Blackness, transnational

Herausgegeben von
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Vrääth Öhner: Colonialism from the Left Bank's point of view.
Négritude, national culture and humanistic vision in *Statues Also Die*
by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker, pp. 119–130

Les Statues meurent aussi (*Statues Also Die*), a short documentary film by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker realised between 1950 and 1953, is – apart from the films by Jean Rouch – the only example of modern French cinema in the fifties which deals with the problem of French colonialism. More precisely: with the destruction of African art and culture as a result of French colonialism. *Statues Also Die* never received much attention, neither by the time of release nor afterwards: prohibited on the basis of »anti-colonial tendencies« after the first public screening at the Cannes Film Festival in 1953, the documentary hit the screens only in 1968 – at a time, when it seemed already outdated in form and content. Given that *Statues Also Die* is a contemporary of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as well as of the debate about Négritude carried on by the writers and intellectuals of the Left Bank, this short documentary film is up for re-evaluation: especially so, if one considers the unique position the film takes on the coincidence of decolonisation and class conflict which dominated the anti-colonial discourse of the left at that time.

Michelle Ann Stephens

Modernity's Shadow:
The Black Transnation in Historical Perspective

Though we often think of globalization and black transnationalism as recent and contemporary phenomenon, it would be more truthful to say in a Platonian fashion that we are simply now remembering something we already knew. In the Americas, throughout the twentieth century and extending back into the nineteenth, black identities have had to find alternative frameworks than the nation for constructing peoplehood. From the outset, the nation-state in all of its early iterations was never conceived of as an institution for blacks and colonials. Rather, blackness has to some degree shadowed the nation form globally, revealing the very limits of the national imaginary.[1]

In *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914 to 1962*, I use the writings of three figures, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay and C.L.R. James, to describe black transnationalism as a cultural and intellectual movement that first emerged from the political events that ushered in the twentieth century – World War I and the Russian Revolution.[2] In these early years of the twentieth century black New World intellectuals followed closely the debates between Woodrow Wilson and Lenin concerning nationalism and internationalism. As black colonial subjects without easily identifiable national homelands, men such as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, C.L.R. James and other black intellectuals like them, turned to imagining a de-territorialized black state – a »Negro Federation« as they termed it – as the alternative to either the idea of an African national homeland or even the independent West Indian states that would later become the political goal of decolonization. Rather, in the 1930s the focus was more on black transnational institutions and forms that could guide and shape a political and cultural identity for the diasporic community.

Beginning in 1916, both the modern »New Negro« and the »New World Negro« (terms used to describe African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans respectively) found themselves oddly situated within the prevailing debate over a colonized

people's right to self-determination. Cyril Briggs, a black Communist leader of the revolutionary organization the *African Blood Brotherhood*, was the first black New World figure to propose a specific kind of political government for the modern black subject, a racial federation that could operate transnationally outside of the bounds of the Western nation-state. Simultaneously, Briggs's contemporary Marcus Garvey held up as an alternative model the representation of a diasporic black political community through a world-wide Black Empire, similar to that of the Western imperial powers. Key African American intellectuals also contributed to these discussions throughout the century. In W.E.B. Du Bois's early *Pan-African Conventions*, Paul Robeson's sense of the radical politics of international travel and performance, and Richard Wright's interest in Pan-Asian and Pan-African movements of the 1950s, such as *Bandung* and *Black Power* on the continent, we see a symbolic geopolitics of the black transnational similar in orientation to that conceived of by their Caribbean contemporaries, Garvey, McKay and James.

The symbolic language used by these figures to mobilize the global imaginations of black subjects across the diaspora, included certain tropes such as the image of a »Negro ship of state,« a metaphor for the mobile and displaced populations of the Black Atlantic. Garvey made this metaphor literal by starting his own line of black-owned steamships, the *Black Star Line*, that transported his message of freedom through empire across the black and white worlds. In novels such as *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo: The Story Without a Plot*, the writer Claude McKay identified fugitive colonies of blacks living in Harlem and in Marseilles after World War I and cast them fictionally as communities of anti-nationalist drifters.[3] In C.L.R. James's writings mid-century, his vision of West Indian federation re-imagined the shape and borders of black political space. Recovering the Greek city-states as an alternative model to the nation James used the geography of the Caribbean archipelago, a landform he saw as the territorial epitome of the free movement of people and ideas across national borders, as the basis for a new vision of the democratic yet mobile black state.

