

**De Gruyter
Open Cultural Studies
Volume 3 Issue 1**

**Special Issue
Contemporary African and Black Diasporic Spaces in Europe
Anna Rastas & Kaarina Nikunen (Eds.)**



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Abstract

This special issue explores spaces where identifications with the African diaspora become articulated, (re)negotiated and, as demonstrated by many articles in this issue, established as a field of the collective agency with transformative power in European societies. The African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe are constructed not only by individuals' engagements in Africa and its global diaspora but also through the collective agency, aiming at promoting change in European societies shadowed by the normative whiteness, nationalist discourses and policies, human rights violations and overt racism. In this introduction, we discuss the empirical studies presented in this special issue as examples of academic, political and artistic spaces of African and black diasporic agency. Together, the articles make visible the diversity of African and black diasporic spaces in Europe. They also challenge methodological nationalism as well as essentialising discourses of race and ethnicity by acknowledging the global circulation of African and black diaspora cultures and the meanings of the transnational connections for diaspora communities.

Keywords: African and black diaspora; diaspora spaces; Europe; collective agency; cultural production; anti-racism

Citation information:

Rastas, A. & Nikunen, K. (2019). Contemporary African and Black Diasporic Spaces in Europe. *Open Cultural Studies*, 3(1) doi:10.1515/culture-2019-0019

Published Online: 2019-05-13

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0019>

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Research Article

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Introduction: Contemporary African and Black Diasporic Spaces in Europe

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0019>

Received December 18, 2018; accepted January 7 2019

Abstract: This special issue explores spaces where identifications with the African diaspora become articulated, (re)negotiated and, as demonstrated by many articles in this issue, established as a field of the collective agency with transformative power in European societies. The African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe are constructed not only by individuals' engagements in Africa and its global diaspora but also through the collective agency, aiming at promoting change in European societies shadowed by the normative whiteness, nationalist discourses and policies, human rights violations and overt racism. In this introduction, we discuss the empirical studies presented in this special issue as examples of academic, political and artistic spaces of African and black diasporic agency. Together, the articles make visible the diversity of African and black diasporic spaces in Europe. They also challenge methodological nationalism as well as essentialising discourses of race and ethnicity by acknowledging the global circulation of African and black diaspora cultures and the meanings of the transnational connections for diaspora communities.

Keywords: African and black diaspora, diaspora spaces, Europe, collective agency, cultural production, anti-racism

The theme of this special issue on contemporary African and black diasporic spaces in Europe approaches diaspora communities and cultures from various perspectives. Here, the notion of *African and black diasporic spaces* refers both to different forms of collective agency based on individuals' identifications with Africanity and/or blackness and to sites and settings where this agency occurs. The idea of diasporic space is used here as an abstraction (see, e.g., Brah 208-210). Instead of the notion of (black and African) culture, the idea of space or spaces of cultures allows us to avoid pre-given categorisations and strict distinctions among different African and/or black communities and cultures. We argue that this is important if we want to promote research on both the diversity of and the transformations within the African and black diaspora(s).¹

This idea of spaces referring to landscapes of people and agency (for discussion on the metaphoric use of concepts of space, see Vertoveck 22) resembles Appadurai's notion of "scapes" (33-43). Appadurai's theorisations on ethnoscaping, mediascaping, technoscaping, financescaping and ideoscaping focus on particular social phenomena and sites of the agency; however, the starting point for the articles in this special issue are experiences and situations of particular social groups, namely African and black diasporic people in Europe. Instead of the particular scapes discussed by Appadurai, the empirical case studies included in this issue focus on some of the overlapping sites of human agency where identifications with

1 There is a lot of variation in the terminology used to refer to racial identities and categories. Since in cultural studies, races are understood and approached as social constructs, we do not need quotation marks to distinguish them from other ideas of races. In this introduction, we also use lower case letters for words such as black and white, but the authors of the articles have made their own decisions concerning these choices.

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Africaness and/or blackness in Europe are articulated and (re)constructed in academic, political and artistic spaces.

Diasporas are global and transnational by nature—not only local histories, political and other forces shape the everyday lives of diaspora communities. These communities are also shaped by transnational connections and global circulation of political, ideological, cultural and other flows (Appadurai 37; see also Zeleza, “Diaspora Dialogues” 46). These flows, through which diasporas are constructed, should be acknowledged as important contexts for the study of African and black European spaces. All these factors, together with the rapid demographic changes and transformations in racialised relations in many societies, make the research on African and black diaspora a challenging field of study (see also Brubaker 1-7).

The current political climate (see Paul Gilroy’s essay in this issue) makes it increasingly difficult to deny racism and its effects on all African diaspora communities in Europe (e.g., *Being Black in the EU*; Nwabuso 16-17). Furthermore, growing numbers of people who identify with racialised minorities in Europe, especially young people of African descent born in Europe, have started to confront what Wekker refers to as the white innocence (*White Innocence* 16-18; see also Essed et al.) that has prevented discussions on racism and colonial violence in Europe. Nevertheless, in many studies about African diaspora communities in Europe, race and questions related to racism are still being ignored.

Especially in studies that are positioned in the vast and rapidly growing multidisciplinary area of migration research, a common starting point has been the ethnicity paradigm where the studied people are categorised according to ethnicity or country of origin. Instead of exploring diaspora subjects’ experiences as racialised subjects, those studies have focused on immigrants’ integration into Europe or their transnational connections with their (parents’) countries of origin, for example, their participation in the development co-operation and policy-making concerning Africa (e.g., Norgolo et al.; Sinatti and Horst). In turn, in studies on black diasporas, race has always been a central category and racial identification a starting point. Such conceptualisation of the African diaspora and diasporic identities in this field, especially when focusing only on people of sub-Saharan African descent, often excludes identifications that are more complex and situational (as shown by many of the articles in this special issue) than those sometimes presented in the research literature on blackness.

It is possible to distinguish between African diaspora studies and black diaspora studies based on the differences described above—their different objects of studies and to some extent, their different histories—as academic fields in Europe. There also seem to be some variations in how researchers in these fields approach and understand the political dimensions of academic knowledge production, including the meanings of researchers’ own positionings in racialised relations. Despite these differences in how researchers in these fields approach some questions and position their work—as African diaspora studies, black studies, or Afroeuropean or African European studies—this special issue does not represent an effort to define these research fields. Neither is it our intention to make here any clear distinctions between African diaspora and black diaspora studies. Instead, this special issue offers many empirical studies on those processes through which individuals negotiate their identifications with Africaness and/or blackness and by doing so create contemporary African *and* black diasporic spaces in Europe.

Racialised identities are negotiated not only through global political movements and vocabularies that are often inspired by academics involved in these movements. People discuss racialised relations and their own racial identifications with the aid of local vocabularies that always carry traces of their earlier meanings. In the case of migrants, they also use those ideas and conceptualisations of racial relations that they have learned in their old home countries in Africa or elsewhere in the diaspora. Researchers positioned in critical cultural studies cannot ignore these different meanings of race and racism; neither should they disregard what anthropologists call emic knowledge and interpretations of the studied people. The notion of emic knowledge refers here to the ways in which people themselves verbalise their racial identifications.

The processes of identity formation and the way that diasporic identities are articulated in the so-called new African diaspora (Okpewho and Nzegwu) can differ from those in the older African and black diaspora communities whose histories were rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Therefore, academics’ definitions of *black diaspora* or *African diaspora* are not necessarily embraced by all African and black diaspora subjects. Furthermore, identifications with blackness and/or Africaness can be shifting and situational.

Although the word *black*, unlike *African*, always refers to the politicised discourse on race, *African*, *Afro*, *Afropean* and *Afropolitan* can as well include strong political and anti-racist messages.

In the following sections of this introductory essay, we first position this special issue in particular academic spaces and then introduce the articles by discussing them as studies on *political* or *artistic* African and/or black diasporic spaces. Those spaces overlap in various ways and are intertwined with other sites and forms of human agency, such as media spaces (e.g., Bailey et al.; Mainsah). It would be impossible to describe any diaspora activities in only academic, political or artistic spaces; therefore, the way that we have placed the articles under the subheadings below is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. African and black diaspora spaces in Europe have always been venues of intersecting transnational and local activism, as well as sites for collaboration among people of different professional and other backgrounds.

Academic Spaces

In the academia, black diasporic spaces have been created by national and international researchers' networks and their collaboration in different fields of black activism. Although African and black diaspora studies can be considered a relatively new scholarship in Europe, intellectuals from Africa and the diaspora have for decades already theorised encounters between Africans and Europeans and raised discussions on the meanings of race. The writings by Frantz Fanon and others have inspired many black European intellectuals, including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and other representatives of British cultural studies, whose works have brought questions of racism, racialised identities and blackness in Europe to wider academic audiences. In some countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, women have played a central role in developing black (feminist) activism and research on blackness in Europe. The fact that research in Europe, including African and black diaspora studies, is published in many different languages may have slowed down co-operation among European researchers and the recognition of this research field. Furthermore, unlike research focusing on the recent migration from Africa to Europe, black European studies have been not only inspired but also (to a considerable extent) carried out by researchers in the US (e.g., Hine et al.).² However, the volume of the research undertaken in European universities, as well as the collaboration among researchers in Europe, seems to be on the rise.

Since the early 2000s, researchers from different European countries and from the US, who are involved in particular international research programmes, have organised conferences and other events to create more spaces for research and discussions on the situation of Afro/black Europeans and how the African presence in Europe has influenced European societies and cultures. The *Black European Studies Conference*, organised in Mainz in 2005 (see *BEST*) inspired many new networks and research programmes. Along with other events and networks, the *AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe Conferences* in Spain (University of León in 2006 and 2009; University of Cádiz in 2011), the United Kingdom (University of London and Open University in 2013) and Germany (University of Münster in 2015) became important forums for academics, artists and activists from different countries to promote research on African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe (e.g., Beezmohun; Brancato; Espinoza Garrido; López).

The *Sixth AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe Conference* was organised at the University of Tampere, Finland in 2017, after the funding for the *AfroEuropeans* research programme (see Lopez 1-6) had already ended. In an open meeting during the conference, a decision was made that promoting African diaspora and black diaspora studies in Europe by organising these conferences would be continued by an open network that would welcome not only academics but also artists, activists and other professionals. Similar to the programme's achievements, this network collaborates with other research programmes and networks in these fields of research and activism. The call for conveners for the next conferences on AfroEuropean studies was published in Tampere; afterwards, a decision was made that these conferences would be organised in Lisbon in 2019 and Brussels in 2021. Another discussed topic in that network meeting was how to make scholarly publications in this field available for a broader audience,

² See, for example, the staff and the affiliated faculty listed on the website of the Black Europe Summer School.

including activists, the people and the communities that are our studies' subjects, and researchers who (or whose universities) cannot afford expensive publications.

As organisers responsible for the Tampere conference, we welcomed the opportunity to publish this special issue as an open-access publication in *Open Cultural Studies*. Articles in this issue can easily be positioned in critical cultural studies where knowledge production is understood as a political practice. Along with other research traditions closely related to cultural studies, such as decolonial, feminist and diaspora studies, black/Afro-European/African European studies aim at rewriting the (hi)stories that continue to ignore minoritised communities and their knowledge, despite multiple contributions of earlier African and black intellectuals and activists to the European scholarship. The number of scholarly publications on the African diaspora and blackness in Europe has increased rapidly, and the political dimensions of academic knowledge production have also been emphasised in these fields of cultural analysis. Studies that are positioned in black/Afro-European/African European studies examine the African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe, as well as encounters between white Europeans and people and cultures that in the majority discourses have been, and still are, defined as *others*. Questions concerning racism, anti-racism and the meanings of race as a collective political identity can be considered the starting points of these studies.

Nevertheless, normative whiteness still overshadows academic knowledge production in Europe. This problem also concerns some countries, such as the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, with significant numbers of citizens who identify with Africanity and/or blackness. According to Kehinde Andrews ("The Black Studies Movement"), who leads the first black studies undergraduate degree programme in Europe at Birmingham City University, "There is a crisis of representation with only one per cent of academic staff in Britain being Black."

The fact that the guest editors of this special issue are two researchers categorised as white follows from our roles as organisers of the *Sixth Afro-Europeans Conference* in Tampere, which in turn derives from our own research interests, networks and activism, but it also indicates the whiteness of European universities. The small number of non-white academics in European research institutes cannot be explained by demographic factors alone, not even in predominantly white societies, such as Finland. Structural racism makes it more difficult, even impossible, for some people to enter academic spaces and have their perspectives acknowledged and voices heard. This situation inevitably affects individual researchers' work opportunities, as well as their possibilities to find funding for their projects on African diaspora(s) and blackness in Europe. Unsurprisingly, also in Europe, black students and researchers have understood the importance of research on racism and the situation of minoritised communities, as well as racialised identities and identity politics. However, white academia is not necessarily a supportive environment for research(ers) in those areas.

Our epistemological engagements as scholars in critical cultural studies force us to think about how our own positionings in racialised and other social relations influence our knowledge and understanding of African and black cultures and spaces in Europe. After *Open Cultural Studies* agreed to publish a special issue on African and black diasporic spaces in Europe, we approached some colleagues who identify themselves as black researchers in African and black diaspora studies and asked if they would like to participate in this project as guest co-editors. These colleagues couldn't invest their time in this project, but we are grateful that they all, among many other black scholars, agreed to contribute to this issue as reviewers. To make more space for black scholars' knowledge and perspectives in this special issue, we decided that all research articles submitted for this issue must also be reviewed by experts who position themselves as black scholars.³

When empirical studies are evaluated, it is important that the reviewers know the locations, communities and cultures (not only the research on them) that are the subjects of the studies. In many countries, people of colour have started to study black communities and have brought questions concerning the normative whiteness of academic knowledge production into the foreground. Therefore, we argue that

³ By black scholars, we refer to academics who define themselves as black or people of colour, also through their research interests.

acknowledging the epistemic advantage (Harding 147) of black and other scholars who are positioned in racialised minorities do not necessarily mean succumbing to essentialist ideas of “who can know.” Scholars of colour are more likely to challenge studies where the whiteness of European societies is taken as an inevitable premise. Therefore, their situated knowledge should be valued in other research fields as well.

Searching for manuscript reviewers can be particularly challenging in emerging fields of research with structural hindrances, such as those described above. Our decision to look for experts who identify themselves as black scholars has turned out to be an inspiring assignment. Tracing (potential) reviewers with different disciplinary backgrounds and expertise in the many areas and topics discussed in the articles has revealed the volume and the richness of the rapidly growing field of African and black diaspora studies in Europe. Editing this issue has also deepened our understanding of the many national and transnational connections between black academics and activists.

Both the topics of the articles published in this issue and the backgrounds of many authors and reviewers have also raised questions concerning academic versus activist discourses. Even in research fields where these discourses cannot be fully separated, which we argue to be the case in African and black diaspora studies, standards and rules for academic publications exist. All our reviewers—respected academics, many of whom consider themselves activists—have emphasised this point in their reviews. Commitment to epistemologies that accentuate political dimensions of knowledge production does not undermine the research quality. On the contrary, it may increase the credibility and applicability of research.

Another issue underlined by the reviewers is the importance of knowing local contexts, including the ways that the studied people themselves conceptualise and verbalise their identifications with blackness and Africanness. Many reviewers, like some of the contributors to this issue, emphasise the need to identify the differences among and within African/black diaspora communities in various locations, especially those between Europe and the US. Therefore, we argue that Afro/African/black European studies are needed not only to expand our understanding of European societies but also to develop such theoretical premises of African and black diaspora studies that will allow us to examine the plurality and the multivocality of all African and black diaspora spaces on a global scale.

Political Spaces

Paul Gilroy's essay in this issue discusses the political climate that shapes the everyday lives of African and black diasporas in contemporary Europe. As Gilroy argued already in many of his earlier works, racist and fascist political climate can only be explained by understanding both the long historical trajectories of racial hierarchies and social and political transformations, advanced now by neoliberalism. Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* and *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* captured the complexities of European modernity, built on colonial traditions and racialised hierarchies. His sophisticated analysis of the deep contradictions in the denial of the racist colonial past and the quest for acknowledging the humanity of all (e.g., *Against Race*) has served as an inspiration to researchers and political movements worldwide. It is exactly this complex conjuncture, determined now by the rise of neo-fascist political sentiment across Europe that his essay in this issue continues to analyse.

By exploring the new emergence of the alt right and its intellectual roots, Gilroy shows how fascism is fundamentally and inherently connected with racism. Nonetheless, the difficulties in identifying the ways in which these ideological forces intersect and rely on the political ontology of race remain constant challenges to contemporary politics and research alike. The tendency to avoid or ignore this connection has been powerfully advanced by the emergence of the new political alt-right movements through social media, with the affective circulation of hatred and playful racist meme cultures that work to normalise racism and simultaneously create transnational networks of hostility.

Exploring these present political challenges lies at the heart of understanding global inequalities, human rights and the fundamentals of Europeanness. By bringing together different historical dimensions of the current political life of Europe, Gilroy's essay invites black European studies and anti-racist academics, in general, to expand their gaze and expertise to areas that are challenging yet urgent.

The political climate that is increasingly hostile to immigration from outside of Europe has affected the everyday lives and identities of both old and new African diaspora communities across Europe. Not only African immigrants but all Europeans categorised as black have become targets of a racist and fascist political climate that is also manifested in direct acts of violence. According to a recent survey on the experience of racism among 5,803 African immigrants and descendants of African immigrants in 12 European countries, roughly one-third of the respondents (30%) have experienced racist harassment in the five years before the survey⁴. Furthermore, over half of those who had experienced violent attacks did not report it to any organisation because either they believed that reporting it would not change anything (34%) or the victims do not trust or are afraid of the police (28%) (*Being Black in the EU* 9-10; see also Nwabuzo).

The manifold ways in which racism has been countered by individuals, groups and associations in Europe have often remained invisible in public and official records. Many of the articles in this special issue discuss the importance of documenting these invisible histories of organising anti-racist work. They also outline the struggle to find and create spaces for expressing ideas and acting as political subjects that allow for multiple transnational identifications.

Pamela Ohene-Nyako explores black European women's anti-racist agency in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Her article is a study of the supportive role of the Women Under Racism sub-programme within the World Council of Churches, as well as the SISTERS network that emerged from it in the early stages of the European black women's movement. With her analyses of the impact of the Afro-American activist, Jean-Sindab, and the Afro-Brazilian activist, Marilia Schüller, on these political activities, Ohene-Nyako sheds light on the importance of transnational connections for black European identities. According to her, in these political spaces, identifications and solidarity were also extended to migrant, black, Sinti-Roma and Sami participants who endorsed a collective identity as "we the women of Europe."

The examination of the multifaceted African and black diasporic identifications in Europe and the words referring to them continue in **Gladys Akom Ankobrey's** ethnographic study on 12 black Londoners' lived experiences with Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism. These terms (words, notions) can be considered African diasporic spaces where ethnic, racial and political identifications are negotiated. Her study shows how Afropolitanism (see Knudsen & Rahbek, 13–42) and Pan-Africanism (for identifications with Pan-Africanism, see also Grégoire) are constructed and deconstructed in both diverse and overlapping ways that question the centrality of the middle passage epistemology (see Wright, *Physics*) and the tendency to essentialise experiences in the African diaspora discourse.

In many countries, resistance to racism and fascism (in the form of xenophobia, Islamophobia and homophobia) has brought different minoritised communities together to resist these oppressive forces. These anti-racist spaces, with their transnational and global links to black activism in other locations, have made it easier for people to identify with blackness in those countries where blackness has until recently been a problematic point of identification for various reasons (in Northern Europe, see Rastas 368-75). However, as shown by some of the articles in this special issue, the popularity of later expressions, such as Afropolitan and Afropean and other terms referring to Africaness and/or racialised relations,⁵ suggests that in Europe, many people of African descent do not necessarily want to rely on words that may hide the complexity of their cultural, racial and political identifications.

In their article comparing Afro-Dutch and Afro-Italian communities, **Serena Scarabello** and **Marleen de Witte** explore the emergence of a transnational, Afro-European imaginary, distinguished from both white European and African American formations. They remind us that the practices of self-making in these African diasporic spaces should be understood in the context of the history of colonialism and the contemporary politics of othering. According to Scarabello and de Witte, these identities neither turn away from nor simply add to Europeaness "but are in and of themselves European".

Several articles in this special issue show different ways in which the Mediterranean route has become an integral part of the European social landscape. They explore the interconnectedness of African diasporas and contemporary struggles for immigrant rights, as well as how these connections, through activism and resistance against "Fortress Europe," produce new identities and spaces for self-making.

⁴ The survey was conducted between 2015 and 2016.

⁵ For mobilising people under the "Pan-African" banner, see, for example, Grégoire.

