

CARP Catch-Up: Mirroring Africa, Within And Beyond by Phoebe Ruguru

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Our speaker, Phoebe Ruguru

On Wednesday 26th October, CARP hosted its first ‘Share My Passion’ talk of this academic year. Phoebe Ruguru, a SOAS student of International Relations and Anthropology, was born in Kenya. She shared her passion for representing the great continent of Africa in its true light. It was very insightful.

MC for the night, Yu-jin Mingala, CARP UK’s Graphics designer, kicked off the evening with a quiz that ranged from Africa’s population, to how much of the Earth’s landmass Africa covers. Yu-jin introduced us to Swahili greetings and delicious Kenyan

cuisine; the pleasure of trying homemade Mandazi. Mandazi, is a Kenyan fried bread.



MC, Yujin, explaining Mandazi to audience

Everyone was attentive as we welcomed Phoebe to share her passion. Phoebe’s started with an interactive quiz. The questions challenged the audience, to think about what we know about Africa’s geography. It led into the main theme for Phoebe’s talk. She spoke predominantly about the history and language of the African continent.

Phoebe posed the question: “How do we know Africa without knowing its history? How can we understand Africa when most of what we learn about Africa, is not written by Africans themselves?” Phoebe reminisced about her arrival in England, the perception in England, was quite different from her own experience and

knowledge of the Africa she knew and grew up in.



Phoebe talking to listeners during discussion

Through Phoebe, we were able to begin to get a feeling of the connections between African history and its languages. We were able to grasp that there is a great amount to learn and that language is a real barrier. Even those who explored and analysed Africa could not capture the true cultures and the real richness of ancestral histories (beyond slavery), which were so often told and handed down by countless generations and grandparents. Phoebe presented that she has had to question who she is as an African. She quoted from Winston Churchill. Churchill stated, “History is written by victors.” In International Relations, power is a reoccurring topic. She explained that a lot of Europe’s history discusses war, and the victories of war – a lot of

that history is written by Europeans. There are victors, so there must be losers. Does that mean that Africans are losers, because not much is written on this topic?

As I listened to Phoebe, I realised that as a person of African heritage, there is a lot that I really don’t know about my own country and its languages. Perhaps most people of African Heritage born outside of Africa, may feel the same.

Phoebe summarised by saying “Knowledge isn’t absolute! I am only one person. I don’t represent the entire continent, but when we hear anything about Africa (or any other country), we have to be critical.” We should know, who wrote that information, and we should try to know what their beliefs are! I understand that Phoebe believes in the importance of getting in touch with the source.