The idea of a black transnation emerges in those moments when black struggle is represented along an internationalist rather than nationalist axis. The black transnation also emerges in the context of increasing efforts on the part of black subjects to define themselves in political languages and frameworks that were originally conceived to exclude them. At the very beginnings of the twentieth century, African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, brought together his own American and European experiences (Du Bois spent some of his university years in Germany) to delineate a global color line, stating: »With nearly every great European empire today walks its dark colonial shadow [...], [one] might indeed read the riddle of Europe by making its present plight a matter of colonial shadows.«[4] This observation still merits exploration, that the study of the black transnation, coloniality, and race

is simultaneously a study of the nation, modernity, and whiteness. The belief in a black transnation grows out of Du Bois's colonial world of shadows that, first stretching alongside modernity in New World forms of coloniality and slavery, continued to shroud European and American calls for self-determination during World War I with the colonial realities of the peoples of Africa and the West Indies. These worlds of color then became the shadow threatening the capitalist First World during the post-World War II era, the threat of the Third World »color curtain« described at the *Bandung* conference of the 1950s as a new third estate.[5]

The framework of diaspora has offered a way of recovering and charting the black transnation as a historical formation, one that travels along the maritime pathways of the transatlantic slave trade, paralleling the development of nation forms while somehow always exceeding their definitional capabilities. Some have argued that black transnational epistemologies also reveal a different conception of modern revolutionary struggle, one based not in nationalist or internationalist class ideologies, but rather, emerging organically across the Atlantic and across the contintents, out of the anti-slavery and anti-racist radicalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Europe and the Americas.[6] In this scenario the Haitian revolution serves as an important test case for theorizing anew modern revolutionary ideologies as represented by the French and American revolutions. To the degree that Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian liberator, had a vision that included the emancipation of slaves throughout the New World and in Africa, his idea of the Haitian republic could be seen as the first attempt to imagine a black transnation with both territorial boundaries and a global, outernational reach.

Beyond these tropes of movement and the language of geography and politics, however, what interests me most about black transnationalism is its discursive and philosophical understanding of the impact of race on modern subject formation in both the New and Old worlds. Over time, black transnationalism has become more than simply the movement beyond or against notions of nationality. Rather, black transnational consciousnesses are now being recognized as embodying multiple forms of identity that exist within and alongside the national, a legion of ethnic, gendered, raced, classed, religious, et. al. commitments that shape the identity choices of modern human subjects at given historical moments. Most recently, black transnational interventions have been imagining much more complex forms of human subjectivity, where nationality rests along intersecting axes that include other modes of being and becoming.[7]

Current studies of black transnationalism and the idea of a black transnation also contain internal debates, a central one being whether new approaches to black Atlantic and transatlantic consciousnesses should be emphasizing blackness as a space where a multitude of racial identities come together, or whether contempo-

rary modes of blackness represent the reverse – the presence of centrifugal forces that differentiate and pull apart the various kinds of communities that could congregate under the sign of blackness – Afro-German, African, African American, Black British, Caribbean, Francophone, Latin American, the black Dutch and black Pacific Islanders, just to name a few. Is global blackness itself a site of intraracial and multiethnic difference, or is it a sign for the sameness of racially based cultural similarities and political solidarities?

A common understanding of contemporary blackness as a global sign is that its meanings are determined by the hegemony of African American cultural forms. But this observation alone is not sufficient: the question should be, how are other forms of blackness in competition with or insubordinate to these forms, and how are those differences related to larger geopolitical formations of power? Another question would be, how do different racial narratives develop simultaneously and in relationship to each other – for example the dialogue between Afro-German feminists and black Caribbean American feminist Audre Lorde – within the context of that black American hegemony, both enabled by it and by countering it? A third set of questions would ask, what does black globality tell us about the other racial formations it is in dialogue with, such as whiteness and alternative constructions of races and peoples ›of color‹? If within the study of blackness we hope to interrogate and ultimately dispense with the hierarchies that have organized our prior constructions of race and the self, then we need to learn how to study blackness globally and transnationally without over-privileging it – how to understand blackness itself as a site that has to be constantly subordinated to the other sites of identity and political formation with which it is in dialogue and interaction.

Notes

1 For historical discussions of the nation and nationalism's evolving forms, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, London (Rev. ed.) 1991; Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, London 1991.

