

Abstract

The mechanics of how we come to know the past are flawed; the problem lies within the ways through which the narratives of history are consumed by intellectual society. In order to challenge our seemingly inert reliance on authority of primary evidence and archival protocols in the subaltern world, this research aims to unpack the values of social repositories in history through an analysis of the history of gong fu in Madagascar. To this end the research question is thus: *How does the ambiguous history of gong fu in Madagascar contribute to the value of social repositories in subaltern history?*

By making use of ‘subaltern’ as a guiding frame, this research looks toward social repositories of history through field work that involved multiple trips to Madagascar. These trips focused on tracing paths of informants, visits to sites of folk lore, interviewing informants, analysing oral history and creative production. In an attempt to recover the ‘fragment’ (stories, biographies, knowledge) the research is extended into creative work that takes into account comics and films that exist in relation to the subject. Digital arts is then deployed as an alternative language to the scribe-based ways of telling history; a mode of production, imagination and archival documentation in the form of an online repository that includes sonic art, animated images and textual explications.

It is through exploring power within the production of history that this research manages to locate alternative narratives and social repositories. In linking with the misrepresentation of black subjectivity and individual knowledge cultures propagated within universalist understandings of history that largely feed western paradigms, alternative narratives of the martial art gong fu arise and are put forward as symptomatic of larger local knowledges of Madagascar that could not easily fit into national archives or state-craft narratives.

This research finds that an understanding of social repositories in relation to social history enriches the intellectual understandings of subaltern history. It is therefore recommended that further research be done that informs the identification of social repositories within subaltern history, to both enrich the general history of the subaltern world as well as possibly develop alternative languages to the hegemony of scribe-based history telling that explores ways to re-present these narratives.