Giuseppe Grimaldi explores how the European refugee crisis, fortifying borders and the deaths in the Mediterranean Sea have mobilised the Italians of Eritrean and Ethiopian origins and the resignification of the *Habesha* identification⁶ among the children of the immigrants. The ethnographic research, conducted in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, applies the concept of the Black Mediterranean (drawn from Gilroy's Black Atlantic) as a representation of a broader transnational social space (in this case, a space of possibility), as well as a powerful theoretical framework to make sense of the processes redefining ethnic, national and transnational identities in contemporary Europe.

Finding spaces for expressing ideas and forging political alliances to raise awareness and express identities often operate in two ways, as described by Nancy Fraser ("Rethinking"), with the concept of subaltern counter-publics. Minority groups can form their own discursive arenas, first, to define their interests, needs and identities in their own terms. Second, they can bring their views to the larger, locally, nationally or globally organised debates and in this way, thematically widen the debates and expand the groups of people who can participate in politics.

Julia Borst and **Danae Gallo González** explore such spaces in the context of African diasporas in Spain and Portugal. While digital media have advanced the circulation of racism and the formation of alt-right communities, they have also provided avenues for alternative voices of the marginalised and different minority groups. By exploring Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese online sites, *Afroféminas*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Plataforma Gueto*, Borst and González argue that by generating political debates and collective action, these online spaces allow for decentralised national and transnational networks of community building.

The case studies illustrate how mediated participation expands politics to new communicative spaces of belonging and solidarity (cf. Nikunen) that allow the multifacetedness of African and black European experiences. The African and black European activism described by Borst and González is often aimed at complementing mainstream media with voices of the marginalised and experiences of injustice. However, research has pointed out that increased fragmentation of the mediascape poses further challenges to how these spaces of inclusive solidarity and belonging could reach the larger public sphere and contribute to discussions on ideas of national and European belonging. This problem is further complicated by the growing hostility of alt-right and anti-immigrant groups, who purposefully fabricate and distribute images and news to harm particular, often already vulnerable, groups of people (immigrants, refugees and women), as argued by Gilroy in this issue.

Artistic Diaspora Spaces

In different parts of the world, Africans and their descendants have cherished their traditions, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions, and have created new diaspora cultures that have arisen not only from their African heritage but also or especially from coping with and resisting racism and other forms of oppression. In African diasporic spaces, artistic work and political engagement have always been intertwined. In the course of history, artists, also in Europe, have been important figures in creating what we understand as African and/or black diaspora cultures. For many black artists, art is not only a means of political action but also or merely a "survival strategy," as stated by the Afro-German spoken word artist Maciré Bakayako (Kelly 153). Moreover, being "just an artist" would be difficult for Africans and black artists in Europe, which is not an option even for those artists who would rather be seen through their art and professions or other political goals than merely as racialised subjects or representatives of "African art" (Rastas and Seye 84).

The visibility of artists and curators of colour in Europe over the last couple of years seems to have come as a surprise to many art consumers and the media. This bewilderment, articulated in statements such as "Art is the new black" (see Otieno), can partly be explained by the normative whiteness of European art institutions. However, it is also related to the ways and the means by which art professionals of ethnic and racial minority backgrounds make interventions in public spaces. They call for "new grammars" (Reed) in

⁶ In Grimaldi's study *Habesha* refers to an ethnonym used as a source of identification among people originating from Ethiopia or Eritrea.

discussions on arts, or as stated by Gabi Ngcobo, curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, “complicate things, not to make things comfortable” (qtd. in Otieno).

The increasing ethnic and racial diversity in European art scenes and the active roles that African diasporic people have taken in these fields have not been limited to publications, exhibitions and other events established and organised by Afro/black Europeans. In some European countries, especially in the UK and in the Netherlands as well, African and black diaspora communities have long been active in raising discussions on the colonial and racist histories of their societies and organising activities that focus on social forgetting, social remembering and public histories of slavery and its legacy (Small and Nimako). However, similar to all social spaces, museums and other heritage institutions are racialised fields where black subjects still face the same problems they encounter everywhere. In other European countries as well, black artists, curators and activists have vigorously put diversity discourses into action and brought the global decolonial movement into European heritage institutions.

In the US, recognition and respect for the legacy of people of African descent gained one landmark when the National Museum of African American History and Culture was finally opened in September 2016 in Washington, DC. In Europe until recently, most projects that involve recording, archiving and exhibiting diaspora communities and their endeavours by Africans and black people themselves have taken place mainly in the UK and other countries with larger African and black diaspora communities. Lately, in other European countries, people of the African diaspora have started projects that involve searching and documenting their local minority histories, many of which are closely related to diaspora politics and black activism in other locations.

Mitchell Esajas and **Jessica de Abreu’s** article is an introduction to the establishment of the Black Archives by people from the Surinamese and black communities in Amsterdam. The Black Archives is a critical intervention in the dominant ideas of European cultural heritage—narratives that tend to overlook black European communities and the histories of colonialism, slavery and its legacies. Esajas and Abreu’s description of an exhibition project, based on their archival research about the lives of the black radicals Hermina and Otto Huiswoud, highlights the intersections with global and local black radical history and activism.

Recent projects by many African and black artists and curators in Europe have aimed at more appropriate representations of blackness and African and diasporic histories, cultures, arts and aesthetics, as well as a more inclusive understanding of European, national and local identities.⁷ The increase in the African and black presence, especially in the visual and the performing arts in Europe, has generated plenty of discussion around the notions of “African art” and “black art.” In his article, **Mischa Twitchin** explores the paradoxical space that African art inhabits in the art history canon formulated and determined by western museums. His article on what the Benin artist Meschac Gaba has called the “Eurocentric African problem” examines the paradoxes engaged by Gaba’s reflections on his Museum for Contemporary African Art project, now owned by Tate Modern. Twitchin asks when refracted through the commitments of a black artistic agenda, how might art institutions reconceive their understanding of modernism in the light of African, diasporic or Afropean perspectives?

Heather Shirey’s article is a compelling contribution to how art can activate and expand public space, with references to global identities and the African diasporic culture. By exploring Yinka Shonibare’s Nelson’s Ship installed in London’s Trafalgar Square, Shirey shows how Shonibare’s model ship in a bottle, with its sails made of factory-printed textiles associated with West African and Afro-European identities, has temporarily challenged the normative power that defines social and political spaces in Britain.

In twenty-first-century Europe, the growth of the research on the African diasporic literature—and the so-called migrant literature in general—indicates the significance of these literary fields, not only for the people of the diaspora but also for larger audiences. In addition to the many political concerns raised by the diaspora and migrant literature, their popularity can be explained by their ability to add to the knowledge of the varying contexts and the complex processes of belonging and community building within the diaspora

⁷ For example, many of these projects are presented in the art magazine *Contemporary and (C&) Platform for International Art from African Perspectives* and in Carol Dixon’s blog *Museum Geographies*.

communities and in the rapidly transforming societies in general. These literary fields renew traditions and aesthetic trends in literature. They also remind people of the multilingualism of European societies and raise new questions concerning the meanings of translation. (Bekers et al.; Innes and Stein; Knudsen and Rahbek; McLeod; Ponzanesi and Merolla; Stein; see also Beezmohun et al.)

Jamele Watkins' article in this special issue explores the possibilities of silence in the Afro-German author and spoken word performer Olumide Popoola's novella, *this is not about sadness*. Watkins discusses the hybrid form created by Popoola—a performed novella written in two languages (English and Creole) that tells the story of silence and the emergence of the connection in the community of women. Using the theories of community building by Fatima El-Tayeb and of opacity by Édouard Glissant, it argues for an identity that is not dependent on roots and family trees or “projected” onto others but is produced through the connection.

Music and the performing arts have always been especially important political spaces for people whose participation in politics and other social fields has been restricted. *Black music* refers to various musical styles created by people of African descent who have confronted and fought against racism at different times and locations. There is rich research literature on African diasporic and black music, with different theorisations concerning its origins and links to other music cultures (e.g., Garcia 268; Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic” 133-35; Zeleza, “Dancing to the Beat” 211) and the links between anti-racist movements and black and African diaspora music. In Europe, there is a growing body of research especially on hip hop, the “cultural lingua franca of the African diaspora” (El-Tayeb 29). However, spaces for the so-called traditional African music and dance, as well as other music-related activities by African immigrants in Europe, can also be approached not only as venues for cultural encounters but also as political spaces.

Livia Jimenez's ethnographic study on African nightclubs in Lisbon and Madrid is an analysis of the commodification of the dance labelled *kizomba* as a form of symbolic violence that disguises postcolonial structural inequalities and unsolved conflicts through a discourse on a neutral “approaching of cultures” on the dance floor. According to Jimenez, this discourse portrays the performances displayed at African discos as “basic” and unworthy. Through resistance to commodified *kizomba*, nightclubs have become spaces of cultural resistance. Jimenez also discusses the global cultural industries' increasing power to name social groups, structure practices and exercise symbolic violence.

Alica Aterianus' article demonstrates the ways in which the network of the Senegalese *sabar* dance offers a space for recognition and integration in Europe and how *sabar* dancers (re)invent “traditions” in migration. The ethnographic study illustrates how the transnational dance network allows for the negotiation of intersectional power relationships, transcending gender, race, generation, class and nationality.

Antti-Ville Kärjä introduces the concept of the Black Baltic Sea to explore the musical dimensions surrounding the notion of blackness in Northern Europe. Inspired by Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, Kärjä envisions the Baltic Sea region as an interdiasporic space with its own dynamics of postcolonial racialisation, prejudices against blackness and histories of the migration that become exemplified in different genres and practices of music.

Jasmine Linnea Kelekey's study on Afro-Finnish hip hop examines rap as an avenue for mapping African diasporic identities and racialised experiences. Her analysis of a selection of songs performed by black/Afro-Finnish rappers shows how these young Finns discuss racism and the normative whiteness of Finnish society and how they define blackness in relation to identity, racism and national belonging.

Conclusions: Towards New Epistemological Spaces

The articles in this special issue illustrate the multiplicity of African and black diaspora communities and the richness of their cultures in Europe. While the research on African and black diasporas in Europe may be considered marginal, it, in fact, explores fundamental issues of the relations among power, human rights and cultural practices in changing societies. Therefore, each of these studies informs readers about larger trajectories related to social relations and cultural production in changing societies.

By introducing case studies while engendering knowledge from experience, this special issue points to important areas of knowledge production. These studies shed light on the ways in which a marginal position may offer an epistemic advantage that allows understanding and recognising defective knowledge claims and oppressive social structures. Furthermore, the sources (artworks, publications, etc. discussed in this special issue) that have remained invisible or have been silenced in the official, popular and easily accessible “cultural archives” (Wekker, *White Innocence* 1-3) are foregrounded as valid objects of research. At the same time, by introducing the research on these spaces and sources, these studies participate in making histories of anti-racist actions visible. All research that acknowledges the fact of racism and the meanings of race, which vary, depending on our positions in racialised hierarchies, disturbs the normative whiteness of European academia.

However, the diversity among and within diaspora communities in different locations (as demonstrated by their descriptions in this special issue) also requires updating the theoretical framework of African diaspora studies. Research on African diaspora(s) and discussions on blackness have been strongly determined by Middle Passage epistemologies and by African Americans’ histories and cultures (e.g., Wekker, “Another Dream” 281; Wright, “Middle Passage” 217). Migration flows from Africa no longer follow patterns of colonial relations (Hamilton 549). Therefore, the epistemological frameworks of African diaspora studies can no longer be built only on traditions inspired by questions related to the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade or the ideas and the conceptualisations of blackness developed in the US. Even in the US and Canada, many scholars have emphasised the need to acknowledge “the new African diaspora” (e.g., Okonofua; Okpewho and Nzegwu; Zeleza, *In Search of African Diasporas*).

African and black diaspora studies are sometimes discussed as if they only contribute to the research on marginalised groups and their situations in different societies. However, we argue that these studies and diaspora studies, in general, can help researchers and readers recognise some of those social and cultural transformations in European and other societies that easily remain invisible in the research guided by methodological nationalism. This “assumption that nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 301) still seems to be a kind of guiding principle in the research on European societies, as well as in migration studies. In the research on diasporas, their global and transnational dimensions cannot be ignored, which should direct attention to the increasing diversity, transnationality and global connectedness of all societies.

If we want African/Afro/black European studies to represent critical cultural studies, we also have to accept those questions that go beyond identity politics. We argue that it does not mean ignoring the importance of identity politics or its research. Grant Farred (257) reminds us of the imperative to think “out of context” in cultural studies since we cannot address every political event in the same way. In his essay in this issue, Paul Gilroy calls for research to imagine alternatives and ideas of what the world would be like without racial hierarchy and inequality. In this spirit, the collection of case studies in this special issue illustrates different ways in which African and black diasporic spaces are created as productive cultural spaces to express, negotiate and imagine a better life in Europe for all.

The article is based on research funded by the Academy of Finland, projects number 286195 (Rastas) and 295948 (Nikunen).

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Research Article

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Agonistic Belonging: The Banality of Good, the “Alt Right” and the Need for Sympathy

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0001>

Received December 25, 2018; accepted January 15, 2018

Abstract: This paper considers aspects of the rise of neo-fascist political sentiment across Europe. It suggests that an appropriate political response to those developments must involve a reconsideration of the politics of sympathy which is seen as essential in the formation of solidarity.

Keywords: anti-racism, compassion, nationalism, humanism, Alt Right, nostalgia, proteophobia, Fanon, Améry

Some years ago, taking a cue from the writing of Jean Améry, the great Fanonian survivor of the Auschwitz lagers, I began to argue that the black settlers, postcolonial peoples and refugees in Europe should try both to assume and to contest European identity. I wondered whether Europe's national, regional and religious identities might be transformed by a strategic repositioning. Perhaps those habits could be altered for the better by the *agonistic* attachment of settler populations to the idea of Europe which would have to be reworked to include the inescapable fact of its creole future. Answering the sometimes-violent racism that has blocked the liberating right to be seen to belong, those gestures of attachment would also involve seeking ways to bond subaltern, postcolonial and migrant histories with larger critical narratives of blacks and non-Europeans located in a reconceptualised modernity that extended beyond Europe's imperially-expanded geo-body.

These provocations would not only encompass contributions to widespread struggles against racism and racial hierarchy. They would assist with the production of a counter-history of Europe that stretched back into the time before Europe became Europe out of the ashes of Christendom. Today, Europa's Phoenician parentage has been forgotten, but we should always remember that she was the daughter of Agenor, the king of Tyre.

This hopeful strategy necessitated an adjustment in historical perspective. It demanded a comprehensive re-thinking of the brutal market-activity in human beings that had made coffee, sugar, chocolate and tea, not to mention new forms of banking and insurance, familiar, even essential, elements in the common European habitus. It would be extremely difficult to implement, but it might be justified by the long-term benefits of unambiguous admission into Europe's official sense of itself. Acknowledging that their cultural plurality could not be reversed would alter European democracies. The associated critique of racism and racial orders would be a way to promote richer conceptions of citizenship and rights, resistant to even the most informal kinds of colour-coding and exclusion.

Since 2001, the chance of that transformative intervention has been blocked and slowed by the effects of conducting counter-insurgency warfare on an unprecedented, planetary scale. Governments everywhere in Europe have buckled under pressure from the growth of ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist movements with and without immediate electoral ambitions. What project Frontex and the Schengen agreement have done for Europe's fortified physical space, resurgent racism and nationalism have accomplished for its

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emergent cultural space. New technology has increased the tempo of racist mobilisation and fostered closer links between growing neo-fascist forces everywhere (Singer and Brooking).

The forms of racism in which the idea of cultural and ethnic difference replaced earlier, simpler notions of biological hierarchy, have been enhanced by the idea that a clash of civilisations is currently underway. The global “war on terror” identified new enemies beyond the Manichaean architecture of the Cold War and promoted a decisive cultural turn. That momentum created a vicious circle. The global counterinsurgency displaced people who became refugees. They sought hospitality in unwelcoming locations where their very presence was judged not only to be alien but also to be invasive. Europe’s incomers and their locally-born descendants effectively became an “enemy within.” In response to these risks, security came gradually to dominate all other government functions.

These dismal developments have contributed to the consolidation of the genre of political speech that Mahmood Mamdani described as “culture talk.” His term refers us not to the departed, Cold War world of conflicting ideologies, but to a shadowy land of nebulous values which can, in an instant, solidify into iconic cyphers of cultural difference that are considered unbridgeable and absolute. That ossified difference is imagined, just as it was during the nineteenth century, to be natural and geopolitical. Of course, there are significant generational variations in the degree of attachment to the idea of race. That enthusiasm fluctuates with linguistic, regional and historical divisions as well as the reach of US technologies that have exported their racial habits to the rest of the world.

A curiously backwards-looking and comforting conception of culture is invoked to make this new xenology legitimate. The key to grasping its power is the realisation that from the nostalgic angle of vision it promotes, cultural diversity is always a risk. Conceived in opposition to lofty civilisation, lowly culture is mostly what minorities have. It blocks their assimilation but supplies them with a coveted ontological anchor that can keep them steady amidst the storms of austerity which now menace their innocent, if resentful, hosts.¹ The accommodation of plurality with peaceful coexistence becomes unthinkable, as does the practical reconciliation of social solidarity with cultural diversity. Those key terms “plurality” and “diversity” are usually just polite code words for racialised variation.

The resulting xenology has been configured by distinctive conceptions of political theology and political time. They aspire to the nation’s restoration and repossession and dictate that incomers constitute a security problem which we are obliged to recognise in strongly gendered forms. The male refugee becomes the “rape-fugee” who endangers white womanhood. The clothing worn by the covered women who accompany him is the disturbing avatar for the proteophobic anxieties of the indigenes (Bauman 162). The re-written governmental conventions of the *secure* national state dictate that a stable polity can only ever comfortably accommodate psychopolitical mono-culture: invariant and immobile yet apparently, in testing contemporary conditions, endowed with solidarising, involutionary power.

These assumptions specify an optimal relationship between frozen culture and fixed nationality that has other negative consequences. The way that people from and maintain the social groups to which they imagine they belong, is presented as the result of an essential disposition to associate positively only with those who are seen as *already* like themselves. This tendency towards sameness is likely to be grounded vogueishly in neuropsychology or genomics. Whatever its supposedly scientific foundations, it overwhelms all other social processes. In the context of contemporary European securitocracy, it combines readily with culturalist nationalism and xenophobia to create a toxic mixture. That blend has proved especially potent whenever politicians—from a variety of ideological directions—strive to recode the populist instincts to which the yearning for identity as sameness remains captive. Nationality, ethnicity and white victimage supply convenient watchwords for all the clustering that is required in order to feel both safe and secure.

Solidified and instrumentalised in this way, culture gets insulated from the stimulus of history, from everyday interaction and from social creativity. In that simplified form, it is amenable to being disciplined from above. National and racial groupings are thereby invited to possess their own exclusive culture: the

¹ See Vron Ware’s “Towards a Sociology of Resentment: A Debate on Class and Whiteness.” The song “Roots” by the left-wing, British folk duo, *A Show of Hands*, displayed this aspect in all its horror and was annexed by the British National Party as a result. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/apr/23/british-folk-music>

inert object that is imagined to distinguish them from others. They are required to hold on to it as if it was a form of property. It may be dry and lifeless, but this antique and absolute thing can also be enthralling. Melancholically cast both as heritage and prospective nostalgia (Boym), it reduces citizens to a transient, intermediate presence in the longer story of the nation’s unique political ontology. Group character is maintained in simple, functional harmony with the ecologies of belonging that supposedly distinguish Europe’s authentic, rooted nationalities from each other, as well as from aliens, itinerants and interlopers.

The dominance of this style of thought comprises a small but telling part of the de-politicising mechanism that inflates and amplifies contemporary culture-talk in the setting provided by officially endorsed fantasies of civilizational antagonism. Its repetition conveys securitocracy’s version of geopolitics as a cultural conflict defined by the blending of race, ethnicity and religion into a single gestalt.

The “Alt Right” and the Re-Branding of Fascism

The name “alt right” was not coined by antifascists. It was chosen as a means to accomplish new political goals, by its enthusiasts and advocates: the proponents of the newest, combative varieties ultranationalism and racism. The term refers to a loose international alliance or informal coalition that is well-funded and enjoys access to the highest levels of power. The grouping is technologically sophisticated and has assembled an elusive command of political and psychological communication via the libidinal and affective aspects of new technology in general, and social media in particular.²

This wholesale rebranding of a generic fascism was carefully constructed to maximise the effects of computer mediation. Operating effectively online since 2015, the “alt right” and its various allies: the identitarians, the alt light, the neo-reactionaries and the old neo-Nazis, white supremacists and anti-semites, have projected a view of their activities no longer as radical evil, but as daring, transgressive, comic, ironic and futuristic. Even when supplemented by a contingent of disorientated imitators,³ these authoritarians have been able to summon up seductive images of the utopia that guides their pragmatic political choices. Their anti-racist opponents have yet to find an adequate answer (Goldhill).