2 Michelle Stephens, Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914 to 1962, Durham/North Carolina 2005.

3 See Claude McKay, Home to Harlem, Boston 1987; ibid., Banjo: A Story without a Plot, New York 1929.

4 W. E. B. Du Bois, The Negro Mind Reaches Out, in: Alain Locke, ed., The New Negro, New York 1992, 385–414, here 386.

5 See Richard Wright, The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference, Jackson 1994.

6 See Sibylle Fischer, Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, Durham/North Carolina 2004.

7 See for example the work of Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter, as introduced by scholars and students in Anthony Bogues, ed., After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter, Kingston/ Jamaica 2006.

Michelle M. Wright

Postwar Blackness and the World of Europe

This is an exciting time in African Diaspora studies, as scholarship increases in breadth and depth to engage more extensively – or for the first time – with a dazzling array of black communities, histories, cultures, politics, literatures both within and without the continent of Africa. This is also a challenging time, as a broader array of scholars and scholarly approaches necessarily encounter fundamental differences with one another. The heated exchanges that have occurred at recent conferences on the African Diaspora, African American studies and Black European studies point to the arrival of ›new‹ epistemologies of black subjectivities and collectivities that challenge many of the accepted truths of established epistemologies.

Both African American and Africana studies in North America anchor many of their understandings and definitions of ›blackness‹ in what could best be called the *Middle Passage epistemology*. Briefly put, this epistemology (which of course has several variations depending on the context in which it is framed) points to the Atlantic slave trade as the crucial moment that separated blacks in the West from their ancestral origins, and then locates all preceding and subsequent events, from the classical world to the modern day, in relation to the Middle Passage. In these disciplines, it is not the Enlightenment, but the Middle Passage that ushers in the modern age – an age rife with paradoxes that Middle Passage epistemologies expertly lay bare. These epistemologies emphasize the localized triumphs of blacks over slavery and discrimination, but there is a catch. These epistemologies are always already cast against a backdrop of a postlapsarian existence (with Africa, of course, as the Eden).

As a trope, the Middle Passage announces the long and ugly role the West European nations played in the brutal transportation of human beings from the west coast of Africa to European port cities, the Caribbean and North American shores – in that order. It emphasizes the false promise of the Enlightenment because the rise of parliamentary democracies in Europe was accompanied by a singularly brutal disregard for peoples now considered biologically inferior. Understanding itself as the most important civilization in the history of the world, white Europeans and Americans are eager to signal events such as the Enlightenment, the American

Revolution and the French Revolution as earth-shattering ones that became beacons of democracy for the rest of the world. With the trope of the Middle Passage, those beacons become darkened or at least not so bright for all the millions of black bodies passing in front of them on their way to a short life of crushing labor their white owners were loath to undertake.

Yet the Middle Passage begins to lose significance when looking at Black Europe, as the vast majority of Africans and peoples of African descent in Europe did not arrive through the Middle Passage. Their origins and histories, in fact, are exceptionally varied but, I would argue, can best be understood as the result of colonialism and, even more significantly, World War II.

World War II has always been a popular trope for right and left-wing politicians in the United States, has now seen its invocation increase exponentially in not only Bush administration justifications for various crimes against humanity, but also in European discourses seeking to justify racist acts of violence and enactments of laws aimed at ejecting their non-white compatriots from the same legal, social and political protections mainly enjoyed by wealthy whites, but also a majority of Europeans.

In both European and American mass media documentaries geared towards mainstream audiences, leftist and rightist political speeches and school board approved junior high and high school textbooks, World War II is shaped and deployed in three central ways: 1) although a ›world war‹, the frame is largely if not entirely local, focusing on white European populations and militaries; 2) although Japanese imperialism, Hitler's National Socialism and Mussolini's fascism retain key differences from one another, they are boiled down to ›fascism‹ and left vaguely defined as totalitarianism plus death camps; 3) the Allied Powers are conversely produced as anti-fascist, and therefore anti-racist, and therefore their victory is both moral and total. I want to argue that these particular manipulations of the war are not the harmless effects of nostalgia and innocent chauvinism but, when circulated unchallenged, enable a revisionist history of Europe and western civilization that returns us to the same type of racist beliefs and theories supposedly destroyed by 1945 – and, in its effects, is not so terribly different from the hate speech we supposedly deplore when it comes out of the mouth of a Le Pen, Fortuyn, a Bush (take your pick), or a Haider. This discourse is not unknown in academic circles: some of the more educated academics who analyze and critique discourses of war embrace parts of or all of this mythology. World War II becomes a trope in which its origin is World War I and Europe's use of its colonized troops to fight battles both within and without the European theatre becomes erased – after all, who wants to imagine the Allies as brutal oppressors in their own right? In *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* George L. Mosse, after exposing many myths of war and

wartime in Europe, does some memory reshaping himself in a chapter entitled »The Brutalization of German Politics«:

