants included an artist, a photographer and an entire film crew, who took with them one of the world’s first slow-motion cameras, specially ordered from Hollywood. The tens of thousands of images they brought back in turn were reproduced and replicated in books, films, exhibitions, toys, games, merchandise and souvenirs that were disseminated widely across the western world.

Treating La Croisière Noire as a case study for the representation of the colonial project in western popular culture, this presentation traces the routes that some of the most iconic images in this archive have taken over the past 90 years, and reflects upon the methods and functions of their instrumentalisation. The ways that these images have been manipulated, decontextualised, recontextualised, appropriated and reappropriated can potentially us a lot about the idea of Africa that the French elite sought to construct and cement in the minds of the general population.

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