Most commentators agree that the world this alliance seeks to build will be racially pure. It will rest squarely upon the revival of natural relations between men and women that have lately been distorted by feminism, and it will be dedicated to the preservation of the embattled west which is threatened in particular by demographic changes arising from the excessive fertility of non-white incomers. A residual echo of a much older racism insists that the West is menaced by the shadowy corporate forces of “international Jewry” (O’ Brien). The term Muslim has been secured ambiguously as a racial rather than a religious trope. The anti-Semitic foundations of contemporary racism are recycled in anxious commentary on the specific varieties of corruption introduced by Islam and the treacherous, “cultural Marxists” who use it as a Trojan horse (Nagle, “What the Alt-right is Really All About”). There is much more to say about each of the bloc’s constitutive elements and about the roles of race-thinking, xenology and culture-talk in their mutual articulation, but that detailed survey must await another occasion.

Scholarly and political opinion is deeply divided about how to evaluate the threats they present. When discussing fascist ideas, there is always a danger that critics end up taking them more seriously than their adherents do. Further difficulties arise because, so far, a lot of the critical analysis of this movement has been conducted online. Angela Nagle’s book *Kill All Normies* is a useful if limited primer (Poulter). The theoretical and historical framing of that work is underdeveloped. The resulting limitations can be compensated for by drawing upon the valuable insights such as those supplied by the German philosopher, Byung-Chul Han, whose recent succession of short books has proved illuminating both as an ethico-political inquiry and as a provocative treatment of the contemporary media ecologies on which this movement has relied for amplification and legitimacy.

² See Mike Wendling’s *Alt Right: From 4chan to the White House*.

³ Primo Levi draws attention to the tense relationship between fascists and their imitators at the end of his final book *The Drowned and The Saved*.

Han's work establishes that we have moved decisively beyond the firmly analog, mass-cultural world that defined the limits of propaganda in the era dominated by Freud's notorious double nephew, Edward Bernays (Tye). He suggests that we are being delivered quietly into the clutches of algorithmic political culture and predictive analytics which have made human behaviour predictable for the first time (Han, *In the Swarm*). That epochal change demands a more elaborate understanding of the relationship between information, communication and power than anything that Machiavelli, Foucault and their various successors have been able to provide.⁴

The intellectual origins of the alt right lie in a dizzyingly wide range of revolutionary-conservative and fascist thinkers. Its own advocates cite the influences of Oswald Spengler, Henry Mencken, Julius Evola, Ludwig Von Mises, Hans Hermann-Hoppe and the individualist libertarian Murray Rothbard. In the US context, the movement's caste of organic intellectuals has acknowledged the influence of the "paleoconservatives" who revised the emphasis placed by neoconservatives on foreign policy. It is also claimed that the French New Right have supplied an important source of inspiration (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos).

The movement draws heavily upon the commercial and technological clout of self-styled "neoreactionaries" who boast of extensive connections in Silicon Valley. Other contributors favour the accelerationist, neo-fascist and occult, semi-academic critics of bourgeois democracy and equality who have grown weary of indicting the hollow liberal pieties that maintain the official, institutional structures of power. This vocal substrate draws upon the dubious legacies of thinkers like Georges Bataille and Carl Schmitt as well as a techno-orientalist sublime discovered in the exciting possibility that states will be shrunk down to minimal proportions and run as corporations with the aid of AI technology. This "neo-cameralist" dream is larded with a gleeful anti-humanism and a fervent racism now routinely and blandly re-described as "human biodiversity" and "ethno-nationalism." The would-be Magi of the movement are led online by the failed academic philosopher Nick Land (Haider) and others who have, in turn, been influenced by "Mencius Moldbug," a prominent techno-fogey who draws inspiration from some of the more obscure works penned by Victorian England's theorists of imperial domination and has been lauded for it by President Trump (Noys). The poetics of H. P. Lovecraft are combined with deep-ecological fantasies to form a loudly-trumpeted "dark enlightenment."

How all this is connected to Trump's presidency also needs to be discussed in depth. His electoral campaign was a watershed because it gave a stamp of approval to the previously unspeakable nostrums of the racist, neofascist and ultra-nationalist right. As a result, a Trump-centred argument about the character of this movement may be both attractive and easy, but it is not very useful. It tends to reinstate a simpler, stabler moral and political environment that should be regarded with suspicion in the fluid communicative ecology we inhabit.

The links between the old right and the emergent alt right are still either inchoate or brittle. Some fellow travellers oppose Islam vociferously but are likely to shrink from the openly anti-semitic chanting, automatic weapons and flaming torches that were beamed around the world from the Summer 2017 rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Not all the gamers, ironists and trolls who found a precious quantum of community on the 4-Chan board (all doubtless habituated to a "beta-male" existence in the basement of the parental home) want to be allied with the gun-toting belligerents and irony-free rituals of the red-state militia-atti.

New fodder for the movement is being provided by a youthful, proselytising cohort of influential Youtubers, bloggers and vloggers drawn from across the world. In Britain, we find Paul Joseph Watson and the Scot Millennial Woes. They are allied with the Swede Henrik Palmgren, the Canadian Lauren Southern, Lana Lokteff and even the gamer, Pew-Die-Pie. These actors may, in future, be amenable to commercial pressures from the platforms they rely on to reach their numerous subscribers. They are likely to be tested further by divisions arising from the movement's lack of unanimity with regard to gender relations. Similarly, the appeal of US' fake news information warriors like Alex Jones may be limited by the parochialism of their discourse which, its love of metaphysical and generic whiteness aside, has translation problems in places

⁴ See also David Patrikarakos's *War In 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in The Twenty-First-Century* and James Williams's *Stand out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*.

where firearms are less popular as indices of political liberty and race war seems more remote than it does in the USA.

The English journalist Carole Cadwalladr has shown how, as it feeds a political movement with an unprecedented transnational topography, the technological infrastructure of this network raises a host of juridical and legal problems for sovereign national states. Though the machinery is still unevenly developed and deployed, have no doubt that the alt right are ahead in gaming the Facebook and Google algorithms that place authoritative and emotionally-charged propaganda repeatedly on the screens of the vulnerable minority that can affect the outcome of electoral processes by being open to changing its mind. Theresa Hong, a key practitioner responsible for scripting Trump's Facebook posts during his electoral campaign, suggests that his tech advisors have written a new psychographical playbook for electoral campaigning which their political opponents have yet to even understand.⁵ In Europe, the damage being done to democratic political culture is far from only electoral. The centre of political gravity is being shifted to the right, and what is considered respectable and responsible political conduct has been redefined.

It is worth repeating that all of these forces intersect in and rely upon the political ontology of race. They oppose political correctness and multiculturalism and use the disputed issue of free speech relentlessly to alter the limits of what can be said publicly, but those are secondary issues. This racial momentum will not be arrested by the tactics used in the past to fight back against its predecessors. The alt right leadership style themselves as Gramscians and Leninists (Nagle, *Kill All Normies* 53; Kilpatrick 14). They intend to play a long game. They have begun to make nests inside elite educational establishments such as my old place of employment, the London School of Economics (Barnes).

The professional news media has been particularly inept at educating itself about the specific dangers posed by illiberal political forces that aim to grow their movement by lying and dissembling. The mainstream has not worked out how to handle these seductive, racist voices without amplifying them and increasing their reach. The attention economy that frames these public encounters makes shocking and provocative statements much more valuable than quiet and sober reflection. In the epoch of "fake news," the truth content of statements is therefore irrelevant most of the time. Other considerations are much more significant.

The legacies of fascism now arrive in our lives from so many different directions simultaneously that the concept has lost much of the analytical, political and moral weight that it acquired in the later twentieth century. The concept of racism has also fallen into disrepute as a result of overuse and trivialisation. Today's would-be anti-racists generally prefer a vocabulary exported from the USA and centred on deliberately jarring terms like antiblackness and decoloniality. Routine activist chatter about black and brown bodies, the premium to be placed upon self-care, and the duty to develop intersectional approaches, suggests that the poetry of social transformation has been flattened out and the agenda of liberation curtailed by a disregard for language that is associated with unbridled enthusiasm for generic forms of identity. Communicative rationality is being squeezed so that it can fit the minimal space provided by soundbites and hashtags, tweets and memes, likes and follows. Political sentiment is hostage to narcissism and nihilism.

An essentially *docile*, computer-mediated solidarity may be becoming the norm for activists, but new digital links arise with the transmission of spectacular horrors and the mainstreamed choreography of black resistance. Those network technologies often create nothing more than the mirage of a movement. On screen, racism, capitalism and militarism appear intractable, overwhelming. Off-screen, large-scale mobilisations can occur swiftly but are likely to evaporate just as fast. In the universe of time-line media, a click here and "like" there may secure the requisite hit of dopamine, but they leave an ailing world essentially untouched.⁶ Meanwhile, the structural inequalities that derive from institutional racism stagnate or appear to worsen. Giving voice to alternative and oppositional ways of living and thinking becomes progressively more difficult. Fatigue, frustration and anxiety take hold. The black radical tradition is routinely invoked, especially by its north American custodians, but it is usually a depthless inventory.

⁵ http://content.blubrry.com/mycampaigncoach/Theresa_Hong_Interview-8_2_17_12_31_AM.mp3 (accessed 2nd September 2018)

⁶ See Marcus Gilroy Ware's *Filling the Void* and James Bridle's *New Dark Age*.

History retreats to become a mere backstory, sparsely populated by sparkling, celebrity icons: a deified Audrey Lorde, a messianic James Baldwin. These problems are compounded by attempts to revive analyses and strategies that were produced to operate only in one remote set of circumstances and fail to retain any purchase in contemporary historical, political and cultural conditions.

Refugees and the Politics of Human Salvage

The recent UNHCR annual report showed that our planet boasts 65 million displaced people. Millions of refugees have arrived in Europe. Thousands more have died en route. In 2018, the data suggested that the number of fatalities occurring in transit had declined while the proportion of travellers at risk of death was rising sharply.

A higher proportion of people are dying at sea, with one death for every 18 persons who arrived in Europe via the central Mediterranean route between January and July this year (2018) compared to one death for every 42 in the same period in 2017. (UNHCR)

This history of maritime flight foregrounds the varying value assigned to supposedly different varieties of human life. It can, therefore, be made to resonate with the earlier forced movement of Africans into the reified condition of enslaved negroes: the human fuel that catalysed the modern economic magic of European capitalism. At the contemporary end of the same historical arc, we find Africans, Afghanis, Iraqis, Syrians and others fleeing war and climate change. They are now likely to be represented as waste people—human waste—that inhabits an attenuated middle passage: contained, encamped and lodged in spaces of exception that may be inside but are more often found beyond the reach of national states. Those zones are inhabited by displaced people considered as denizens rather than citizens. Their inhabitants are hostage to the contingencies of loosely-regulated local authorities and NGOs that, despite their name, are an integral part of the neoliberal governmental apparatus: charitable, outsourced and sub-subcontracted.

If these fugitives reach Europe, the patterns of segregation and conflict that await them do not straightforwardly reproduce the US patterns that were rooted in the nomos of continental slavery. In London, the horrors of Grenfell Tower revealed that a different segregation can operate more by wealth than by racial hierarchy alone. The radical geographer, Danny Dorling has for example shown that Britain's spatial division is often more vertical than it is horizontal. Updated conceptions of class antagonism and racialised inequality are urgently required if we are to comprehend these variations.

Cut Britain up horizontally rather than by neighbourhood, and you do find minority-majority areas. For example above the fifth floor of all housing in England and Wales, a minority of children are white. Most children growing up in the tower blocks of London and Birmingham—the majority of children “living in the sky” in Britain—are black. (Dorling)⁷

Humanity Compassion and Life in Common

In many parts of Europe, political opinion has expressed compassion for the plight of incoming refugees and asylum seekers. Those responses are fragile, but it is important to appreciate that there have been many generous and humane responses to what is often only remote suffering. Those humane gestures coexist in complex ways with patterns of nationalist, racist and xenophobic hatred as well as resentments, anxieties and fears rooted in the idea that displaced people represent contagion and the contamination or corruption of previously pure and peaceful places.

The discrepancy between antipathy and sympathy is now conventionally measured on the imagined bodies of women. The relative and relational analysis of women's subordination and the integrity of feminist responses to the sex/gender arrangements of incomers have become significant questions. We cannot

⁷ See also, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: *State of the English Cities A Research Study*, Volume 2.

assume that we will agree about how they should be understood. Since the 2016 New Year’s Eve events in Cologne, the image of Asian and African men motivated by their desire to enact gross forms of violence on local white women, has become yet again a focal point for popular loathing of racialised foreigners in general and Muslims in particular. Their cultures, so we are told, are uniquely repressed, violent and sexually incontinent. How these stories are presented in the media, and the history of this intersectional menace in the activities of white-supremacist organisations are both germane to their contemporary power in the context of obsessive, absolutist talk about cultural difference.

In spite of the relentless charge of the racist and ultra-nationalist right, there are significant residues of ordinary decency. Everywhere we look, alongside the fear and resentment that punctuate the space between terrorist attacks, we discover extensive local organizing and dynamic solidarity enacted in the names of hospitality and common humanity as well as a strong desire, evident in many places, to work around expanding police power and the strictures of ruthless, high-tech securitocracy. There have been moves afoot for civil society organisations to pressurize but also to bypass government power, opposing racism and xenophobia in order to build a culture of hospitality and supportive, independent, vernacular connections with fugitives, incomers and settlers via the work of dedicated non-governmental bodies like Refugee Support as well as less formal and more fluid local coalitions and activist bodies. In the context provided by the steady ebbing of religious morality and the drift towards what the Norwegian mass murderer, Anders Brevik called “cultural Christianity.” These ethical gestures are an important part of the making of a post-secular morality centred on empathy, mutuality and generous openness to alterity. Nobody knows how long this interlude will last.

In 2017, I stood in my own neighbourhood in the aftermath of a terrorist attack watching a spontaneous groundswell of mutuality, reciprocity and togetherness while listening to those feelings of empathy being dismissed contemptuously as “white guilt” by a few young activists based elsewhere who happened to be standing close by. They had come to express their solidarity, but they did not know our area and its history. However, they felt sufficiently confident—they would probably say “empowered”—to sneer and pour scorn on the public outpouring of sympathy that transgressed every threshold of identity politics. Those paranoid responses masquerade today as sophisticated varieties of radicalism.

Of course—as we’ve seen in France—the nature of Europe’s ongoing political emergency means that many people abandon the trials of sympathy and prefer to renounce their hard-won liberties in pursuit of enhanced security. It is not clear at this point whether the networks aimed at support for refugees and undocumented incomers will be sufficient to withstand the mechanisms of criminalisation that have begun to be directed against them.

These contradictory responses appear in politics deeply divided by urgent pleas for the accommodation of cultural difference and what we might loosely call anti-racist demands for human recognition and the presumption of equal dignity. The variety of recognition being sought in emergency conditions, close to spaces of death like Grenfell Tower or in the waters off the Libyan coast, is not of a familiar philosophical variety. Charles Taylor and the others who have adapted the old approaches of Kant and Hegel have often presented recognition through a primary concern with the maintenance of dignified individual particularity—in Taylor’s terms, “authenticity.” That problem is considered only in the setting provided by liberal democracy and is often either over-identified with impossible demands for tolerance or, in the difficult translation into discussions of group rights, misconstrued as an infinite, recursive relativism.

The desire to be recognised as a human being, against the strictures of ethnic absolutism and racism, does not boil down to political conversation that can be defined by its fluent command of group identity specified according to the habits previously based upon acknowledgement of individual selfhood under eighteenth-century Europe’s rules. This desire for the illusive state of “equal dignity” operates as part of a plea for recognition not as culturally specific but as vitally and corporeally human. That demand becomes different because it is articulated *explicitly* against the forbidding specifications and structural effects of racial hierarchy. The resulting pleas are by no means always directed, nomophilically towards the attainment of rights. They appear routinely in circumstances where the acknowledgement of humanity has either been withheld or is explicitly denied, where the passage towards inclusion in species life, has been closed off by the invocation of “Man” in race-friendly, anthropological hierarchies. The bans or other

exclusionary mechanisms evident in those arrangements refer us immediately and violently to the contested limits of political communities that have been built or stratified according to the incorrigible facticity of race. Whether race is figured as natural history, as culture or as political anatomy, institutionalised racism imagines and assembles it as an absolute, division in social and political life. Human and inhuman can, it seems, always be distinguished if not by nature then by the equally formidable signatures of culture and ethnicity.

These are considered vulgar and even disruptive points to raise in polite, scholarly company. Analysis of racism is almost always ruled out of serious discussion either because its history remains deeply discomforting and has therefore been firmly repressed, or because, where its legitimacy is conceded, it can only be appreciated retrospectively and gets relegated to the past.

From that perspective, racism is considered to be over and done with. It tells Europe what it was and is no longer. If racism is discovered still to be active, its residual significance is accepted only within a narrow band of postcolonial locations, not least of which is the political and economic archive of Europe's modern expansion across the Atlantic.

I want to suggest, against that popular viewpoint, that racism remains a more significant, even a constitutive aspect, of European history. It has travelled, mutated and grown from its enlightenment roots in the same intellectual soil that yielded the idea of essential human equality but which, we should always remember, provided no significant obstacles to the exterministic consolidation of European colonies and empires. The undoing of those governmental and economic systems was a largely unacknowledged element in the creation of the EU as a political and commercial unit.⁸

The intertwined histories of race and empire, colonies and decolonisation can still furnish us with valuable analytic tools with which to come to terms with modern Europe's democratic promise as well as its limitations and pathologies. We can employ some of those resources to begin to explain how today's dismissal of vulnerable people as vermin by the influential commentators who have urged military responses to their encroachment on European sovereign territory, has become part of a powerful, popular politics in so many different national states.

The desperate, unwanted incomers who have been targeted for that violent treatment can sometimes be grudgingly admitted into the most abstract grouping of humankind. They are assigned to lower orders of existence where the problems presented by their alien attributes can be managed anthropologically as expressions of racial, ethnic and cultural difference that belong elsewhere. I am oversimplifying here. We should acknowledge significant regional and cultural variations in the intensity of attachment to race, to the norm of whiteness and to religious or ethical habits that might qualify them. The degree of humanity identified in or awarded to Europe's others fluctuates and consequently determines the quality of sympathy and/or empathy that will be expressed once the veil of alterity has been torn to reveal, unexpectedly, a needy, vulnerable human countenance beneath. That epiphany has become a more complex event because the scale upon which humanity can be imagined and encountered has been changed by the expansion of digital infrastructure. Those shocking discovery of the Other's humanity has usually been conveyed through *visual* engagement that reorganises distance and modifies the degree of intimacy involved in becoming present to each other. And yet, against what Fanon identified as the intensity of epidermalisation and its racial corporeal schema, something like a "real dialectic between ... [the] body and the world" (Fanon 112) can begin, unanticipated, to reassert itself in the politics of sympathy.

Once the epidermalised body has been perceived as the primary object of racial hierarchy, the significance of consciousness is overtaken by violent, corrective attention to the shifting significance of corporeality. At that point, ontology itself becomes a historical and social phenomenon, and thus, despite its eternal, fixed appearance, the unstable equilibrium of the racial corporeal schema can be overthrown. It will be upset and even undone if our reassertions of the "real dialectic between the body and the world" are sufficiently tenacious.

⁸ See Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson's *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*.

Antiracism Today

In Britain, diversity management imported from the corporate world has supplied government with an attractive yardstick for measuring the modernisation of key institutions. This is especially important now that nobody—not even the most committed and ideological of white supremacists—wants to admit to being a racist. The Finsbury Park terror attacker, the murderer of Jo Cox MP, even Tommy Robinson, the erstwhile leader of the EDL and UK Pegida, have all denied that they are, personally racist. This is the flimsy substance of the “alt” in the “alt-right.”

The fact that the number of unabashed and enthusiastic racists seems to have declined is one of the biggest changes to have occurred during the last few decades. The near disappearance of these pariahs needs to be accounted for historically and in a detailed way—a detour that I cannot accomplish here. It relates to the history of antiracist sentiment in popular culture, to a transition between political generations, to the after-effects of Rock Against Racism, punk and rave culture as well as to the conviviality that both derived from and remade Britain’s class dynamics as well as its gender relations.

To cut a long and complex story short, that precious outcome was what we used to call “multiculturalism” until use of that rather helpful concept was shut out from serious scholarship and demonstrably “grown up” political conversation. Proposing its rehabilitation here, requires me to make clear that I refer not to narrow, ideological or professional specifications of cultural plurality, but to the lived, sensuous practice of people disposed, generously and honestly to try and manage the conflicts that inevitably arise between them by making better communication, better translation and richer forms of mutuality, especially those based upon affinity, gender, neighbourhood, sexuality, age, common passions and shared interests rather than on violence, imagined unanimity and the comforting prescriptions ethnic absolutism.