> In the aftermath of the First World War, the Myth of the War Experience had given the conflict a new dimension as a means of national and personal regeneration. The continuation of wartime attitudes into peace furthered a certain brutalization of politics, a heightened indifference to human life. It was not only the continued visibility and high status of the military in nations like Germany which encouraged a certain ruthlessness but, above all, an attitude of mind derived from the war and the acceptance of war itself. [...] England and France, the victorious nations, where the transition from war to peace had been relatively smooth, were able to keep the process of brutalization largely, if not entirely, under control. Those nations like Germany which were not so fortunate saw a new ruthlessness invade their politics.[1]

For Mosse, the World Wars are limited to Europe, for at no point in his book does Mosse ever mention battles outside the European theatre (or explain why he limits his arena of research to Europe). The brutalization of politics and indifference to human life is ›new‹ for Europeans, and indeed, Mosse produces an image of prewar Europe that is blissfully pastoral, interrupted only by ›safe wars‹ that never harmed civilian populations. It is simply stunning (and a little bit scary) that a scholar as educated and celebrated as Mosse would, in a book published in 1990, blithely erase the brutality practiced by Europeans in their colonies, on their local black populations, and in their use of their colonial troops as cannon fodder in all three theatres of war (Atlantic, Pacific and Mediterranean).

Mosse also indulges another crucial fantasy about World War II and Europe when he argues that the end of war signaled a gentle transition into peacetime when, in the ensuing decades, the Allies were forced to deal with their crumbling power in the colonies, their empires collapsing and their colonial soldiers and other refugees from their brutal regimes now seeking to enjoy some of the wealth and freedom their exploitation had afforded Europe despite the destruction of war. Tony Judt's recent 800-page tome, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* offers a welcome corrective, noting some of the ways that the loss of colonies radically shifted postwar powers and politics and that:

> At the close of the Second World War, the peoples of Western Europe – who were hard put to govern or feed themselves – continued to rule much of the non-European world. This unseemly paradox, whose implications were not lost on indigenous elites in the European colonies, had perverse con-

sequences. To many in Britain, France or the Netherlands, their countries' colonies and imperial holdings in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas were balm for the suffering and humiliations of the war in Europe; they had demonstrated their material value in that war as vital national resources. Without access to the far-flung territory, supplies and men that come with colonies, the British and French especially would have been at an even greater disadvantage in their struggle with Germany and Japan than they already were.[2]

Far earlier than Judt, Black European discourses have long understood the importance of World War II to their own epistemologies, framing the war not unlike the way African Americans have framed the Middle Passage: to explain their presence in the West, their ›right‹ to be there, and to argue that the racist European beliefs and practices that ultimately caused their arrival is alive and well, still seeking to both exploit and deny their presence. Since the publication of *Farbe bekennen*, Afro-German literary and non-fiction discourses have framed their contemporary presence through World War I and World War II.[3] Black British literary and non-fiction discourses are most often framed in line with or in contradistinction to the »Windrush narrative«, which argues that contemporary Black British identities are formed by the arrival of the ›first‹ black Caribbean immigrants after World War II – significantly pointing to the fact that many of these men had fought for the Allies and have thus won the right to claim the privileges supposedly enjoyed by all white Britons.[4]

Here I must note that the same does not hold true for France, where differences between different types of black immigrants – whether they are *DOM-TOM* (*départements d'outre-mer- territoires d'outre-mer*) or from former African colonies or born and raised in Europe – arise quite frequently on issues of race, racism and belonging not to mention religion, colonial histories, etc. Nor does it hold true for the United States, where World War II plays an exceptionally central role in America's self-imagining as the self-abnegating savior of Western civilization. Dubbed the »greatest generation« by a popular white American news anchor, those who served the war machine in some capacity are automatically accorded heroic status and racially white washed: as Clarence Lusane notes in *Hitler's Black Victims*, a documentary celebrating African American veterans from the war was so intensely vilified by former white American vets that the station refused to show the piece ever again.

In their forthcoming books *Sable Hands and National Arms: Toward a Theory of the African American Literature of War* and *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women's Activism From World War I to the New Deal* Jennifer James and Nikki Brown respectively direct us towards new and productive ways of engaging with the African Diaspora via African American studies.[5] James challenges us to ask why World War II receives so little attention in African American studies and epistemologies given its profound effect on our postwar lives. Her answer (which I will not reveal – buy the book!), forces us to consider the problematic aspects of using war as a central trope in a black epistemology.