The lack of proud, unabashed racists creates other problems which come into focus when we consider the difficulties involved in identifying and categorising racist and fascist discourse, rhetoric and argumentation. We learned painfully from the voluminous writings of the mass murderer, Anders Brevik, that it was possible to be an anti-Semite who enthused over the state of Israel. Today, neofascist movements all promote their black and brown membership as the proof that they have embarked upon a new, post-racial chapter. Tommy Robinson leads these developments with his sincere-sounding declarations that he is offended by homophobia and anti-Semitism. He warrants his opposition to Islam with a question we hear all too frequently these days resounding across the swampy, no man’s land of fading distinctions between Left and Right. “How’s it racist to oppose a fascist ideology?” he inquires innocently, winking at the swelling legions of homo-nationalists, the liberal mainstream and a sizeable contingent of feminists against fundamentalism. Readers of his autobiographical book, *Enemy of The State*, have had to interpret his exaggerated, but in many ways convincing, versions of the time-worn “some of my best mates are black” line of justification (Robinson 153).

The politics of race is evolving, and we must adapt our understanding to take its transformation into account. It corresponds in many ways to the resurgent discourse of individual uplift that has won wide appeal in a neoliberal environment where the inability to succeed in life gets regularly explained as a personal failing rather than a structural matter. In a supposedly “postracial” society, being unable to achieve wealth, status and security is frequently imagined to result from individual failure to develop the correct aspirations, resilience, standards and values.

The general intensification of inequality that has been lately evident can thus be re-interpreted. As its deeper causes remain inaccessible, inequality’s cultural manifestations provide straightforward targets for political intervention. Operating only on an interpersonal scale, rising inequality can be discounted as a result either of personal prejudice by gatekeepers or of personal failure by applicants for admission to the escalator upwards into the corporate redoubt.

Antiracism and the Politics of Sympathy

Several years ago the notorious photograph of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi's corpse on the sand at the water's edge was a landmark event in a larger spectacle of war, flight, desperation and suffering. The politics of attention is relevant again here because this history includes the growing agency of governments in the ever-closer management of what can and cannot be seen by their citizens. In several settings, the same contested visibility has become politically significant. The orchestration of emotions and the scripting of affect are now intrinsic to the moulding of popular opinion in decaying public spheres haunted by trolls and the spectre of fake news. Whether tight control over the politics of the image and the spectacle can be sustained in the age of camera-phones fuelled by African minerals, is in our hands, or rather in our pockets.

What seems more important than those epochal changes is the fact that among radicals and what is left of the Left, the ideas of empathy and sympathy have been allowed to sink into disrepute. This trend seems to be particularly evident among academics—whose moral and political perspectives in the era after critique, tend to reject what Hannah Arendt described as the politics of pity and have been tempered instead by the effects of the anti-humanist training bequeathed to them by the second half of the twentieth century.

One of Britain's most celebrated feminist scholars seemed to speak for a disoriented generation when her busy Twitter feed dismissed sympathy altogether as an "imperialist notion." On the other hand, in a televised Christmas message to the British people, Abdullah Kurdi, the grieving father of the children whose bodies had so eventfully been washed ashore on Turkey's Aegean coast, pleaded for "just a little bit of sympathy from you." That request asked his audience to consider whether it is possible to develop solidarity without sympathy or to build an anti-racist movement without any prospect of empathic repair (Gobodo Madikizela). In the meantime, we need to know how hostility to sympathy came to be so widespread among avowed radicals that it could function as a measure of their interpretative sophistication and ethical probity? Even if compassion serves the psychic needs of the remote observer of the horrors that result from decisions taken by our unrestrainable governments, are its practical results necessarily tainted when they touch the victims and offer them shelter, sustenance and warmth?

This discussion has a long history that became inextricably entangled with the racial divisions that resulted from colonial and imperial statecraft as well as the politics of print and oppositional publishing during the nineteenth-century movements to abolish slavery and protect indigenous peoples from genocide (Wood). But there is more at stake than the just scale upon which moral and political judgements are to be made. Near or far, close or distant. The geometry of suffering is not a Euclidean phenomenon.

Before and after the colonial period, struggles against racism and racial hierarchy have contributed directly and consistently to contested conceptions of the human. They valorised forms of humanity that were not amenable to colour-coding and complicated the understanding of human sameness and species being, of life in common.

So, against the argument conventionally made by those who believe that racial tolerance and human fellow feeling are insubstantial things in the face of underlying and untamable natural differences that favour evolutionary mechanisms like the uneven distribution of trust between members of various racial groups or hostile responses to the phenotype of the other, I want to identify the battle against racism in ethics, epistemology and political ontology as of fundamental concern.

That battle involves more than the recalibration of the concept of recognition and its supplementation by the idea of relationality. It has a bearing upon the prospect of encountering humanity outside of or beyond its racial figurations, though not in its post-human forms. The Jamaican Sylvia Wynter is one of several postcolonial thinkers who, working with a palette of Fanonian concepts, have spoken of the need for a re-engagement with the human after the death of man. We are not yet postracial, but we need ideas of what a world shorn of racial hierarchy and inequality will be like if we are to sustain our movement and not become disoriented in the face of the challenge posed by the "alt-right."

Struggles against racism have sometimes been utopian in character, yet they have shaped a distinctive philosophical perspective. It is rooted in the fragile universals and radical interdependency that first came into focus on the insurgent edges of colonial contact zones where the brutality of racialised statecraft

was repudiated, and cosmopolitan varieties of care and conviviality unexpectedly took shape across the boundaries of culture, civilisation, language and technology.

This type of response should be sharply differentiated from the armoured humanitarianism that currently dominates our geopolitical environment. It can be traced into the nineteenth century where, alongside the resistance offered against colonial power by indigenous peoples, we encounter critics of the colonial enterprise who operated from inside the colonisers’ own national states. There were dissenters, protesters and other advocates for the humanity and the liberty of colonised peoples. Sometimes they articulated what we can still recognise today as an antiracist politics. Their opposition to the racial order of empires was often, though by no means exclusively, a religious reaction which recognised imperialism and colonialism to be fundamentally belligerent and therefore opened into a broader advocacy for the cause of *peace*. At other times, there was a close association with Feminist politics premised upon the interconnection of all systems of oppression and on the potential unity of all oppressed and exploited peoples.

If we wish to understand the dead spots in the rickety structure of the *liberal* humanitarian tradition, and if we wish to make sense of the recurrence of its old weaknesses which have been apparent to critics for a very long time, if we want to restore socialism and feminism or to salvage the Left, there is no choice now but to turn our attention towards the problems of racism, raciology and racial hierarchy. This is to be done not because it exhausts the inventory of humankind’s moral failure, but because that necessary confrontation can provide important critical resources from which a richer grasp of humanity might be assembled and a new reparative project conceived.

We must be able critically to analyse the practical institutionalisation of race hierarchy in governmental power and prepared to understand its complex articulation both to nationalist thought and to the political and juridical architecture of national states.

The slaves from many different places who were exchanged for guns, rum, cloth, salt cod and other commodities and currencies recoiled from their own brutal reification. They became, as Fanon put it, objects among other objects, human commodities circulating among other commodities in a new, oceanic economy governed by unprecedented legal and procedural instruments. We should know by now that their various descendants inside and outside the fortifications of overdevelopment have inherited elements of the slaves’ irreducibly modern predicament, not least of which was their vulnerability.

Not long ago, a British prime minister referred to the Mediterranean refugees huddled in what we’d been told to call their “Jungle” settlement at Calais, as “a swarm.” This was a further sign of the salience of the struggle over the human I have been trying to identify. David Cameron glossed his rhetorical choice by saying:

I was not intending to dehumanise, I don’t think it does dehumanise people. Look at what Britain’s response has been. We have made sure that we sent the Royal Navy flagship to the Mediterranean which has rescued thousands of people, saved thousands of lives. Britain’s aid budget is helping to stabilise the countries from which these (migrants) have come.⁹

Cameron’s dog-whistled projection was inflected by earlier racist discourses that had been aimed at incoming, post-1945 black settlers and, in the late nineteenth century, at fugitive Jews. However, the hyperbolic presentation of those drowning refugees as an elemental, existential threat to our way of life was so peculiar, so neurotic and so duplicitous that it demanded uncomfortable answers to the question of what the civilisation Cameron and company had vowed to defend might actually entail. That civilisation is not, in fact, a European or Christian phenomenon but a narrowly national affair. It coincides only with the archipelagic body of the United Kingdom.

The rampart of the sea has done its historic work. The “Wogs” do, after all, begin at Calais, and as the vote against membership demonstrated, the misguided efforts of the EU are themselves constructed as an alien, de-civilising influence, levering boatloads of menacing jihadis into no-longer-Great Britain’s formerly quiet and peaceful islands. This nationalist myopia is bound to conflict with the planetary risks of biomedical catastrophe and the menace of climate-change which, as the seas rise, can be expected entirely

⁹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/11804861/David-Cameron-says-describing-migrants-as-a-swarm-wasnt-dehumanising.html> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33716501>

to redraw the familiar parameters of economic life and political interests.

I hope that as we encounter those conditions, a resurgent antiracism will help to generate a cautious, post-humanist humanism capable of grasping multispecies relationships between human and nonhuman. If successful, this will be distinguishable from other, previous varieties of humanism by being made, as Aimé Césaire put it while contemplating the wreckage and waste of world war two, “to the measure of the world” (Césaire 56). That fragile alternative is today as precious as it is elusive. My hope is that it can be excavated from the unique conceptual space in which combative antiracist humanism has repeatedly confronted colonialism, racism and nationalism.

That contested location can be triangulated in various ways. Efforts to map it must include the cruel rhetoric of the various Fascists who denounced their victims as vermin in order to make them easier to exterminate. From there, it is only a short hop towards the idiotic white supremacy calculatedly voiced by populist political leaders in the form of racist common-sense: as hateful as it is gleeful.

So, in the spirit of humanism’s re-enchantment, let us seek a different perspective on the trials of European culture than the angles of vision offered to us by Farage, Wilders, Le Pen, Petry, Hopkins, Halla-aho, Orban, Åkesson, and their ilk. In other words, let us try to see whether that civilisation has been able to sustain and maintain itself or whether we are now condemned only to a choice between different varieties of barbarism. Opportunities for an experiment in the banality of good are all around us.

In conclusion, I will explore one of them briefly. I have spent the last couple of years collecting and comparing contemporary tales of drowning and shipwreck. I want to turn not to the many moving stories of heroic action at sea that might serve briefly to affirm the epiphany of a new humanism born from the challenges of maritime rescue and salvage, but to a related, much sadder case of Pateh Sabally, a twenty-one-year-old refugee from Gambia who committed suicide by drowning himself in Venice’s Grand Canal in January 2017. That very public death was investigated by magistrates after a videotape of it was placed online. It was notable because it had been watched and recorded by a sizable crowd composed of locals and tourists from outside Italy. Some of that crowd were said to have been jeering at him as he drowned and making derogatory, anti-immigrant comments. One spectator was, for example, heard shouting the word “Africa.”

Sabally was not the survivor of a wrecked ship. He had ended up at the Italian port of Pozzallo two years earlier after the overloaded boat that had carried him from Africa was intercepted by the authorities. The security cameras at Venice’s Santa Lucia station yielded a recording of him sitting on the steps overlooking the Grand Canal ten minutes before he was spotted floundering in the water.

He appears to have jumped in voluntarily, probably as a response to the failure of his petition to the Italian government to be allowed to claim asylum and remain in the country. The local media said Sabally had previously been given a temporary permit [*Permesso di Soggiorno*] to stay in Italy but had travelled into Switzerland seeking work so that he could move closer to family in Mexico. He had then been returned to Italy by officials.

He was thrown several life preservers by the crew of a *Vaporetto* which approached him but does not seem to have made any attempt to use those devices to save himself. Apparently, the crew of those craft are expressly forbidden to leave them even to engage in a rescue. *La Nuova di Venezia e Mestre* reported that after viewing various videos of the event, the authorities would bring charges against a 35-year-old driver of a *motoscafo* belonging to the *Casinò di Venezia*, who had passed close to the drowning man but had not stopped to offer him any assistance. That failure to provide aid apparently violated the city’s codes of navigation. The facts of the case remain obscure even if we can be sure that the Grand Canal is not exactly the high seas.

Dino Basso, a local official in the Italian association of lifeguards, said: “I don’t want to blame anyone, but maybe something more could have been done to save him” (Snowdon). While Venice’s mayor, Luigi Brugnaro admonished anybody seeking to politicise the case and announced that funeral costs would be met from the city’s municipal fund and the body sent back to Africa.

Perhaps the basic philosophical kernel to be extracted from this tragedy which unfolded against a backdrop of riots in Italy’s detention and holding centres, is not the old Levinasian lesson about how a primal relation with and responsibility for alterity precedes ontology, but rather that those reactions

institutionalised in the law of the sea have ceased to operate, especially where the encounter with a drowning fellow human is mediated by a phone camera that occupies the hands of the potential rescuer and turns the drowning to which they refuse to bear witness, into an internet spectacle.

This example can be made part of a wider struggle to re-enchant humanism by endowing a stronger sense of *reciprocal* humanity in Europe’s proliferating encounters with vulnerable otherness. There is more to be salvaged from the water than wreckage and corpses. Europe’s relationship with its own shrinking civilisation is at stake in the decision to intervene as well as in the later lives of the survivors.

Similar lessons about the rhetoric of humanity and the need for new humanisms can doubtless be learned from other instances in which the issues of humanity and alterity have been refigured in emergency or disaster conditions by bold, generous acts of solidarity. They might also be considered to have a philosophical significance discernable outside of nationality, ethnicity, faith or racial hierarchy. It appears that the re-enchantment of the human, implicitly proposed here in abstract terms, is already underway.

These examples can provide an opportunity to enrich our understanding of the changes that characterise the postcolonial world. But there is even more than that at stake. Stories like these help us to find out which differences will be different enough to matter in a neoliberal era that is emphatically “diverse” and indulges its voracious appetite for exotica in inverse proportion to the ebbing of democracy and its vexed histories of hospitality and cosmopolitan hope.

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Research Article

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Black Women's Transnational Activism and the World Council of Churches

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0020>

Received August 19, 2018; accepted October 9, 2018

Abstract: This article considers the internationalisation and institutionalisation of the fight against European and global racism and sexism within the World Council of Churches in the 1980s and 1990s. It presents the ways in which the Women Under Racism sub-programme, the SISTERS network that emerged from it, as well as their respective coordinators—the Afro-American activist Jean-Sindab and the Afro-Brazilian activist Marília Schüller –facilitated encounters between Black-European women. In turn, this paper analyses Black-European women's agency within these institutional and transnational antiracist and gendered spaces. I argue that the WUR and the SISTERS network were used by Black-European female activists to meet each other and other women of colour, and to voice and share their experiences publicly. These international gatherings also stimulated a transnationalisation and a Europeanisation of their activism, while being spaces where they affirmed multiple and overlapping identifications.

Keywords: internationalism, Europeanisation, antiracism, Women Under Racism, SISTERS

Introduction

A growing number of historians of the Black and African diaspora in Europe (Bressey; Florvil 88; Perry and Thurman; Kelly and Tuck 3-4; Angelo 18-19; Campt 64) are stressing the need to consider the connected and transnational dimensions that shaped the lives and agency of Black people, including the impact of the European integration. With regards to the latter, social scientists (Monforte 6; Imig 916-17) have been analysing the impact of political Europeanisation on social movements from the 1980s onwards. As much as their findings reveal that Europeanisation leads to an extension of the scope of local social movements rather than the abandonment of the local in favour of the international, less attention has been paid to the gendered aspects of such processes, as well as the role of transnational institutions aside of the European institutions and NGOs. On the other hand, a number of scholars of women's contemporary history (Florvil 88; Nijhawan 12-13; Sluga 61; Barthélémy 18; Johnson-Odim 51; Materson 36; de Haan 179; Rupp 1571-72) have demonstrated how and why women—both White and of colour—internationalise and institutionalise gender issues, as well as the impact of such activities on their activism and collective identifications. Within this particular scholarship, Florvil's research on Afro-German women's organising the Fifth Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Summer Institute in 1991 is, to this day, one of the few historical accounts on continental Black-European women's politics of belonging and organising transnational political spaces tackling racism against Black women in Europe in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Building upon these three research trends, my aim is to present a historical analysis of Black women's agency within the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the 1980s and 1990s, with special attention to the WCC's sub-programme Women Under Racism and the SISTERS network that came out of it. I start my article

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with a presentation of the WUR which, as I will show, was established as a radical political institutionalised space for racially oppressed women, inclusive of all religious and non-religious beliefs. Through its mission, its global articulation of women's oppressions, and the work of Jean Sindab, the WUR reached out to and attracted Black-European female activists. In my second section, I demonstrate how the WUR was, in fact, a facilitator for Black-European women's encounters and how these women seized the opportunities of international consultations and workshops to voice their local experiences, make collective claims contesting "Fortress Europe" amongst other issues, and to affirm a number of overlapping identifications. My last section looks at how Black-European women's transnational agency was further encouraged and enacted within the SISTERS network under the leadership of Marilia Schüller, yet affected after 1994 due to a lack of resources.

I draw most of my findings from a contextualised interpretation of written and visual archival material, namely the WUR and SISTERS archives kept at the WCC in Geneva, as well as Jean Sindab's personal papers kept at the Schomburg Center in New York. Both collections are open to the public, and contain personal correspondence which I tried to make the best ethical use of by informing the concerned people when I felt it was needed. In addition, I also interviewed Marion Kraft and Marilia Schüller by email and used their written replies.

In this paper, I argue that the WUR and SISTERS facilitated Black-European women's encounters and transnational activism as long as they had the financial and human resources to do so. I also contend that Sindab and Schüller played key roles in their own respective ways to attract and inspire Black-European women within these spaces. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that WUR and SISTERS participated in Europeanising Black-European women's activism by facilitating their encounters with each other and their claim-makings against "Fortress Europe." Finally, I stress that although I decided to categorise these women as "Black-Europeans" for the purpose of this article, their interventions and claim-making show that, rather than invoking a fixed Black identity, these women embraced multiple and overlapping identifications which they alternatively affirmed.

The WUR, a Radical Political Platform for Women Combating the Triple Oppression of Race, Sex and Class

The WUR was established as a radical sub-programme within the WCC's Program to Combat Racism (PCR). The WCC was founded in 1948 with the aim to gather Christian Churches in a federation in order to promote ecumenism and intervene within societies. Created within the organisation in 1970, the PCR had been the result of the revolutionary spirit of the late 1960s. Indeed, representatives from armed struggles against colonisation and Apartheid, as well as from the Black Power movement in the USA and the UK, had taken part in its founding conference in Notting Hill in 1969 and had contributed in shaping its mission (Ohene-Nyako, "Femmes de couleur" 33-34; Welch 876-877). Consequently, the PCR's primary focus was on "white racism" ("An Ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism" 4)¹ and it answered demands for reparations through financially supporting antiracist liberation organisations (independently of their religious beliefs), through the creation of a Special Fund, and by helping a number of groups which openly resorted to armed struggle such as the African National Congress (ANC) or the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), to name a few.

Although antiracist and antisexist Black women such as South-African Brigalia Bam (at the time director of the WCC's Women's Unit) and Sierra-Leonean Rena Karefa-Smart had taken part in its foundation, the PCR did not consider gender in its articulation of racism until growing pressure within its constituency in the 1970s (Ohene-Nyako, "Femmes de couleur" 31-33, 42-50). Then, in the summer of 1980, women of colour who attended the WCC World Consultation on Racism in Amsterdam demanded the establishment of a programme within the PCR that would primarily focus on racism such as it particularly affected women:

¹ In the PCR's definition, "White racism" encompassed the historical, economic and political process undertaken by White people to oppress people of colour.

Racism has been singled out because it is primarily the first conscious oppression that they face... Restrictions imposed upon them by their sex is situated within a more positive framework and the negative aspects emerge later in a process of conscientisation. (Sindab, "Women Under Racism and the Churches Decade" 1)

This position was an outcome of debates from the 1970s onwards within local women's movements, the UN Women's international conference in Mexico in 1975, as well as within WCC gatherings such as the conference "Sexism in the Seventies" in 1974 and the 5th WCC General Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 (Ohene-Nyako, "Femmes de couleur" 42-45). While voicing the lack of visibility and power racially oppressed women faced in comparison to racially oppressed men in the fight against racism, a number of women rejected the argument of White-Western radical feminists who considered that the main oppression against women was based on their sex. Women of colour also criticised White socialist feminists for their lack of acknowledgement of their racial privilege. Instead, they argued that they faced multiple oppressions as women but also as members of racially, economically, culturally and politically oppressed communities. Therefore, their struggle could not limit itself to an oppression based on sex but had to encompass their communities at large.