Whether acknowledged or not, ideologies of gender and sexuality also shape and manipulate Black Studies epistemologies. As Natasha Tinsley's keynote address at Northwestern University in 2006 noted, when these ideologies are ignored, the trope of the Middle Passage becomes a metaphor for the emasculation of the black heterosexual male, a ›lost‹ heteropatriarchal African utopia to which all peoples of African descent must return – at least ideologically – to avoid »race suicide«.[6] It is not coincidental that the icons of black strength and pride are almost always male and straight (W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Léopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah) whereas the women are often praised for their passivity – we praise Rosa Parks for sitting down, Harriet Jacobs for hiding in an attic. Angela Davis and Winnie Mandela, once celebrated as faithful Penelopes, have since dropped out of mainstream favor.

When war becomes a trope for black epistemologies, it is inevitable that the exceptionally heterosexist nationalistic rhetoric in which it is commonly narrated – male agents fighting for control over passive feminine bodies – will also shape that epistemology if left uninterrogated. Indeed, what makes the forthcoming publication of Nikki Brown's book so exceptional and welcome is that it is one of the few devoted to the experiences of black women during wartime – and I say one of the few because even though I have been unable to find any other such volume, one can never say for sure whether one is the ›first‹.

I would argue that this is because the issue of agency is also paramount in a wartime trope – although I would argue that the effects are ambivalent. In contrast to the Middle Passage, which tends to cast blacks as abject victims of an omniscient, omnipotent white agency (the fact that the slave catchers and traders on the African coast were largely black, not white, is often elided in black and white Western epistemologies), the trope of World War II allows blacks – at least black men – to produce themselves within a masculine cast as fighters for freedom. In other words, in bringing in this discourse, there is little to stop a simple ›blackening‹ of the current heteropatriarchal discourse on World War II (and the few books chronicling black fighters in the war tend to produce exactly this frame). On a more metaphorical level, the use of World War II in Black British and Afro-German discourses can fall into a very heteropatriarchal structure. Andrea Levy's latest novel *Small Island* uses the archetype of the black male ›entering‹ the white English female as a noble soldier sworn to protect her and impregnating her with the next (biracial, and therefore a perfect amalgamation!) generation. In a similar vein, Hans J. Massaquoi's auto-

biography focuses heavily on his successful penetration of white German women (whom he claims consider him superior to his Aryan counterparts), his later mastery of Cameroonian women (who, unlike their earlier white female counterparts, remain nameless blanket fodder) and abruptly finishes with his induction into the U.S. Armed Forces and the transferring of his white German mother to the United States. In other words, we will be in desperate need of gender and sexual critiques to avoid retrenching black epistemologies into the fight to recover a lost African heterosexual manhood.

Nor should we assume that the myth of a homogenous fascism – that is synonymous with anti-black racism – will automatically be subverted by the deployment of World War II in ›Middle Passage‹ epistemologies. This is perhaps where Paul Gilroy's argument in *Against Race* is most troubling (and ahistorical): his invocation of ›fascism‹ is exactly the way in which it is increasingly being invoked by the European Union to disguise and deny so many horrid racist crimes of the past, present and future.[7] If we do as Gilroy enjoins and label any and all minority ideologies that embrace an essentialist notion of race ›fascist‹, we are allowing the Western invention of blackness and our long history of subverting that invention to disappear. Blackness becomes sucked into the false claim of World War II, eradicating ›fascism‹ and therefore racism. We need to take a page from Gilroy and return to World War II, but not under the liberal humanist re-signification of that conflict now so popular among European governments. Instead, we need to return to that era and maintain the striking difference between fascisms and racisms, pointing out, as Tina M. Campt has (*Other Germans*), that black men served in Hitler's SA, that the Allies, the ›good guys‹ treated white German POW's (prisoners of war) better than their own black servicemen. This was not a conflict between Western democracies and totalitarian regimes, but a conflict between nations long embroiled in oppressing, exploiting and liquidating other minorities – and justifying it.

It is not as if the study of World War II is the panacea to all of our ›ills‹: heteropatriarchy, nationalism, liberal humanism (black or white) – it can easily be used to propagate these ideas, and has been. Yet as more scholars – from undergraduates to full professors – seek to integrate their own interests, projects, departments or disciplines with African Diaspora studies, the Second World War as a shaping trope offers a far broader and more immediate set of connections than the Middle Passage and allows us to explore a variety of black identities that intersect as they differ.

I want to conclude with a brief exegesis of what I would consider a useful model for the insertion of World War II in Middle Passage epistemologies. In his collection of essays *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), James Baldwin pursues the changing and hypostatic nature of American identities (black and white men) in the postwar years, tellingly using the trope of the Middle Passage (most obviously evoked in the famous phrase »many thousands gone«) as a faint but ever present shadow, causing shame and embarrassment – a reminder of its unpopularity as a positive trope before Black Nationalism. Yet it is not as if the postwar years offer an ›answer‹ to this question of identity, as Baldwin puts it in one piece – it is simply the juxtaposition of race and space that endlessly poses this.

In one of his most striking essays, »Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown«, he gives us the image of an African American and a French African flanked by the Eiffel Tower, and in doing so neatly evokes and provokes the question of difference in the African Diaspora and the central role played by Europe. Here, France exists both as an anti-fascist and colonialist power, one defeated by Aryans and ›liberated‹ with the help of its own African colonial troops as well as African American ones. The two black men (and, I should note, this essay, like almost all in the collection, fails miserably in the arena of gender) are both subjects and objects because the forces that brought them there testify both to their vulnerability and their resolute strength. While prone to disastrous stereotyping, Baldwin nonetheless dares to pursue this complex intersection of diasporic epistemologies in ways we have rarely seen since:

> The [American] Negro is forced to say »Yes« to many a difficult question, and yet to deny the conclusion to which his answers seem to point. His past, he now realizes, has not been simply a series of ropes and bonfires and humiliations, but something vastly more complex, which, as he thinks painfully, »It was much worse that that,« was also, he irrationally feels, something much better. As it is useless to excoriate his countrymen, it is galling now to be pitied as a victim, to accept this ready sympathy which is limited only by its failure to accept him as an American. He finds himself involved, in another language, in the same old battle: the battle for his own identity. To accept the reality of his being an American becomes a matter involving his integrity and his greatest hopes, for only by accepting this reality can he hope to make articulate to himself or to others the uniqueness of his experience, and to set free the spirit so long anonymous and caged.
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> The ambivalence of his status is thrown into relief by his encounters with the Negro students from France's colonies who live in Paris. The French African comes from a region and a way of life which – at least from the American point of view – is exceedingly primitive, and where exploitation takes more naked forms. In Paris, the African Negro's status, conspicuous and subtly inconvenient, is that of a colonial; and he leads here the intangibly precarious life of someone abruptly and recently uprooted. His bitterness is unlike that of his American kinsman in that it is not so treacherously likely to be turned against himself. He has, not so very many miles away, a homeland to which

his relationship, no less than his responsibility, is overwhelmingly clear: His country must be given – or it must seize – its freedom. This bitter ambition is shared by his fellow colonials, with whom he has a common language, and whom he has no wish to avoid; without whose sustenance, indeed, he would be almost altogether lost in Paris. They live in groups together, in the same neighborhoods, in students hotels and under conditions which cannot fail to impress the American as almost unendurable.

Yet what the American is seeing is not simply the poverty of the student but the enormous gap between the European and American standards of living. *All* of the students in the Latin Quarter live in ageless, sinister-looking hotel; they are all forced continually to choose between cigarettes and cheese at lunch.[8]

From the product of »ropes and bonfires and humiliations«, Baldwin transforms his abject African American into »the American« who acts not unlike a naïve millionaire upon spotting the Latin Quarter, summing up the many contradictions that go into the African American identity, and here Baldwin summons up the largest and most painfully enraging – to be both the continuing victim of a slavocracy and the beneficiary of it. He does this, significantly, through epistemologies, creating each of his characters through his understanding of their histories, that which now makes them »Negro«.

I would argue that here Baldwin inserts World War II in the form of the postwar era, and what he has achieved is stunning. We are given two singularly different types of blackness triangulated through a cultural industrial marker of modernity: the Eiffel Tower, a large phallic symbol of steel created in part to symbolize France's new industrial might. It is a symbol, then, of French (white) masculine potency; literally, however, the Tower is black, which inevitably interpellates the two black men who, in turn, interpellate the Tower by flanking it. In a later essay in the collection entitled »Stranger in the Village«, Baldwin famously noted that the lack of black people in the remote Swiss village he visited is a sign of their primitive status, thus suggesting, in a neat reversal of Hegel, that blackness is actually a sign of progress and modernity. If we further consider what allowed France to achieve the stupendous output of steel that allowed something such as Eiffel's Tower to be built, we must remember that Western civilization achieved industrial overdevelopment *after* it had forced tens of millions of slaves to labor for it, and after it had started to extrapolate and exploit the natural – and already developed (European colonizers conquered civilizations, not jungle) – resources of its colonies.