Women inside the WUR thus located their struggle within the general fight against racism, while seeking autonomy from racially oppressed men they felt dominated the terms of the debate and did not consider the particularities of racism such as faced by women. In the 1980s onwards, this particular position contributed to the theorisation and generalisation of the notion of triple oppression that regarded racism, sexism and classism as three oppressions that worked together, amongst other forms of domination. For instance, at its 6th General Assembly in Vancouver in July 1983, the WCC recognised that:

The interlinkages among various manifestations of injustice and oppression are becoming more and more clear. Racism, sexism, class domination, the denial of people's rights, caste oppression, are all woven together, like a spider's web. Singly and together they are at the root of many injustices which cause much suffering and death. ("Struggling for Justice and Human Dignity" 31)

As the WUR's theoretical scope developed, its actions also became more significant, namely after the workshop it held during the NGO's Forum during the UN Third World Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985. Encouraged by the level of attendance at the workshop and taking notice of the tensions between women of colour and Western-White radical and socialist feminists on the question of priorities at the conference ("Women's Forum, Nairobi" 3), the WUR restated its aim and mission as a platform that could "...play an important role here by giving more information and enabling encounters of women through visits, workshops and seminars" ("Women's Forum, Nairobi" 1). The appointment of the WUR's first coordinator, Jean Sindab, further boosted the WUR's activities and its understanding of triple oppression.

Sindab was born in Cleveland in 1944 and grew up in New York as a dark-skin Black woman with five siblings raised by their single mother and grandmother in a low-income household. After working as a secretary in the 1960s and aged 26, she decided to expand her education and thus intellectual liberation by undertaking a BA degree in African and socio-economic history at Hunter College in the context of the Black Studies movement. Through her studies as well as her travels to West Africa in the early 1970s, Sindab developed a pan-African and Third-Worldist internationalism which she further expanded through her graduate and postgraduate research (Ohene-Nyako, "Femmes de couleur" 67-69). In 1981, her internationalism led to her involvement in the fight against Apartheid as she became the first Black female director of the Washington Office on Africa (WOA). The WOA was one of the organisations funded by the PCR's Special Fund, and its aim was to lobby the American government for the imposition of economic sanctions against the South-African state. Thus, Sindab's position at the WOA helped her develop strong campaigning, organisational, and public speaking skills. In parallel, she was a consultant for the UN which furthered her knowledge of international organisations and led her to travel extensively to Southern Africa where she networked and acquired field knowledge. Finally, although Sindab's activism was mainly focused on antiracism, her consciousness of sexism and the gendered aspects of racism grew in the 1980s as an outcome of readings and encounters with Black and African women.

By illustrating a fist, the message of such iconography symbolically linked the WUR with radical and revolutionary movements from the 1960s and 1970s onwards (Ohene-Nyako, “Femmes de couleur...” 88). Not only was this radicality and politicisation enabled by the fact that the WUR was part of the PCR which itself was deeply politicised, but they also expressed the activism of its constituents. As I will demonstrate in my next section, it is in this particular radical, gendered and internationalist space that Black-European women met each other and encountered other women globally with which they shared common positionalities and experiences.

The Fight Against Racism and Sexism in Europe through the WUR

Although racism in Europe had been discussed at the PCR's founding consultation in 1969, it is only in the 1980s that the programme acted against it. Racism and xenophobia in the media, by politicians and at an interpersonal level had been ongoing issues for Black people in Western Europe but were resurging at an alarming rate. The situation was exacerbated by the economic recession and the passing of national anti-immigration legislation. These exclusionary laws were enacted at the same time that France, Germany and the Benelux States consented to the free movement of their citizens under the Schengen Agreement in 1985, which was followed by EEC governments agreeing similarly in 1986 under the Single European Act which scheduled the implementation of a single market in 1992. Consequently, fears were that inter-EEC movement and immigration would become even more restricted for migrants and people of colour who were residents or born in those countries but who were not citizens.

In reaction, Black-European women contested racism and whiteness through publishing and forming antiracist groups. In the UK, for example, Black women were producing knowledge through books and journals on their particular struggles as women facing at least racism and sexism (Thomlinson 432; Ohene-Nyako, “The Heart of the Race” 249). Moreover, they organised against racism in employment, housing and social services, as well as against police abuses and the criminalisation of Black people (Swaby 12; Sudbury 9-11). In Germany, women of African descent were at the forefront of a process of Black consciousness raising which led to the foundation of the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD) in 1985, followed by the publication of the Black women's book *Farbe Bekennen* in 1986 and the formation of the Afro-German women's group ADEFRA (El-Tayeb 471-473). In France and in the Netherlands too, Black women collectives and initiatives were created such as the Mouvement pour la défense des droits des femmes noires [Movement for the defence of Black women; MODEFEN], Sisters Outsider, and Flamboyant, amongst others. Black women from these countries also produced knowledge on racism, either at a grassroots level like in the case of the French Coordination des femmes noires [Black Women's Coordination] or within the women's movement and academia. A good example is the case of Philomena Essed whose article “Racisme en féminisme” [Racism and Feminism] in 1982 denounced the racism within the Dutch feminist movement, and whose 1984 book *Alledaags Racisme* [Everyday Racism] contested the Dutch denial of racism (Essed, “Naming the Unnameable” 119-120).

Although all these initiatives were set in a local context, they took inspiration from transnational influences either through Black lesbian feminist internationalism like in the case of German and Dutch encounters with Audre Lorde (Bolaki and Boeck 10); or travels and readings of literature by radical and feminist people of colour (Essed, “Naming the Unnameable...” 126; Opitz et al. 109, 208). Moreover, as much as Black-European women organised as Black women, they continuously encountered and coalesced with other racially oppressed groups, which led to overlapping collective identifications, one being political blackness that was embraced by people in Britain, the Netherlands and Germany. Overall, political blackness considered “Black” to be a strategic identity emphasising the shared experience of racial and ethnic oppression rather than African ancestry.

Thus, female antiracist activism, internationalism, and cross-ethnic identifications were features of Black-European women's organising when the WUR called its Global meeting in Geneva in November 1986. But despite this activism, only two of them attended the consultation. Among the 20 participants were Janet Boateng, a Black-British social worker and Councillor in Lambeth who gave a presentation on Black women

in Britain, and Lydie Dooh-Bunya, a Black-French feminist and president of the MODEFEN. Marilia Schüller who would become the WUR's coordinator in January 1992, also took part in the consultation and gave a presentation of the Afro-Brazilian liberation movement of that time. Although restricted to the British and French contexts, the Geneva consultation still facilitated Black-European women's transnational activism in at least three aspects.

First, it brought them together with racially oppressed women from different countries, socioeconomic backgrounds and occupations, whom they may not have met if such financial and institutional resources had not been facilitated. Second, participants were given individual speaking slots to voice their specific experiences of oppression and activism with a relatively understanding audience which shared the experience of struggling against multiple oppressions.

For example, Boateng presented a number of issues faced by women of African descent and Black communities at large in Britain despite antiracist legislation ("We the Women, We the World" 64-69). She detailed the state of unemployment, economic exploitation and housing especially in a context of economic recession, deindustrialisation and social cuts. She also explained how Black women and their communities were targets in their physical, sexual and mental health, namely through practices of gynaecological neglect, police brutality, anti-immigration policies, and everyday racism and sexism. Overall, Boateng argued from a Marxist standpoint that Black women's labour and anti-Black racism in Britain were consequences of the country's history of economic exploitation through slavery and colonisation. This kind of Marxist articulation was not an isolated case as testified by the argumentation in the seminal book *The Heart of the Race* released a year before the WUR's global consultation (Bryan et al. 2-3). After pointing out to the issues faced by Black women and their communities, Boateng also emphasised the history of resistance of Black working-women as well as contemporary initiatives such as the launch of small businesses, community child-caring facilities, and defence committees against police abuse. This, I argue, was a way of saying that Black working-women were not passive in the face of racism, but that they took initiatives, fought against oppression – amongst themselves and their larger communities – and had a history resistance and coalition building they could draw from. Boateng concluded in expressing her hope that "...this consultation [would be] part of the process. ("We the Women, We the World" 69), thus emphasising the importance she gave to international and transnational spaces in the fight for social justice.

As exemplified by Boateng's intervention, not only did participants use the opportunity of the consultation to share information about their local struggles, but interventions of this type also enabled the circulation of knowledge produced by the participants themselves without which the consultation would have lacked in content. Moreover, it additionally stimulated their constant self-reflection on their own struggle in relation to the ones faced by their counterparts.

A third dimension in which the WUR consultation facilitated Black-European women's transnational activism was by stimulating collective claims and identifications as demonstrated by the Action Agenda they directed at the member Churches of the WCC and the institution itself. In the first section, participants articulated collective demands based on their common geography. Thus, migrant, Black, Sinti-Roma and Sami attendants endorsed a collective identity as "we the women of Europe" through which they demanded

attention to and action against the denial of political and legal rights of Sinti-Roma women in Europe and Sami women of Scandinavia as well as the immigration and employment discrimination and other forms of police brutality and state harassment against women of African, Asian and Caribbean descent living in the United Kingdom and France. The rights of migrant women throughout Europe should be guaranteed and protected. ("We the Women, We the World" 86)

As stated in this declaration, these women endorsed together the particular demands issued from the individual presentations of the participants, and thus showed solidarity with each other. This, I argue, contributed to a Europeanisation of their claims, a process in which domestic contexts remained relevant, but the scope of identifications and solidarity was expanded.

At the same time, national and continental claims and identifications were further extended to a global level. For example, in a following section ("We the Women, We the World" 86-87), all participants, no matter their origin, collectively called for the churches to put pressure on their respective governments

to pass anti-discrimination laws; to condemn discrimination and forced removals of Indigenous people; to cease the forced sterilisation upon women; to address needs in healthcare; to condemn abusive detention and police brutality; and to end discrimination in employment and immigration. Through these collective claims, the participants stated at least a symbolic sense of sisterhood, and thus a collective identity based on their shared experiences of multiple oppressions globally. In sum, Black-European women used the WUR consultation to speak out on their local experiences of oppression and resistance, but they also utilised the space to broaden the scope of their claims to a European and global scale and to affirm multiple overlapping identifications. For Lydie Dooh-Bunya, the experience was going to be renewed in 1990.

The WUR became more significant for Black-European women's transnational activism from 1989 onwards, when it started planning a women's pre-session of a pan-European PCR consultation on racism in 1990. At that time, racist attacks and murders were hitting the news—especially in a reunifying Germany that was sparking violent nationalism—and added to ongoing fears of a spread of racism if Europe should be united in 1992. In parallel, Black-European women continuously practised transnational networking. For example, Helga Emde and Marion Kraft, both Afro-German women and members of ADEFRA, attended the 3rd International Feminist book fair in Montreal (Letter from Emde to Sindab 1) and took part in the Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Summer Institute in Zimbabwe in 1989 (Florvil 92). For women like Emde who grew up isolated and in a state of self-hatred in Germany (Opitz et al. 101), transnational encounters were highly valued

[The 3rd International book fair] was a very important event for us Black German women, because we could establish contacts to women from all parts of the world, exchange experiences, information and ideas and convey a sense of the particularities of our lives in Germany to our Black sisters from other countries...we think it very important to continue the exchange of experiences and ideas with Black women from other parts of the world and to set forth the dialogue with our Black sisters who are leading different social and political struggles. (Letter from Emde to Sindab 2)

This statement testifies to Afro-German women's search for transnational spaces that enabled encounters, consciousness raising, networking and further self-reflection on their own local struggle and positionality. It also indicates a sense of Black global sisterhood which overlapped with Black German identifications.

This internationalism thus preceded and was further supported by the PCR and the WUR at the latter's pre-consultation from May 27 to 29, 1990 in Paris and Chantilly which convened 75 women from 14 countries and from diverse minority groups, occupations, socioeconomic backgrounds and beliefs. On the occasion, the WUR's main goal was for "women of colour [to] meet to build a women's network ..." (Funding request by Jean Sindab to ELCA 3). Among the Black-European women present at the Paris-Chantilly pre-consultation were Philomena Essed, Helga Emde, Lydie Dooh Bunya, Black-Dutch Rita Naloop from the National Surinamese Women's Organisation, Afro-Italian and community worker Esther Haile Jacobson, Black-Belgian socialist parliamentary Paulette Fuller, and Afro-Briton Mukami McCrum.

The consultation was first a space to encounter each other. Then, in the same manner as in Geneva in 1986, participants came with their knowledge and shared it during single interventions, panels, regional working-groups and informal exchanges. In this respect, language played an important role, and the women who could seize the occasion the most to express themselves were the ones who could speak English, leaving others frustrated (Report of the Italian Delegation to Chantilly Conference). While Fuller presented a socialist critical analysis of the implementation of the Single European Act, Emde and Dooh-Bunya gave speeches on the oppressions and struggles of Black women in Germany and France respectively. Their interventions were also opportunities for claim-making. For instance, Emde's adherence to the WUR's mission and insistence on the need to network at a global and European level in order to overcome isolation and enable Black consciousness-raising was restated in the German women's report

We Black women in the Federal Republic of West Germany are confronted with sexism, racism, isolation and marginalization. For us, it is necessary and important to share and exchange our experiences and political work with other European women, in which we too urge in building a network. (The Chantilly Report 75)

As to Bunya, she denounced structural racism against women and minority communities in France namely in employment, housing, education, health care, immigration legislation and politics. Building upon an analysis considering the cumulative effects of racism and sexism, she stressed that “foreign, immigrant, refugee women...especially from the southern hemisphere” (The Chantilly Report 55) were the most affected by the situation:

In the patriarchal societies in which we live—in this case, France—we women from other countries, take fourth place in society, behind French men, French women and immigrant men. It does not seem far-fetched to say that what is true in France is true also in the rest of the EC. (The Chantilly Report 55)

Bunya’s last statement is revealing of an attempt to link a domestic situation to the larger EEC context and thus testifies to a Europeanisation of her discourse. In fact, she concluded her intervention by voicing her fears and doubts on the impact of the 1986 Single European Act on immigration wondering whether “the countries of the EC [will] choose to follow the model of the country with the most favourable regulations for immigrants or that with the least favourable” (56).

Additional proofs of a Europeanisation of the struggle against racism and sexism can be found in the “Women Call for Action Against Race, Sex and Class Oppression” as well as in the “Declaration of the Women’s Meeting on Racism in Europe” which was a condensed version of the latter. Both benefited from the knowledge shared by Fuller on European integration and its impact. For example, participants stressed the need for their working together in an intersectional and collective struggle which placed the contestation of the single market as a priority

In our search for justice, liberty and equality, we must combine together the struggles against racism, sexism and classism and in unity, we must face the impact of 1992 and the Single European Act. (The Chantilly Report 27)

They also seized the pre-consultation to make a collective demand stating that:

...we have a right to and, therefore, demand freedom from poverty, hunger and economic exploitation, the right to decent housing, education, training, legal status; to fair representation in the media and in every other forum. We, therefore, issue a call to local national governments, international organizations, churches, Human Rights groups and all others who would stand in solidarity with us to listen to our collective voice... (The Chantilly Report 27-28)

Their target audience reveals the importance they attributed to national and international institutions, as well as to civil society in shaping their lives. Moreover, through this statement and its further development in the Call, they proved their agency in contesting European governments and international organisations by explicitly framing their access to political, economic and social resources as “basic human rights” which they considered as inalienable no matter their sex, civil status or any other differentiating mark (The Chantilly Report 28-33). With regards to people of colour, the Call legitimised the right to abode and to have their human rights respected based on their historical contributions to the economic development of Europe. Furthermore, and contesting anti-immigration agreements whether at a national or European level, the Call demanded the free movement of people independently of their status, and for policies’ harmonisation to be beneficial to migrants and asylum seekers. Overall, the participants strongly emphasised on the material, social, political and legal resources that racism and sexism prevented them from having access to, in addition to demanding their physical and psychological integrity. The document concluded with their call for the establishment of a “European women’s network” to follow up on the pre-consultation and to be named “Blacks, Refugees, Immigrants and Migrants (BRIM)” (The Chantilly Report 33). This demonstrates the importance given to transnational networking and strategic coalition building with regards to common struggles and goals.

As for their identification, participants considered themselves as “women,” “living in Europe” and who were “racially oppressed” (The Chantilly Report 27-28, 33). Nonetheless, simultaneously to these collective identifications, they also stressed the need to recognise their differences

As we have gathered together we have come to recognise, affirm and strengthen the power we have in unity. We recognise and celebrate our cultural and ethnic diversity, and as racially oppressed women from many experiences, we also recognise that we are not a homogenous entity ... Any recommendations effected by us should take this into account. (The Chantilly Report 33)

This statement testifies again to overlapping and multiple identifications, and most importantly to the fact that their collective action did not necessarily require one fixed collective identity or the negation of simultaneous identifications. And, although political blackness had been discussed and embraced to some extent as a collective identity, not all participants considered it to be relevant to their context (Report of the Italian Delegation to Chantilly Conference).

While the WUR's pre-consultation marked the spirits of participants (Letter from Essed to Sindab) and stressed the need to create a European women's network, the latter was only concretised after 1992 through the establishment of SISTERS as I will show in my next section. In the meantime, Black-European women who attended the pre-consultation followed up and continued to network like in the case of the 5th Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Summer Institute organised in Berlin and Bielefeld in 1991 by Afro-German women. Emde was amongst the co-organisers and played a crucial role in linking up Marion Kraft with participants (Kraft email). As an outcome, Essed and Dooh-Bunya were invited to give presentations which were then edited and assembled in a collective book co-edited by Kraft and published in 1994 under the title *Schwarze Frauen der Welt. Migration und Europa*. Not only is this volume an important contribution to European women's intellectual history, but it is also a testimony of the diffusion of political blackness as exemplified by the inclusion of authors of Turkish and Asian descent.

Black-European Women and the SISTERS Network

Jean Sindab left the PCR in March 1991, and Marilia Schüller started as Programme Executive in January 1992. Schüller was born in 1957 in Santana do Livramento in Brazil, a city that shares a border with the Spanish-speaking Uruguayan city of Rivera. From a young age and in a context of military government, she got involved in the struggle against racism and discrimination through Protestant initiatives in a majorly Catholic country, namely the Pastoral to Combat Racism of the Methodist Church—which had been initiated by Afro-Brazilians—as well as the National Ecumenical Commission to Combat Racism (Schüller email). In 1979, her faith and dedication to social justice led her to undertake a BA degree in Theology at the Methodist School of Theology in Sao Bernardo de Campo, followed by an MA in Social Science and Religion at the Methodist University of Sao Paulo. In the course of her MA, she travelled to Geneva for a six-month theological training at the WCC Bossey Institute from October 1984 to March 1985.

This journey marked the beginning of her involvement within the WCC and her international antiracist activism. Indeed, in December 1985, she participated at the WCC's and South African Council of Churches' meeting in Harare which gathered local and international religious leaders as well as representatives of the ANC and PAC to discuss strategies against Apartheid. In 1986, as stated previously, she participated in the WUR's Global consultation in Geneva as a representative of the Afro-Brazilian struggle. Schüller was thus familiar with the WUR and its mission when she took over. She also benefited of the women's database and contacts Sindab and her assistants had formerly established.

Nonetheless, the PCR had been through changes in the early 1990s due to the announcement of elections in South Africa which led to a significant decrease in the PCR's funding. As a result, relatively few antiracist organisations and local initiatives continued to be financially supported, and resources could not enable as many PCR-sponsored global events. Additionally, the focus of the WCC and the PCR had shifted from combatting Apartheid to supporting more significantly the rights of Indigenous People in light of the 500 years' "commemoration" of European colonisation in South America in 1992 (Schüller, "Her Name is 'Sisters'" 105). In fact, Schüller's principal mandate was on Indigenous People rights and the WUR was secondary in her specifications. Nevertheless, given her own trajectory and her experiences as an Afro-Brazilian transnational activist, as well as her linguistic proficiency in Spanish, she further supported the expansion of the WUR's constituency to include more significantly indigenous women and women of

African descent from South America and the Caribbean.²

The WUR's second Global gathering thus took place in Port of Spain in Trinidad-and-Tobago from October 25 to 30, 1992. Its main goal was the creation of a global network that would be called SISTER—an acronym for Sisters In Struggle to Eliminate Racism—and which would aim to sustain a network of women fighting against the triple oppression of racism, sexism and classism. Essed, Emde, McCrum, Haile, Fuller and Sindab were among the 81 participants.

As it had been the case in Geneva in 1986 and Paris and Chantilly in 1990, Black-European women seized the occasion to present their specific contexts and make claims. For example, McCrum, an activist based in Scotland, gave a presentation on women of colour's activism in the field of housing in the United Kingdom. As to Fuller, her intervention carried once again on the impact of the Single European Act on Black people. Both interventions speak of the different levels of Black-European women's activism, and the extent of their Europeanisation as McCrum focused on Britain whereas Fuller emphasised on socio-economic developments within the EEC. Essed, on the other hand, started her presentation by looking at the denial of everyday racism in the Netherlands, but she then extended her analysis to Western Europe more generally and further moved on to stress the similarities that were likely to be observed at a global level (Essed, "Implicit Racism..." 5). Above all, she concluded on recommendations that are informative of the importance she attributed to internationalism and global coalitions between women of colour:

It must be seen that the struggle against racism cannot be restricted to the national levels. International networking is an urgent need. Thereby, we can create the space for intensive dialogue. It does not make sense to compare bad to bad or worse to worse...We need women who live in the South as allies outside, women in the South can use us as allies within the North. (5)

By these words, not only did Essed adhere to the general goal of the WUR, but her inclusion of Third World politics demonstrates the impact of global encounters with participants from the Caribbean, Southern America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Also, her statement is informative of the multiplicity and overlapping scales of her activism, and she, in fact, continued to meet participants after the 1992 consultation—when she happened to travel to their countries—and to interview them (Letter from Essed to Schüller). Nevertheless, although she was globally satisfied by the meeting in Port of Spain, her feeling was that the consultation had not allowed enough time to share about solutions and successful efforts against oppression encountered (Letter from Essed to Schüller). Consequently, she suggested a follow-up of the consultation in the form of a book that would gather testimonies of women of colour within SISTERS (Letter from Essed to Schüller). These are examples of how international gatherings such as the WUR's stimulated Black-European women's transnational activism.

As an outcome of the 1992 consultation, the network was launched under the name SISTERS—Sisters In Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism—in order to acknowledge the importance of the latter. This signalled a shift from the WUR's initial priority on racism as the SISTERS network's constituents were more readily inclined to state that sexism mattered as much as racism. In fact, although the WUR remained the secretary of the SISTERS network, the latter was regarded as autonomous. Its visual communication even let go of the WUR's militancy and rather opted for a more reassuring and personified message.

As regards to its actions, as much as its initial aim was to gather women globally, the SISTERS network took a regional approach which further participated in the ongoing Europeanisation of Black women's antiracist struggle. For example, with the help of Rita Nalooop and Philippino activist Maitet Lesdema, a regional SISTERS-Europe workshop was convened from September 30 1994 to October, 2nd in Geneva under the theme "Racism, Economics and Migration." It focused on employment, economic exploitation and discrimination in immigration at a European level (Summary of the SISTERS workshop).³

² The WUR organised a pre-consultation of African-American, African Caribbean and Indigenous women in Rio de Janeiro on September 22, 1990, six months after the pan-European consultation on racism.

³ Due to the lack of information in the archives kept at the WCC, more research needs to be done to find out about the participants and if any resolutions were made.

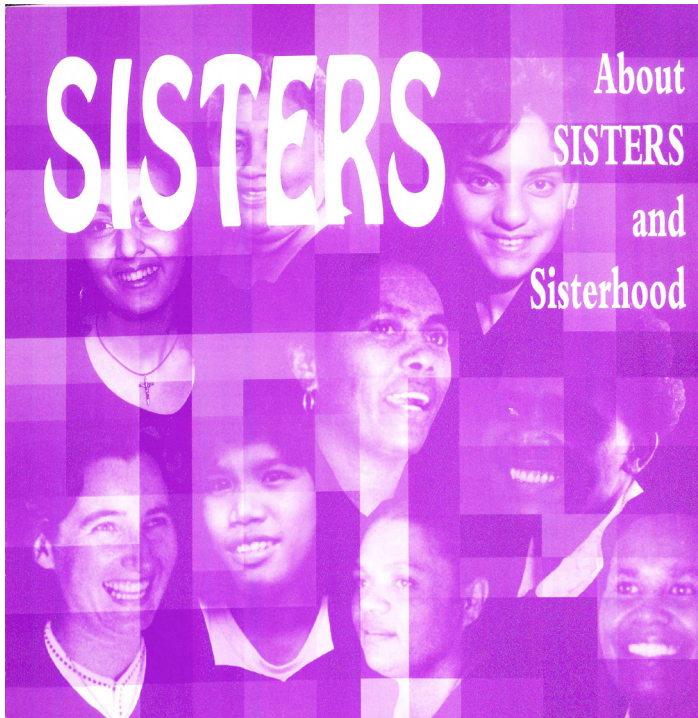


Figure 2: Cover of the official SISTERS flyer. SISTERS box. Image by author, May 2018

But unfortunately, this workshop was the last WUR-sponsored event facilitating the coming together of racially oppressed women in Europe (at least until 1998)⁴. This was partly due to the PCR's financial situation which worsened after the 1994 elections in South Africa and, in turn, affected the WUR's financial and human resources (SISTERS annual reports). At the same time, Schüller and her colleagues encouraged the members of the SISTERS network, rather than the WUR secretary, to develop and sustain the network. As a result, Nalooop and Ledesma, who in the meantime became SISTERS-Europe coordinators, met regularly between 1996 and 1997 in preparation of the European Year Against Racism. They sought ways to come up with a SISTERS' action plan for Europe and increase the network's membership. They also promoted the SISTERS network during the events they participated in as representatives of their own groups. Nonetheless, I argue that their efforts, as dedicated as they might have been, could not further develop a strong regional network due to lack of human and financial resources. Furthermore, the initial demands directed at the WUR had been for institutional help and resource facilitation. Thus, I contend that when the WUR no longer had the means to provide such support and relied on its constituents, it ended its appeal and potential as a facilitator of transnational activism for Black-European women. How this activism developed after 1997 is food for another paper.

Conclusion

My aim in this paper was to highlight how the WUR and the SISTERS network, as well as their respective coordinators, have facilitated spaces that Black-European women used as sites to voice their experiences of racism, sexism, and economic oppression; to make claims; and to think of strategies to combat racism and sexism locally and transnationally. As a result of presenting the transnational and European scope of claim-making and political strategies that Black women endorsed, and by highlighting the multiplicity of identifications that they alternatively affirmed, I stress the importance of transnational networks and

⁴ The temporal scope of the archives kept at the WCC end in 1998 as the policy of the institution is to enable the consultation of documents after 20 years.

insists on learning from precedents of collective identity formation that reveal overlapping strategic and non-essentialised identifications. These findings can thus provide insights into present-day activism in terms of their geographic scope and the question of political community building.

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Research Article

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Lived Afropolitanism: Beyond the Single Story

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0029>

Received September 1, 2018; accepted December 4, 2018

Abstract: It has been several years since the term “Afropolitanism” was coined and instigated an intense debate in both the offline and online world. Although Afropolitanism is celebrated for highlighting positive depictions of Africa, it has also been criticised for its supposedly exclusive and elitist focus. Several scholars have distinguished Afropolitanism from Pan-Africanism by framing it as the latter’s apolitical younger version. Following the discussion around these perceived differences, this paper investigates how Afropolitanism negotiates the African diaspora discourse in relation to Pan-Africanism. Thus far, the study of Afropolitanism has remained mostly limited to the field of literary and cultural studies. In order to move the discussion on this term further, this paper explores the lived experiences of twelve black Londoners with Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism. By using the notion of “performance,” I show that Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism are constructed and deconstructed in both diverse and overlapping ways. The narratives emerging out of this dialogue question the centrality of the Middle Passage epistemology and the tendency to essentialize experiences in the African diaspora discourse.

Keywords: diaspora, cosmopolitanism, race, resistance, homeland

Introduction

“Is Pan-Africanism dead or alive?” This question served as the debate contention of London’s *Centre of Pan-African Thought*’s first event on Friday 3, June 2016.¹ On the day of the debate, a group of predominately black people gathered in a neo-classical lecture hall in London to discuss Pan-Africanism’s present state of affairs. Audience members were invited to fill in polling cards to vote in response to the central burning question. In spite of the many obstacles that people identified, 57 out of the 75 visitors agreed that Pan-Africanism is still alive today. However, throughout the evening, participants addressed the difficulty of making Pan-Africanism appealing to a younger generation of black youth coming of age in Britain. In order for it to remain relevant, speaker Jo Dash argued that it is necessary to move from “victimhood” to “warriorhood.” He continued that it means that “we have to try something new in order to achieve something new.”

Meanwhile, a series of “isms” and descriptors have entered the “marketplace of styles and identities” (Kirmse). Afropolitanism, Afrofuturism, Afrocentrism, Afropunk and Afropean among others, have gained (renewed) popularity with the advent of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media among young people of African descent (Osekre). One of those *isms*— Afropolitanism—generally described as

¹ In the event announcement, Pan-Africanism was described “as the idea that people of African descent have common interest[s] and should therefore be unified.” The call for unification referred to in the event description, has been deployed in a collective struggle against a common (white) oppressor throughout time (Ifeknuwigye 317).

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cosmopolitanism with African roots (Gehrmann 61; Toivanen), forms the focus of this study. The term was popularised by Taiye Selasi in her introduction of the “newest generation of African emigrants,” also known as “Afropolitans.” Members of this “scattered tribe”—as Selasi calls them—continue to have strong ties to the African continent but know at least “two G8 cities like the back of their hands” (Gehrmann 61).

Afropolitanism has been the subject of intense debate in both the offline and online world ever since the term was coined. Many scholars (Dabiri; Abebe; Santana; Kigotho) have drawn a sharp distinction between Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism in order to brand Afropolitanism as an “apolitical narrative of transnational consumer lifestyles” (Pahl 77). Yet, the controversy surrounding the term urges us to reconsider the call for a more inclusive understanding of the African diaspora (Zezeza; El Tayeb). In spite of the criticism, Afropolitanism is credited for illuminating gaps within the field of African diaspora studies (Wasihun).

The historical study of the African diaspora in the US (Africana Studies), which is often conflated with Paul Gilroy’s framework of the Black Atlantic, still centres the Middle Passage in the formation of the African diaspora (Edwards 61). In the process, “Africa” merely figures as a static and silent presence. Moreover, the discourse is characterised by the uncritical application of the Black American experience to other parts of the world and perpetuates the marginalisation of Black Europe (El Tayeb 44-45; Zezeza; Wright, *Physics of Blackness* 14). Therefore, it is important to explore how Afropolitanism critically revises transnational frameworks for transnational processes (Skinner).

In order to capture the complexity of African diasporic experiences, it has become necessary to interrogate ideas such as diaspora, cosmopolitanism and Pan-Africanism (Ede 88). Therefore, this study examined how Afropolitanism negotiates the African diaspora discourse² in relation to Pan-Africanism. The study of Afropolitanism has been mostly limited to literary and culture studies (Wawrzinek & Makokha; Gikandi; Knudsen & Rahbek). Although disciplinary boundaries may be arbitrarily defined, Anthropology is rarely involved in the discussion. This is reflected in the great lack of empirical data on this phenomenon (Lavie & Swedenburg 18; Hassan 10). In order to fill this gap, I attempt to mediate between literary and cultural studies and the study of lived experiences. In qualitative research, the lived experience approach privileges experience “as a way of knowing and interpreting the world” (Boylorn 490). Moving “beyond the text” (Weate 27) contributes to a deeper understanding of Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism.

This interdisciplinary journey takes me to London: the hub of diverse African diasporic communities. Rather than taking the concept of the “African diaspora” for granted, I attempt to show how categories within the diaspora are constructed according to power relations (Brah 183). This begins by exploring “Afropolitanism” and “Pan-Africanism” in relation to the concept of the “African diaspora.” Following this, I ground this study in the local context to explain how dynamics of everyday life give rise to forms of transnational community. Rather than imposing ideal types of the *isms*, the notion of “performance” is used in the subsequent sections to look at the reappropriation of Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism in the everyday lives of black Londoners.³ By dissecting these performances, I show that Afropolitanism is not necessarily at odds with Pan-Africanism but refashions this legacy. Through the act of unpacking, Afropolitanism’s multifaceted nature allows us to experiment with the concept of the “African diaspora.”

African Diaspora Discourse

In a 2015 TedTalk, Taiye Selasi suggested: “what if we asked, instead of ‘where are you from’, ‘where are you a local?’.” According to her, the latter tells us more about “who and how similar we are.” This is based on the idea that “identities” are shaped by local experiences. Selasi calls herself “multi-local” because

² The notion of the “African diaspora discourse” is explicitly used to critique the hegemony of the United States in the study of the African diaspora. It is important to mention that the African diaspora is studied in different ways in many parts of the world. For further discussion of African diaspora scholarship, see Olaniyan & Sweet.

³ My group of interlocutors consists of a mix of UK based people of Afro-Caribbean and West-African descent. This also includes persons who are categorised as “mixed race” in the British context.

she feels at home in several places in the world and privileges culture over country. This sense of self is characteristic for the Afropolitan that Selasi sketches (Hassan 14; Gikandi 10).

You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes...; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos... we are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.

Taiye Selasi's Afropolitanism offers a refreshing counter-narrative against the overexposure of stereotypical images of Africa that prevail in the Western public discourse (Gikandi 9). Contrary to the "single story"⁴ of Africa as a poverty-stricken country, Afropolitanism seems to provide visual evidence of the "Africa Rising" narrative. This Afro-optimistic perspective mostly focuses on booming economies and growing middle classes in Sub-Saharan Africa (Makokha 93; *Why I am (still) not an Afropolitan* 105). It challenges the view of an isolated and marginal Africa by showing its involvement in global processes that shape our everyday reality (Gikandi 11). Moreover, while Africa has a passive role in Gilroy's Black Atlantic, Africa appears to reconfigure diasporic connections in Selasi's framework actively. Minna Salami who is known for her Pan-African feminist blog *Ms. Afropolitan*, even argues that Afropolitanism differs from the concept of the "African diaspora" in terms of its situatedness. While the diaspora often takes place outside of the continent, Salami's Afropolitanism "exists both on the continent as well as in the diaspora" (*My Views on Afropolitanism*).

Although "Afropolitanism" appears to highlight Africa's *agency* in the African diaspora discourse, cultural commentator Emma Dabiri argues that it silences the voices of the majority of Africans (*Why I Am Not an Afropolitan*). Precisely because "Afropolitanism" is often used in relation to young African elites in order to affirm the idea of progress in Africa ("Africa Rising"), Dabiri fears that it becomes Africa's next single story (*Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan* 105). Yet, Dabiri and several other critics refer to consumerism as one of the main challenges to Afropolitanism. In their view, fashion and luxury items dominate the "Afropolitan" experience and therefore lacks transformative potential (*The Pitfalls and Promises of Afropolitanism* 202, see also Bosch Santana; Ponzanesi; Toivanen).

While Afropolitanism has been under scrutiny for supposedly focusing solely on individual self-empowerment through consumerism, Pan-Africanism has been praised for its collective emancipatory goals (Ede 91). It has therefore been argued that Pan-Africanism is better equipped to deal with issues regarding the emancipation of black people anywhere in the world. The main concerns of Pan-Africanism⁵ have changed depending on the historical circumstances.⁶ Pan-Africanist discourses developed in the 18th century at the time of slavery and in turn gave rise to the term "African diaspora." Yet it was not until 1965 that this concept received renewed attention due to the efforts of historian George Shepperson (Olaniyan & Sweet 5). Inspired by the traditional notion of the "Jewish experience," Shepperson conceptualised the "African diaspora" in terms of the impact of the forced migration of enslaved Africans: an eternal desire to return to a "lost" home and the emergence of a collective identity.

Early uses of the term emphasise dynamic processes as it responds to political oppression and dislocation from a place of "origin" (Butler 30; Raman 22). The "African diaspora" is thus not simply a "neutral" concept but linked to particular activist agendas, ranging from the abolitionist to the anti-(neo) colonial struggle (Butler 23; Fryer 272). In this framework, the diasporic subject becomes the "savior of history" merely by occupying a position at the margins. This rests on the idea of the diaspora "as filled with the potential of the dissident outsider." According to Parvathi Raman, this particular reading is evident in Clifford and Gilroy's work, which presents a romanticised notion of the "diaspora (22-24)."

⁴ In 2009 the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie gave a TedTalk entitled 'the Danger of a Single Story', which addresses the problem of stereotypes.

⁵ Edwards distinguishes Pan-Africanism from pan-Africanism in order to draw attention to the diverse narratives that emerged out of the main historical movement. The latter situates francophone Pan-Africanism and Négritude within the wider frame of the African diaspora (49).

⁶ Mbembe identifies two types of solidarity within the Pan-African discourse: a racial and transnational solidarity, and an international and anti-imperialist solidarity (26).

This perspective implies that Afropolitanism can only become part of the African diaspora discourse if it carries a transformative capacity. Understandably, these assumptions helped to come to terms with the legacy of transatlantic slavery. However, it runs the risk of overlooking black cultural practices that are not necessarily considered subversive (Monson 14). Hence, an understanding of the history behind the concept of “diaspora” helps to make sense of the criticism on Afropolitanism’s perceived lack of concern with social and political change.

Yet, rather than turning to a debate that reduces Afropolitanism to Pan-Africanism’s negative counterpart, I am more interested in exploring how these concepts interact with one another. For example, while renowned intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois advocated racial solidarity through the ideology of Pan-Africanism, he also promoted his cosmopolitan vision. According to Salami, Du Bois developed an “Afropolitanistic theory” which entails the principle that “societies where people are enriched by one another’s differences are desirable” (*Afropolitanism and Identity politics*). Instead of presenting this tension as a problem, it is more useful to look at how tactics are strategically employed depending on particular moments (Shelby & Gilroy 117-19; Lavie & Swedenburg 4-5).

Afropolis London: Methods and Context

In light of the perceived tension between Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism, this paper draws on an empirical study conducted from June to August 2016 which includes the views of twelve black Londoners on both concepts. My group of participants (see table 1 below) consists of a mix of people of Afro-Caribbean and West-African descent, between the ages of 23 to 50.

Table 1: Group of research participants

Name ⁷	Occupation	Ethnicity
Nigel Stewart	Founder of the Centre of Pan-African Thought	British Jamaican
Sana	Filmmaker and founder of a creative art platform focused on African narratives	British Ghanaian-Maltese
Auntie Akosua ⁸	Barrister	British Ghanaian
Minna Salami	Writer, speaker and founder of the Ms. Afropolitan blog	Finnish Nigerian
Rose	Freelance writer, black community centre employee and organizer of <i>Meetup</i> group Afropolitan Elite	British Jamaican
Yemi	Student and fashion designer	British Nigerian
Eric	Broadcaster at an Afropolitan radio station	British Ghanaian
Sarah	Event planner and organizer of <i>Meetup</i> group London Afropolitans	British Nigerian
Cece	Event planner and fellow organizer of London Afropolitans	British Jamaican
Ama	Freelance writer	British Nigerian-Sierre Leonean
Linda	Writer and co-founder of an African literary platform	British Ghanaian-Lebanese
Imani	Student	British Ghanaian-Nigerian

⁷ In order to respect the anonymity of my interlocutors, I use pseudonyms, unless a person has consented to the disclosure.

⁸ Madam Akosua preferred to be referred to as ‘auntie’. According to her, this is part of the ‘African tradition’: ‘in the African context, someone doesn’t have to be your biological child to be your child. That is why you say auntie to me. It does not mean we are related by blood.’

Among this group, Pan-Africanism is fiercely advocated by Nigel Stewart, Sana and Auntie Akosua. Their shared interest in Pan-Africanism is reflected in their activities as community organisers in London. The rest of the participants actively engage with Afropolitanism, and some express an interest in both concepts. In order to avoid the risk of predefining Afropolitanism in my search for research participants, I made use of *MeetUp* to locate Afropolitan groups. *MeetUp* is an online social networking portal that facilitates online meetings and helped me to connect with Afropolitan Elite and London Afropolitans.

Through participant observation at events (found online) where ideas around Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism circulate, I met the rest of my interlocutors. This ranges from debates about the practical relevance of Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism to the Africa Writes Festival. Following this, I organised semi-structured interviews with participants about their construction of Afropolitanism and/or Pan-Africanism and its manifestation in their everyday lives. Expressive culture proved to be an important medium as most interlocutors shared their interests also through literature and writing, arts, fashion and activism. As I see myself as one of those "likeminded individuals," this research is inevitably shaped by my positionality. Being a young woman of Dutch Ghanaian and Surinamese background, I felt drawn to discussions around cultural identity on a personal and intellectual level. On the one hand, it required me to examine my assumptions closely and even more critically. On the other hand, my subjectivity enabled me to smoothly navigate the online and offline world.

London is the place where my interlocutors work/reside and their creativity flourishes. Edward Said points at the relevance of using the Western metropolis' as the focus of study because it provides extensive insight in the intellectual and artistic production of artists of African descent in Africa and the diaspora throughout history⁹ (Hassan 13). The city also has a special status among my interlocutors, which they expressed by referring to the diversity that characterises cosmopolitan London.¹⁰ The 2011 census records that London's population is made up of Indian, Pakistani, Jamaican, Polish, English, Ghanaian and Nigerian communities, among countless others. 36.7 per cent of this group was born outside the United Kingdom, compared with 13 per cent for the UK as a whole (*Diversity*). Against this background, London was set apart by interlocutors from what was seen as a less diverse and racially accepting Britain. In the wake of Brexit, London's distinctive place identity has been reinforced more than ever (*Petition for London Independence Signed by Thousands after Brexit Vote*).¹¹ Due to London's perceived unique position, Salami calls London the only place in Great Britain where she could live as a person of African heritage ("Pretty").