Even though we in Western civilization consider ourselves, by nature, to be a democratic people – indeed, we mark the supposed superiority of our civilization through its supposed commitment to universal human suffrage – we still teach ›Great Man‹ history and use its despotic rhetoric in everyday discourse. We say that »Cheops built the pyramids«, or »Donald Trump built the Trump Tower«, when in fact neither man did any such thing. All great industrial and architectural projects require intelligent labor: you cannot have one man, much less ten or one hundred, with all the knowledge required to build something that requires the labor of hundreds if not thousands of bodies: logistically speaking, it is simply not possible. While I am not claiming that therefore every slave/laborer is a distinguished architect, I am arguing against the myth of one great brain leading thousands of brainless bodies. Slavery in the West and colonialism there and elsewhere required intelligent labor, and it is this intelligent labor – first in the millions of blacks imported into the West, later and now with a broad variety of formerly colonized peoples – that was crucial to Western overdevelopment not to mention the Allied victory in World War II.

The presence of the French colonial soldier and the African American flanked by the Eiffel Tower brings forth this complex history and points to an even more complex present. World War II, after all, brought blacks together in ways that both blacks and non-black scholars in the West often choose to ignore: black soldiers, whether coerced or voluntarily (assuming one could distinguish between the two!) fought for American, French, British, Italian and German armies. They fought with one another and against one another in all three theatres of war. Their presence *then* explains their presence at the Eiffel Tower and their presence now, intersecting with one another through different types of history, their exploitation, denigration and festishization linking them and keeping them apart. Baldwin wrote about the savage racism he witnessed directed against Algerians in Paris even as these same French people celebrated African American modernity in the music of Miles Davis and the novels of Chester Himes. For the French, ›their‹ Africans and African Arabs were and are atavistic exemplars of black inferiority even as Miles and Chester were and are symbolic of black American artistic and intellectual achievement.

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Even though we in Western civilization consider ourselves, by nature, to be a democratic people – indeed, we mark the supposed superiority of our civilization through its supposed commitment to universal human suffrage – we still teach ›Great Man‹ history and use its despotic rhetoric in everyday discourse. We say that »Cheops built the pyramids«, or »Donald Trump built the Trump Tower«, when in fact neither man did any such thing. All great industrial and architectural projects require intelligent labor: you cannot have one man, much less ten or one hundred, with all the knowledge required to build something that requires the labor of hundreds if not thousands of bodies: logistically speaking, it is simply not possible. While I am not claiming that therefore every slave/laborer is a distinguished architect, I am arguing against the myth of one great brain leading thousands of brainless bodies. Slavery in the West and colonialism there and elsewhere required intelligent labor, and it is this intelligent labor – first in the millions of blacks imported into the West, later and now with a broad variety of formerly colonized peoples – that was crucial to Western overdevelopment not to mention the Allied victory in World War II.

The presence of the French colonial soldier and the African American flanked by the Eiffel Tower brings forth this complex history and points to an even more complex present. World War II, after all, brought blacks together in ways that both blacks and non-black scholars in the West often choose to ignore: black soldiers, whether coerced or voluntarily (assuming one could distinguish between the two!) fought for American, French, British, Italian and German armies. They fought with one another and against one another in all three theatres of war. Their presence *then* explains their presence at the Eiffel Tower and their presence now, intersecting with one another through different types of history, their exploitation, denigration and festishization linking them and keeping them apart. Baldwin wrote about the savage racism he witnessed directed against Algerians in Paris even as these same French people celebrated African American modernity in the music of Miles Davis and the novels of Chester Himes. For the French, ›their‹ Africans and African Arabs were and are atavistic exemplars of black inferiority even as Miles and Chester were and are symbolic of black American artistic and intellectual achievement.

It is this complex catalog of different histories that require African American studies, Africana studies and Black European studies to engage with one another – we intersect too much to ignore one another, but we are often juxtaposed in our respective histories (and many of us, of course, especially new generations, have several of these histories as blacks from different parts of the Diaspora create new families, allegiances and collectives all over the world). While not the only beacon, World War II does shed a very illuminating light on these histories that the Middle Passage cannot and, equally importantly, necessarily ›updates‹ our understanding of the world we live in. The current exchange of words, missiles, bombs and bodies is continuously wrapped in World War II tropes. President Bush claims we are

under siege by Islamofascists while Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad complains to the United Nations that the »victors of World War II« now rule the Security Council, keeping check on everyone except themselves.[9] Africans and peoples of African descent are of course part of all these discourses – we are again fighting on all sides of this battle. We are postwar blacks, and we might as well engage with our postwar blackness: it is, after all, engaging with us.