The statistics show London's large, heterogeneous black population,¹² which includes both established and more recent migrant communities.¹³ The presence of diverse and overlapping diasporic journeys has therefore inevitably led to the incorporation of different migratory phases in African diaspora studies in Europe: from movements of Africans in the colonial period to current refugee flows¹⁴ (Anthias 1; Ifeknuwigwe 320-21). Hence, it is not surprising that London is significantly influenced by Africa. Salami even describes London as *afropolitan*, but she distinguishes it from *Afropolitan* cities in the African continent. In her view,

⁹ Like many other political traditions such as Négritude, Pan-Africanism was largely created in cosmopolitan metropolises (Butler 24). London served as the symbolic centre of the movement because it was first and foremost the place where diverse African diasporic agents converged (Fryer 272). London is also often mentioned as one of the places where "Afropolitans" reside, both in popular culture and in the media, as well as in academic studies (Makokha 18).

¹⁰ Werbner argues that migrants, refugees and exiles often feel a sense of rootedness in the cities where they live rather than the whole country in which they settle. This is related to the presence of extensive social networks (573).

¹¹ Unlike vast swathes of England, the overwhelming majority of Londoners voted to remain in the EU. According to the petition's organiser James O'Malley, London is "radically different" from the rest of Britain as a "world city" and hence deserves to remain in the EU.

¹² The Black African community is the largest non-white group in Greater London with a population of 577 thousand in a city of 8.17 million residents (*Ethnic Group*, 16).

¹³ It is important to mention that the census produces *objects* in many different ways; those who remain invisible from the official view such as the many undocumented migrants (Werbner 573). Although the journeys of undocumented migrants are part of the historical continuum within the African diaspora in London, this group is often marginalised in classic conceptualisations of the diaspora (Ifeknuwigwe 324).

¹⁴ Zeleza reminds us that the nature of the African diaspora is not exclusively defined by the phases mentioned earlier. For example, in *Staying Power*, Fryer points out that communities of people of African descent have been established in London as early as the 16th century.

the latter (with a capital A) are “automatically imbued by African history, myth, culture, geographies and lifestyles” while this is not the case in London (interview). The intimate connection between Africa and the diaspora is reflected in the construction of “home” of Linda, the British Ghanaian-Lebanese co-founder of an African literary platform:

To me, Ghana was home in terms of my home in London. So what I ate at home, my friends, my family, the traditions, how we interacted; these are the things I understood as Ghanaian to me.

In the imagination of most interlocutors, London thus appears as an *Afropolis*: a city that is decidedly African and cosmopolitan (Byala 210).

Due to different experiences with and understandings of “cosmopolitanism,” it is important to not simply present the idea of a harmonious community of cosmopolitan citizens. Müller points out that power defines the accessibility of “cosmopolitan” positions. This perspective reveals the exclusionary practices that occur in the city (Massey 3420). For example, in a telling article in the *Evening Standard*, London is described as a place where “Afropolitans” unwind and occupy million-dollar residences in the city. Yet, meanwhile, the underclass is further pushed out from the centre in processes of gentrification (Massey).

As the discourse around Afropolitanism has elitist connotations, it is important to remain aware of how the concept could potentially obscure inequalities. At the same time, the controversy surrounding Afropolitanism has signalled the need to recognise the diaspora as a heterogeneous category differentiated along the lines of class and so on (Brah 196; Neumann & Rippl 160–61). Despite Dabiri’s important contribution to a wider debate on class inequality in Africa, her critique and that of many others mostly zoom in on luxury lifestyles and thereby essentializes Afropolitanism (Knudsen et al. 48–9). Hence, ironically, the narrative of the African elite is turned into Afropolitanism’s single story. Rather than denouncing the term, Salami pointed out that the criticism of the term helps her to polish the concept. As one of the self-proclaimed intellectual shapers of the concept, cosmopolitan London represents a space to Salami that enables her to explore the problems with Afropolitanism (interview). In light of the tension between cosmopolitan conviviality and exclusion, the next section addresses how Afropolitanism relates to the experiences of black communities in London.

Performing *isms*

In order to move beyond Afropolitanism’s “single story,” this section focuses on how it is performed. The concept has thus far been discussed in relation to Selasi’s identity politics, but Salami firmly moves away from this sphere. She rather sees Afropolitanism as a philosophical paradigm that informs her direction, purpose, goals and psychology (interview). Therefore, Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism are not mutually exclusive but strongly intertwined (*My views on Afropolitanism*). It is thus not a matter of *being* an Afropolitan; it is about *living* Afropolitanism. The notion of “performance” helps to challenge essentialist conceptions because it draws attention to what one *does* rather than what one *is* (Salih 55). It is therefore commonly deployed to point out the situated, interactional nature of identity performance (Müller 3417). This study draws on this approach to show the multiple ways in which Afropolitanism is manifested. First, I will zoom in on the experiences of individuals attracted to Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism. Who do these concepts speak to?

This question led me to London’s Afropolitan Elite on *Meetup*, a group “dedicated to the beautiful, successful and ambitious black men and women of London.” On a regular basis, events are posted in the group under the umbrella of black arts and culture. Rose created the group in 2015 after returning to London from a four-year period in Paris. Rose’s time in this city had heightened her awareness of her “blackness” due to experiences of racism and her involvement in a black expat group consisting mostly of African Americans. Rather than bound to the London Metropole, political, cultural and intellectual developments thus have to be understood as grounded in a transnational diasporic community (Patterson & Kelley 27).

Having grown up outside of black communities in London as a result of urban segregation, Rose felt the need to reconnect and include more black people in her social network. In spite of this desire, Rose is aware of the exclusionary logic behind the term “elite.” Yet she has reappropriated it according to her own vision, resulting in the opening line on the home page: “If you are beautiful inside, successful to your own standards and ambitious in the constant creation of yourself, then THIS GROUP will speak to YOU.” The term “elite” thus stands for confidence rather than a high (financial) status in society.

For Rose personally, Afropolitan Elite creates the opportunity to celebrate her success without feeling guilty for separating herself from black working-class communities. This dynamic is reflected in the wide range of activities of the group: from black empowerment community events in Brixton to African literary festivals in Central London.¹⁵ It challenges Hassan’s concern over limiting the focus to the middle class and offspring of well-to-do diasporic Africans by using the term Afropolitan. Yet Rose emphasises that though the group highlights “blackness,” it does not allow any space for “complaining.” As the organiser of another *Meetup* group for women of colour (WOC), she maintains a strict distinction between “tackling whiteness” (WOC group) and “decentering whiteness” (“Afropolitan Elite”). In contrast to the WOC group, Afropolitan Elite focuses solely on embracing “blackness” through black arts and culture. Rose’s perspective intersects with Mbembe’s idea of Afropolitanism as different from Pan-Africanism, in the sense that it refuses any form of victim identity. However, this does not mean that it loses sight of injustices against people of African descent (28-29). Afropolitan Elite rather celebrates how black people are able to thrive in the face of oppression.

While this group mainly uses the African heritage as a source of inspiration to indulge in arts and culture, other interlocutors translate their understanding of it into activism. Nigel Stewart, the founder of the Centre of Pan-African Thought, is one of them; he organises a range of events to tackle “miseducation” among other things. Stewart shared that the absence of “Africa centred” teachings in his education led to a struggle with his “self-identity.” This was rooted in experiences of exclusion and marginality, which were reinforced by his lack of contact with black people while growing up in a predominantly white neighbourhood outside of London. Through Pan-Africanism, Stewart developed “racial pride,” which according to him, shapes the “African diaspora,” and is the foundation for success in life. He, therefore, believes it is of utmost importance to pass the Pan-African narrative on to black/African youth as this would enable them to fight against institutional racism (interview). In his vision, a rediscovery of “African identity” is part of the Pan-African political project (Hall 223).

Diasporic Consciousness

Stewart’s and Rose’s experiences illustrate Clifford’s argument about the inherent tension in diaspora discourses. Negative experiences nurtured a diasporic consciousness and in turn, resulted in an alternative (positive) sense of attachment (28-29). Rather than identifying as Jamaican—where his parents were born—or as Black British, Stewart first and foremost sees himself as “African.” This sense of self went along with a denouncement of Afro-diasporic identifications in general in favour of a primordial affiliation. While Stewart strongly states an unbroken connection to Africa in the spirit of Pan-Africanism, Rose firstly highlights cultural hybridity that is at the heart of Gilroy and Hall’s anti-essentialist theory, as a self-identified Afropolitan. Her conceptualisation of the African diaspora invokes Hall’s vectors of similarity and difference. On the one hand, the first vector gives grounding with the past (similarity). On the other hand, the second one reminds us that this sharedness is based on discontinuity (difference): the experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration (Hall 227). Yet Rose’s Afropolitanism is not limited to “Middle Passage blackness”¹⁶ but incorporates a wider diversity of black identities (Wright, *Middle Passage Blackness*; El Tayeb 45). In other words, to Rose, “it can encapsulate whether you’re African, mixed, Caribbean- whatever

¹⁵ Rose is not the organiser of the events but selects them according to her own strict criteria.

¹⁶ “Middle Passage Blackness” refers to the domination of the African-American experience as shaped by Transatlantic Slavery, in diaspora studies (Wright, *Middle Passage Blackness*).

heritage you have.”

Although it is reflected in different ways, both Stewart’s Pan-Africanism, as well as Rose’s Afropolitanism, is about embracing the African background in the face of overwhelming odds. In doing so both equate blackness with Africanness, but this understanding cannot be taken for granted according to Rose. She, therefore, struggles with her membership policy as it only allows black people to become members of the “Afropolitan Elite” in order to “keep it a safe space.” But what makes a proper black subject? (El Tayeb 44). The use of “political blackness” in the British context further shows the constructed nature of “race.”¹⁷ This movement centers a black signifier in order to draw attention to racist practices that affect non-whites as racialized subjects (Brah 13-14). Moreover, this example highlights that the role of the diaspora can be marginal in anti-racist movements (Anthias 12).

Although Rose recognises the significance of this anti-racist strategy, she believes that it obscures the unique African and Caribbean experience in Britain. In this context, Afropolitanism does not open up space for new alliances like in Mbembe’s philosophical reading of the term. His Afropolitanism is accessible to white South Africans, Asian diasporic Africans and other groups (Gehrmann 65). He further argues that Pan-Africanism does not capture the complexity of “identity” in a globalised world in the way that Afropolitanism can. Rose rather emphasises how Afropolitanism allows coming in terms with “blackness.” According to her, it “alludes to many different aspects of your identity as a black person.” Rose used the metaphor of the city to exemplify her thoughts on the term further:

If you’re in a metropolitan city, anything happens. It is constantly changing; constantly evolving and I think it is that same thing. It is the idea of the new black. You don’t have to stay in that same box that you’re put in or given, but you can reinvent it and still be your beautiful black self.

Placing Afropolitanism in this historical genealogy forms the starting point for understanding the rise of diasporic identifications at particular historical conjunctures (Raman 29). In contrast to Mbembe’s and Salami’s view on Afropolitanism as aracial (*My views on Afropolitanism*), the “Afropolitan Elite” approaches the African diaspora within the logic of race. At the same time, Rose’s complex desire to construct an inclusive black subjectivity draws attention to the “messiness” of black European identities (El Tayeb 50).

Intersection of Performances

In the previous section, I zoomed in on Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism as performed by individuals navigating urban life. In order to place these performances in a wider context, I investigate how Afropolitan and Pan-African sensibilities are seen to be at play and interact with one another. Pan-Africanism, for example, is performed in different ways among my interlocutors. A few believe it is first and foremost about promoting human rights for all human beings. However, most interlocutors emphasise the idea of solidarity between people of African descent¹⁸ globally. Similarly, Stewart emphasises that Pan-Africanism itself is merely a word: “I can call it black power, whatever. It doesn’t matter. It just embodies the fact that we [people of African descent] have to unify to solve our problems.” According to Stewart, the term has to be linked to behaviour in order to gain meaning. In line with the notion of “performance,” he shared that he would “die a happy man until the moment comes that it is popular to say: ‘I’m doing Pan-Africanism.’” This dynamic approach shows the problem with uncritical readings of *isms*.

The ambiguity of *isms* is further exemplified in the heavy criticism on the consumerist version of Afropolitanism in academic works, at the expense of other performances of Afropolitanism. By merely identifying as Afropolitan, one risks coming across as elitist and superficial (Pahl 76-77). This is due to the set of assumptions attached to the label such as that Afropolitanism starts with style rather than substance (Bosch Santana). Dabiri expresses

¹⁷ In my interview with Rose, she referred to British Algerian Malia Bouatti becoming the first black women to head up the National Students of Union. Rose’s perspectives relates to the idea of ‘blackness’ in vogue, as argued by Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff.

¹⁸ There are many equivalent definitions of the category of “people of African descent.” The United Nations defines this group as descendants of the African victims of the Transatlantic and Mediterranean Slave Trade.

her concern over what she perceives as the “commodification of African culture through fashion and lifestyle.” According to her, Africa is imagined as more “authentic” after the over-consumption of Black American culture by this mobile Afropolitan class. Hereby Dabiri points to the fact that “Afropolitanism” is heavily employed to promote “African inspired fashion” (*Why I am (still) not an Afropolitan* 105).

Indeed, simply a quick google image search for “Afropolitan” reveals pictures of mostly black women wearing “African inspired” fashion and accessories (*Why I am (still) not an Afropolitan* 105). Although it extends beyond the scope of this research, the visible presence of women and their role in the movement cannot be overlooked.¹⁹²⁰ It points at the importance of acknowledging that diaspora experiences are always gendered (Ifekwunigwe 322; Camp & Thomas). One of the “members” of this female-dominated space, British Nigerian fashion designer Yemi, provides a more nuanced view on the phenomenon:

I look at magazines and at what people are wearing in the streets in Africa [Lagos] and try to mix that with what is happening here in London, in Dalston. Creating something that is unique.... It just feels very Afropolitan because it is not typical African fashion. I'm creating my own prints inspired by both cultures.

It is not simply about using Africa as a “fresh source that is ripe for picking” as Dabiri claims. For Yemi, Afropolitanism represents “authentic creativity that comes from the motherland” but is situated in a diasporic context. This was reflected in Yemi’s Afropolitan Fashion and Music Pop Up show, which took place on July 7, 2016, in Dalston. It was presented as an event that provides the “perfect fusion between urban East London and the cosmopolitan energy found across African cities.” Rather than turning to a timeless Africa, Afropolitanism provides Yemi with the tools to merge a hybrid mix of influences in a “third space”; a “newness that enters the world” (Bhabha). Selasi states that this approach typifies the “Afropolitan consciousness.”

This is in contrast to the dominant idea of the cultural base of Pan-Africanism among the majority of my interlocutors. According to them, returning to “African culture and values” is at the core of the ideology. Auntie Akosua used a proverb in my interview with her to reinforce a sense of authenticity: “no matter how long a log has been in a river, it doesn’t become a crocodile... What makes you an African? It is DNA.” Similarly, these Pan-African values were instilled by Sana’s Ghanaian father during her upbringing. He feared that Sana would face identity struggles due to her mixed heritage (half Ghanaian and half Maltese), and felt that Pan-Africanism overcame the problem of non-belonging. Afropolitanism, on the other hand, highlights how intergenerational differences produces diverse diasporic subjectivities. Whereas parents are able to take their connection with Africa for granted as first generation migrants, children might mainly know their parent’s country of birth through stories or occasional holidays. Afropolitanism allows interlocutors to engage with their heritage in their own distinct ways (see also De Witte 265).

From Shame to Pride

In order to understand the renewed interest in “African” or “Afropolitan” fashion among young people, it is important to situate it in within a larger context of Afro-cool aesthetics. Marleen de Witte describes Afro-cool as the passion to engage with a creative Africa through an emphasis on aesthetics in fashion, music and art (285). At most Africa or black culture-related events that I visited during my fieldwork period, I found myself surrounded by people wearing “African inspired” outfits, natural hairstyles wrapped around colourful scarves and other fashionable accessories. Additionally, most interlocutors referred to the popularity of Afrobeats in the UK mainstream as part of the trend mentioned earlier. According to many, this has contributed to a shift in perception towards Africa: from African roots as a source of shame to a source of pride. While the Caribbean community used to dominate the black British cultural sphere, interlocutors

¹⁹ Abebe conceptualises Afropolitanism as a movement that is led primarily by young women of colour.

²⁰ On the relationship between African fashion and feminism, see Sika (2013).

argued that it is increasingly becoming “cool” to be African.²¹

On July 31, 2016, people joined in the performance of Afro-cool aesthetics at the Jazz Refreshed festival in London. Members of the *Meetup* group “London Afropolitans” were among the many fashionably dressed visitors. The festival was in line with the group’s aim of “bringing culturally savvy black professionals” together to revive a more “niche” aspect of black culture. Although organiser Cece emphasised that the group was not politically oriented, fellow colleague Sarah recognised the importance of celebrating that we are able to *live* Afropolitanism in the public sphere today. Contrary to Selasi’s narrative, Sarah argues that Afropolitanism is not a recent phenomenon but that it has existed since the early presence of African migrants in diaspora spaces. As a daughter of a Nigerian father and a white British mother, she described the racism she and her mixed family faced in a white neighbourhood outside London in the 1960s. Signs reading “no black, no Irish, no dogs” were a common sight in Britain and symbolises the overt racism of the time (Sherwood 4). In Sarah’s view, the Afropolitan spirit awakened in the private sphere where members of the small Nigerian community gathered to find comfort and joy in their shared heritage. In the face of hostility, the social environment thus provides a sense of security and protection in the African diaspora (Akyeampong 209-10).

Although Afropolitanism appears to thrive on aesthetic appeal, it thus simultaneously engenders a critical consciousness. In fact, style has always been an important visual marker of “African consciousness” (De Witte 273). These examples of participants’ lived experiences illuminated some of the complexities that are often neglected in engagements with “isms.” Exploring how Afropolitanism is performed, reveals how people live through and respond to experiences (Boylorn 490), which precedes labels. In the next section, I address the notion of “home” as part of gendered diaspora experiences by elaborating on the interest in “Afropolitan” literature among my interlocutors.

Diaspora Blues

Recounting the history of Afropolitanism, Selasi claims that it started as a novel phenomenon with her short article as a key document (Makokha 18). Over time, the term intruded literary spaces, which is reflected in the label “Afropolitan literature.” According to Linda, who leads an African literary organisation, this particular genre challenges the assumption that African literature only covers heavy topics such as poverty, famine, and corrupt governments. Notwithstanding the problems that Afropolitanism brings with it²², Linda does recognise the significance of a term that encapsulates the complexity of diaspora experiences. To illustrate this, Linda described a fragment of Teju Cole’s *Open City*:

This [Nigerian] doctor is looking for home but he goes to Brussels, and that in itself shows that a Nigerian does not necessarily feel like his first place to call home is Nigeria... I think for readers, especially those coming from the West, this is interesting. This is not someone going back to Nigeria to discover their roots. This is not someone going Kunta Kinte on us.

This quote not only shows the recognition of “home” beyond the idea of the “mythical” homeland (Brah). It also problematizes the imposition of a phenomenology of “Africanness” that obscures diverse self-perceptions and is not simply defined by an uncontested notion of “blackness” (Wright, *Middle Passage Blackness*). The majority of my interlocutors who share an exclusive interest in Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, performed the desire to firmly refuse any identification with the national community in favour of the (imagined) homeland. To them, life in England is merely a temporary station as they espouse a real or symbolic return to Africa. This proclamation is strongly connected to experiences of social exclusions (Brah 193).

²¹ Paul Gilroy states that the shift has to be understood against the background of the transformation of Black British communities: “We are moving towards an African majority which is diverse both in its cultural habits and in its relationship to colonial and postcolonial governance (cited in Hancox).”

²² Linda questioned the usefulness of the concept “Afropolitanism” for several reasons, one being the linguistic implication of the term. According to Linda, “Afropolitanism” seems to deny the fact that Africans have always been “global.” She also critiqued the wide-coverage of so-called “Afropolitan writing” (focused on the diaspora) at the expense of “African literature.”

It is the emphasis on hybrid ways of being African in so-called “Afropolitan” narratives that drew several interlocutors to the realm of Afropolitanism. As a Ghanaian who is “too much of a Londoner” in terms of her local experiences, Linda believes that Afropolitanism illustrates the “diaspora blues”; a poem by Ijeoma Umebinyuo.