Notes

1 George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars, Oxford 1990, 159.
2 Tony Judt, Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945, New York 2005, 278.
3 Vgl. Katharina Oguntoye, Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte, Berlin 1986; K. O., Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von 1884 bis 1950, Berlin 1997; Tina M. Campt, Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich, Ann Arbor 2003; Ika Hügel-Marshall, Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben. Frankfurt 2001; Hans J. Massaquoi, Neger, Neger Schornsteinfeger: Meine Kindheit in Deutschland, München 2001; Clarence Lusane, Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experience of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans and African Americans in the Nazi Era, Oxford 2002.
4 See Mike and Trevor Phillips' BBC documentary and accompanying book of oral histories Windrush, New York 1999; Andrea Levy, Small Island, London 2005; Barnor Hesse, Un/settled Multiculturalisms, London 2001.
5 See Jennifer James, Sable Hands and National Arms: Towards a Theory of the African American Literature of War, Chapel Hill 2007; Nikki Brown, Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women's Activism From World War I to the New Deal, Bloomington 2007.
6 Natasha Tinsley, Queering the Black Atlantic: Intersections of Race and Desire in the Middle Passage, Keynote address at the conference Race Diaspora: Politics, Communities, Ideologies, Northwestern University, 17.01.2006.
7 See Paul Gilroy, Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line, Cambridge 2000.
8 James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son, Boston [1955] 1984, 120–122.
9 Iran Leader, at United Nations, Skirts Issue of Hezbollah's Disarmament; quoted from New York Times, 22.09.2006, A13, or online: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/22/world/middleeast/22nations.html?ex=1162180800&en=dbf4d777dd33d1d&ei=5070 (28.09.2006).

Walter Sauer

Reflexionen zur afrikanischen Diaspora in Österreich

Sieben Geistliche aus Äthiopien fanden im Jahr 1517 ihren Weg ins niederösterreichische Benediktinerstift Melk, wo sie um Gastfreundschaft ersuchten sowie um Erlaubnis, in ihrem Ritus die Heilige Messe zu feiern. Beides wurde ihnen gewährt, und ohne erkennbares Hindernis setzten sie im Anschluss daran ihre Reise fort.[1] Knapp drei Jahrhunderte später, 1798, liest sich ein ähnlich gelagerter Vorfall wesentlich anders: Leonhard Eisenschmied, ein geborener Kärntner, der viele Jahre lang unter der heißen Sonne des Mittelmeers gelebt hatte und deshalb eine dunkle Gesichtsfarbe aufwies (und außerdem noch ›orientalisch‹ gekleidet war), musste bei seiner Heimkehr um Unterstützung durch seinen Bruder ersuchen, »da ich mich ohne deine Begleitung nicht nach Klagenfurt getraue«.[2]

Ein Vergleich von Situationen, der für die Geschichte der »afrikanischen Diaspora« in Mitteleuropa in zweifacher Hinsicht exemplarisch ist: Zum ersten kommt in ihm ein Wandel im Alltagsverhalten der Durchschnittsbevölkerung gegenüber ›exotischen‹ (beziehungsweise ›exotisch‹ aussehenden) Menschen zum Ausdruck; Ansätze einer freien Mobilität zwischen Afrika und Europa, vereinzelt noch in der frühen Neuzeit vorhanden, gingen mit dem Ausbau der europäischen Suprematie gegenüber anderen Kontinenten verloren. Soziale Akzeptanz (oder zumindest Toleranz) wich einer Tendenz zur sozialen Exklusion, und das bisher differenzierte, vielfach sogar ausdrücklich positive Image Afrikas wurde negativ.[3] *Nicht nur für Afrika, sondern auch für Europa muss (wenngleich mit unterschiedlichen Folgen) die koloniale Erfahrung als eine tiefgreifende Zäsur gewertet werden.*

Zum zweiten liefert der Vergleich auch einen wichtigen methodologischen Hinweis: Nur durch die möglichst breite und quellennahe Erfassung der historischen Realitäten wird ein differenziertes Gesamtbild und, darauf aufbauend, auch eine entsprechende theoretische Einschätzung von afrikanischer Existenz in der europäischen Gesellschaft ermöglicht. Die in manchen Spielarten der Forschung implizierte oder gar (unkritisch) postulierte Überzeitlichkeit eines rassistischen europäischen