So here you are,
Too foreign for home
Too foreign for here
Never enough for both.

The poem reflects the specific diaspora sensibility as discussed by most interlocutors involved in Afropolitanism. Blogger Ama described how her “diaspora blues” led to the creation of a blog dedicated to nostalgic memories of growing up as a British girl of Nigerian and Sierra Leonean descent in London.²³ She recalls the days that recent Nigerian immigrants collectively reconnected with “home” in communal spaces in the 1980s in London. In the same spirit, Ama attempts to “create a sense of community and identity” by sharing humorous anecdotes in the online world through her blog titled “the Thrifty Afropolitan.” However, Ama notes that she does not call herself an “Afropolitan” outside of the online world. She rather performs Afropolitanism on her blog to demonstrate how she navigates between different cultures as a “child of the diaspora.” Afropolitanism thus allows Ama to situate her experience in the African diaspora discourse, which is exemplified in her selection of “Afropolitan memories” in one of Ama’s blog posts:

- School pack lunch placed in an ice cream tub, much to your embarrassment, whilst all your other friends had nice, child-friendly tupperware. To be fair, this only lasted for a short period of time (thanks Dad for the intervention).
- Sandwich fillings—when your mum decides to make your packed lunch for a school trip and includes sardines, mackerel, boiled eggs- basically the smelliest fillings she can find deliberately designed to embarrass you. Meanwhile, all your friends are eating Dairylea and cheese and ham.

In this context, the concept of Afropolitanism appears to capture the idea of a sense of belonging that is not fixed but a dynamic, contentious process (Lavie & Swedenburg 16; El Tayeb 78). It undermines William Safran’s diaspora model which returns to the “Jewish experience” as a reference point (Clifford 249; Raman). One of its central features concerns a longing for a lost home, which still dominates in the field of migration studies in Europe. El Tayeb questions the usefulness of this model because it places migrants either without or within the nation-state and potentially reproduces the myth of a white Europe (51-54). This trope has previously been challenged in Gilroy’s hybrid *Black Atlantic*. Yet, Afropolitanism illuminates diasporic perspectives beyond this particular transnational space. It is constructed by my interlocutors as a tool to creatively play with the insider/outsider tension without the need to resolve it (El Tayeb 54). It is this *third time-space*, a position of *in-betweenness*, from which particular diasporic sensibilities are produced (Lavie & Swedenburg 16).

In other words, my interlocutors’ Afropolitanism, forces us to explore transnational practices that cannot be reduced to the dichotomy of an essentialist “home” and a “hybrid” diaspora. Home is rather the “lived experience of locality” (Brah 192). At the same time, the desire to mark a physical place elsewhere as home draws further attention to experiences of marginality and the urge to overcome it (El Tayeb 60).

Discussion

It is hard to pinpoint when Afropolitanism came into existence. Yet the heated debate surrounding the term at dawn at the century signalled the need to rethink the concept of the African diaspora. In this research, I embarked on an interdisciplinary journey to ground the debate on Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism

²³ Thrifty Afropolitan initially started as a blog focused on resourceful living in the African diaspora. For more stories, see thethriftyafropolitan.com.

in lived experiences. In doing so, I attempted to undermine the tendency to treat *isms* as if they are fixed. It overlooks the fact that both concepts have to correspond to changing everyday realities in order to ‘stay alive’. By employing the notion of “performance,” I stressed the different manifestations of the terms. However, solving this issue by using a plural form—Afropolitanisms and Pan-Africanisms— as Ede and Shepperson suggest, could potentially result in a search for authenticity (Olaniyan & Sweet 51; interview Salami). There is thus no straightforward answer possible to the question of how Afropolitanism negotiates the African diaspora discourse in relation to Pan-Africanism. It would require the policing of terms while they overlap and diverge depending on the context, and are constantly in flux.

In the works of many, however, Afropolitanism becomes the radical “other” in relation to African diasporic politics. This understanding is inseparable from early uses of the concept of the African diaspora. As shown, the term was introduced to reinforce the idea and practice of Pan-African unity. In theory, however, it differs from the notion of the “African diaspora” as the latter does not contain the political overtones. However, in practice, the African diaspora discourse explores diasporic practices through a lens that is ingrained in black traditions of resistance (Edwards 51-53). Consequently, the diasporic subject is constructed as inherently subversive in character by virtue of being at the margin (Raman 2003). In light of Afropolitanism’s participation in Afro-cool aesthetics, it is important to consider what constitutes the political. It might turn us to a philosophical debate about the roots of the term, but it is necessary to reevaluate some of the basic assumptions that underpin the African diaspora discourse in future research.

As Afropolitanism is often defined by its perceived problematic characteristics, most critics have overlooked lived narratives that expand our understanding of the African diaspora. In fact, it could be argued that Afropolitanism would not have such resonance if it was solely the exclusive property of the African elite (Skinner 4). This is reflected in the multiple performances of Afropolitanism by my mixed group of interlocutors. To most of them, Afropolitanism represents a gendered third space in which they can engage with their “African heritage” in their own terms. Although Afropolitanism forces us to move beyond the Middle Passage epistemology, Africa still mostly exists in the diasporic imagination. Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, is strategically performed to transcend the state of in-betweenness. The different views regarding the notion of “home” further show that the “identity of the diasporic community is far from fixed or pre-given” (Brah 183). Furthermore, it highlights that the African diaspora by definition is an “unfinished entity” (Gilroy cited in Ifeknuwigwe 317).

In order to resist the hegemony of African diaspora in the United States, several scholars (El Tayeb; Ifeknuwigwe; Brah) have drawn attention to the experiences of black populations in different European nation-states. However, I attempted to shed light on diaspora experiences beyond national paradigms by focusing on the “cosmopolitan” city. This could provide insight into forms of identification that create a “temporary sameness,” reflected in anti-racist solidarity for example. This reality urges us to problematize the idea of the “African diaspora” (Anthias). In this research, however, Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism mostly attracted members of particular black diasporic communities. Therefore, it includes a far from representative sample of the African diaspora. Hence the emphasis on “race” as an organising factor, counters philosophical conceptualisations of “cosmopolitanism” and “Afropolitanism” as aracial. This often reflects the social ideals of the theorists rather than the lived realities of people on the ground (Müller 3418). To them, performing Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism in London opens up space to escape restrictive forms of categorisation in the process of imagining alternative futures.

This paper was presented at the AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe Sixth biennial network at the University of Tampere in Finland. I wish to thank Dr Marleen de Witte and Dr Marloes Janson, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable and constructive comments.

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Research Article

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Afro-European Modes of Self-Making: Afro-Dutch and Afro-Italian Projects Compared

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0028>

Received August 1, 2018; accepted November 9, 2018

Abstract: This article contributes to scholarship on Afro-Europe by investigating the intersection of blackness, Africanness, and Europeaness in everyday discourses and social practices in the Netherlands and Italy. We examine how young African-descended Europeans are forging new ways of being both African and European through practices of self-making, which should be understood against both the historical background of colonialism and the contemporary politics of othering. Such practices take on an urgency for these youth, often encompassing a reinvention of Africanness and/or blackness as well as a challenge to dominant, exclusionary understandings of Europeaness. Comparing Afro-Dutch and Afro-Italian modes of self-making, centred on African heritage and roots, we discuss: 1) the emergence of a transnational, Afro-European imaginary, distinguished from both white Europe and African-American formations; and 2) the diversity of Afro-European modes of self-making, all rooted in distinct histories of colonialism, slavery, and immigration, and influenced by global formations of Africanness and blackness. These new Afro and African identities advanced by young Europeans do not turn away from Europeaness (as dominant identity models would assume: the more African, the less European), nor simply add to Europeaness (“multicultural” identities), nor even mix with Europeaness (“hybrid” identities), but are in and of themselves European.

Keywords: Afro-European self-making, Afro-Dutch, Afro-Italian, Africanness, Europeaness, blackness

Introduction

Across Europe today, two major tendencies regarding belonging and identity seem to hold each other in a contradictory embrace. On the one hand, anxieties run wild around national and European identities, which are perceived by many to be threatened by ethnic and religious diversity. Ethnocultural nationalism and racialised xenophobia are resurgent as trans-European phenomena. On the other hand, another Europe is increasingly coming into view: a Europe that is culturally and racially plural and hybrid. This has always been the reality, as Europe is constituted by long histories of empire and migration, but it has hardly been part of established notions about who or what is “really European.” With new generations of postcolonial and postmigrant Europeans growing in numbers and in vocality, however, we witness an alternative “Europeanization from below” (El-Tayeb): a bottom-up emergence of new, inclusive formulations of European belonging. Disrupting postcolonial amnesia and asserting hyphenated identities, they are redefining the idea of “Europe.” We see this in recent concepts like Afro-Europe(an), Afropea(n), and Black Europe(an), and, outside academia, in African-descended Europeans’ vernacular projects of identity, self-

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making, and social-cultural critique.¹

The current emergence of an Afro-European imaginary is particularly interesting in light of the historical relationship between Africa and Europe, which is characterized by a paradox of deep entanglement and imagined opposition: four centuries of trade in goods and human beings, colonial domination, and postcolonial/neocolonial involvement have not only “Europeanized” Africa but also “Africanized” Europe to an extent that is seldom recognized. Europe’s population of African descent is perhaps the most visible legacy of this history. Alongside the incorporation of Africa(ns) into the formation of Europe—economically, culturally, demographically—was the colonisers’ invention of Africa as Europe’s Other (Mudimbe). Throughout the ages, conquering Western narratives produced accounts of Africans as essentially different from and ultimately inferior to Europeans (cf. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*). These narratives continue to resonate today. Dominant European discourses still largely imagine Africa and “the African” as everything that Europe and “the European” is not.

How should we understand Afro-European projects of reimagining Europe, especially in light of the dominant processes of culturalization and racialization of European belonging? What responses does this combination of racial Europeanization (Goldberg) and African othering evoke in those who consider themselves both European and African? These questions are particularly urgent for young people born and raised in Europe, who grow up being taught, in implicit and explicit ways, that they are not “real” Europeans, that they do not really belong. While Western European societies tout the authenticity of selfhood—“be yourself!”—they leave black and brown youth very little space for realising their multiple and complementary identities. Unable to fully identify with national models, which increasingly define belonging in ethnoracial terms, nor with African-American models, which leave no space for Europe’s specific histories and diversities, young Europeans of African descent are creating continental networks to analyse and compare their experiences (Fila-Bakabadio) and discuss questions of identity and belonging.

These questions relate to a body of literature on the politics and aesthetics of cultural identity formation among African diasporic subjects that is too rich to address here in any depth (see, e.g. Camp; Hine et al.; El-Tayeb; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; López; Nassy Brown). But we do wish to emphasise that African diasporic identities have predominantly been discussed from Black Atlantic, Anglophone perspectives. Newer diasporas of more recent African postmigrants in continental Europe have received relatively little scholarly attention. The communities founded by African migrants arriving in Europe since the end of the Cold War have by now become a major constituent of Afro-Europe. The dominance of earlier Afro-Caribbean migrant communities has given way to a strong African presence in cities like London and Amsterdam, as well as significant communities of African postmigrants in cities that have not been home to a previous Black Atlantic diaspora, like Milan, Hamburg, and Stockholm. This raises questions regarding the specific relational dynamics and multiplicity of diasporic identifications in particular cities, and the generational shifts taking place as younger people explore their identities as both European and African.

We propose to approach these questions in terms of self-making and to focus on the politics and practices through which young people navigate the complex dynamics of partly overlapping, partly distinct formations of Africanness and blackness in their respective localities. Our title refers to Achille Mbembe’s polemic essay “African Modes of Self-writing,” in which he argues that African discourses of the self cannot be seen as separate from European colonial discourses about Africa and Africans, but rather as deeply entangled with them. Instead of radically rejecting colonial assumptions, many African writers drew their fundamental categories from the Western myths they claimed to oppose, foremost the racial difference between “blacks” and “whites” (Mbembe 257), thus making Africanness conterminous with blackness. While the controversy Mbembe’s essay sparked falls beyond the limited scope of this article, what we take from his essay for our purpose here is the idea of Africanness as a relational *project* rather than a primordiality, an effort to forge a way forward that is rooted in multiple, sometimes contradictory, genealogies. Moving

¹ There are multiple, cross-cutting terms of self-identification in circulation and the definition, scope, and even relevance of each of them is highly debated. It is important to recognise that all such terms are situational and relational, and thus embedded in power structures and that the terms we as scholars use are part of this politics of naming, which, we argue, is also a politics of world-making. Our practical choice for “Afro-European” is decidedly not meant to endorse one term over others, and might very well be contested by some of our research participants.

from self-writing to self-making, we are interested also in aesthetic forms—embodied practices, bodily fashions, popular culture—through which people shape their sense of being and belonging. In the diasporic context of Europe, not only does African self-making take on a specific urgency, as Africanness is taken as problematic, but Europeanness also emerges as a project: one of making “Europe otherwise” (Gilroy, “Europe Otherwise”).

Our task, then, is to analyse contemporary modes of Afro-European self-making in relation to both the multiple histories of imagining Africanness, blackness, and Europeanness, and the local particularities of the settings in/from which these imaginings are addressed, disrupted, and/or reproduced. We take blackness, Africanness, and Europeanness as categories of practice, focusing on their social life in relational contexts and examining their circulation, intersection, and empirical use in practices of self-making among young generations of Afro-Europeans. We base our discussion here on research materials gathered through ethnographic methods (participant observation of key events and everyday contexts, interviews and informal talks with relevant actors) and combine these with analysis of cultural products as well as public discourses. We also bring our previous research on Afro-Dutch (De Witte, “Heritage, Blackness, and Afro-Cool”) and Afro-Italian (Scarabello) formations into comparative focus. Both in Italy and the Netherlands, the question of being African and being Italian/Dutch/European is a hot topic for debate and cultural production among young citizens of African descent, but we also note important distinctions.

We provide a bit of background by first sketching the histories and composition of the African diasporas in the Netherlands and Italy respectively. Thereafter we discuss examples of Afro-European self-making from each of our respective field sites. Focusing our comparison on Afro-Italian and Afro-Dutch projects centred on African heritage and roots, we detail 1) the current emergence of a transnational, Afro-European imaginary, vis-à-vis both white Europe and African-American formations; and 2) the diversity of Afro-European modes of self-making, rooted in specific national histories of colonialism, slavery, and immigration and in present-day African diasporic compositions. Afro-European self-making, we argue, must be understood against both the historical background of colonialism and the contemporary politics of othering, both of which they seek to undo in a move of self-definition, but which they also perpetuate in some respects.

African Diasporas in the Netherlands and Italy

With different colonial and postcolonial histories, differently composed African diasporas, and different (geographical) positions with regard to contemporary African migration to Europe, Italy and the Netherlands are well suited to study the circulations between key localities through which Afro-Europe takes shape.

The Dutch African diaspora is highly diverse, constituted by different historical currents. The oldest African-descended population in the Netherlands results from the Netherlands’ participation in the transatlantic slave trade and its colonial rule in Suriname, the Dutch Antilles, and Aruba. After the end of slavery in 1863, colonial authorities promoted the assimilation of the black population into Dutch culture, mainly through the colonial education system. Small numbers of Surinamese and Antilleans began to come to the Netherlands to study in the 1920s, and from 1965 onwards larger numbers of people from all socioeconomic ranks came to find jobs.² This, then, is a “double diaspora” constituted by enslavement from Africa to the Caribbean and later migration to the Dutch “motherland” during colonial and postcolonial times. While their belonging to—and in most cases, their citizenship of—the Netherlands is thus rooted in centuries of colonial history, Dutch postcolonial amnesia (Wekker) and phenotypic othering have made their blackness a marker of non-belonging.

“Guest worker” recruitment programs since the 1960s, designed—by employers and later the government—to make up for the post-WWII labour shortage, account for today’s large population of Moroccan-Dutch. Despite their roots on the African continent, Moroccan-Dutch are not usually identified as “African,” nor do they self-identify as such. Some projects of African self-making, however, as we will discuss below, explicitly include Moroccan-Dutch and Moroccan heritage so as to problematize the

² Most Surinamese migrants came to the Netherlands around Suriname’s independence in 1975.

dominant reduction of “African” to sub-Saharan African or black (cf. Zeleza), and some Moroccan-Dutch, most of whom are of Amazigh origin, are becoming interested in their “African roots.” Substantial sub-Saharan African migration to the Netherlands started in the 1980s, driven by political and economic crises in many African countries, and has followed patterns other than colonially or institutionally established ones. These more recent African immigrants include Somalis, Cape Verdeans, Ghanaians, Ethiopians, and Eritreans, who have arrived through legal and illegalised routes and who have no direct colonial history with the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, the focus of this article, Ghanaians form a major group, with a second generation now in their twenties.

Not only are Dutch African diasporas highly diverse in African origins and migration patterns, these African-descended groups are also differently positioned with regard to questions of belonging, identity, and citizenship in the Netherlands. And yet new collective identifications are forming around notions of Africanness and blackness and terms like “Afro-Dutch.” Young people’s interest in their African roots and self-definition come in response, at least partly, to shared experiences of racialised othering. Although the Netherlands gained European fame for its multiculturalism, a colonial structure that defines Dutchness as white and that externalises blackness is deeply embedded in the Dutch cultural archive (Wekker). Today’s “postmulticultural” climate is characterised by a return to ethnonationalism, with right-wing populism anti-immigrant sentiment rising in the country. In this context, Dutch youth of African descent face recurrent questioning of their Dutch identity.

Italy has more recently become a destination country, like other Southern European nations. Migrations from Africa to Italy started in the 1970s, with the arrival of small groups mostly from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Cape Verde, Egypt, and Morocco. These migration flows resulted in part from the geographical proximity of North Africa to Southern Europe and from the colonial links of some East African countries. Small numbers of students also arrived thanks to private and public scholarships, mostly from Nigeria, Congo, and Cameroon. Massive labour and economic migration from sub-Saharan Africa started in the 1980s; in the 1990s, Senegalese, Nigerians, and Ghanaians, in particular, became more established, and these are now the largest African diasporic communities in Italy. These grew alongside the substantial Moroccan, Tunisian, and Egyptian communities. One specificity of the African presence in Italy is the high diversity in national backgrounds: this heterogeneity is due to the fact that migration flows to Italy did not follow the colonial maps—as happened in other European colonial motherlands—but rather the routes of economic projects and, to a much smaller extent, university education (Ceschi).

In the 2000s, Italy ceased to be the main destination for migrants from the former colonies, becoming instead a transition country for other European destinations. Thus, while the diasporas from the former colonies have the most historical rooting and generational stratification in the country, they are currently smaller than other African-descended groups. Moroccans, for instance, were among the first to settle in Italy, and it became common to use the term “Moroccan” to indicate any kind of ethnic diversity (Ribeiro Corossacz). Nevertheless, in the Italian collective imaginary people of North African origin are generally “othered” not as “Africans” but as “Muslims.” This emphasis on Islam shows both the self-perception of the Italian nation as homogeneously Catholic (and white) and a strong and common association between “black” and “African.”

In this context, where citizenship is based on the *ius sanguinis* principle (acquired by blood/descent), phenotypical blackness can be one cultural marker that implies a common experience of alterity and a feeling of living in a “condition noire” (Ndiaye). As one of Scarabello’s interviewees claimed: “They see all of us as black, thus they consider us all Africans.” Whiteness has indeed constituted a form of representational cohesion in the imagination of nationhood and citizenship, due to the historical lack of a sizable black community and the forgotten history of Italian colonialism (Lombardi-Diop). The hypervisibility of the black body and related exclusionary practices are also connected to a representation of Africa and Africans as emblems of subalternity, one that still resonates in everyday racialization practices and in violent populist discourses (and practices) against sub-Saharan irregular migrants crossing the Mediterranean. The current revival of the “Afro” prefix in youth self-identification categories and self-making projects demonstrates the power of defining their own identities and belongings, and of positioning themselves in relation to Italian nationhood as well as to the larger African and Black diaspora in Europe and beyond.

Dutch Projects of African Self-Making: Afro-Caribbean–African Dialogues

Over the past few years, numerous projects of African self-making have been initiated in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, examples range from the Untold Empowerment African dance and theatre group, the African Homecoming Festival, and the Ghanaian Kente Festival (De Witte, “Heritage, Blackness, and Afro-Cool”) to new, African-inspired fashion labels, club concepts, and multimedia projects. Here, we discuss two projects that share an explicit embrace of African self-identification, an emphasis on (youth) empowerment, and a focus on debate, research, and cultural performance as ways to reach this. Yet, as we shall see, the projects—an Afro-Caribbean-Dutch initiative and a Ghanaian-Dutch one—also differ significantly in their modes of African self-making.

Call Me African!

Call Me African! is a project that was initiated in 2016 by a woman of mixed Surinamese-Dutch descent. With events that combine panel discussions about “our African identity” with dance performances, music, documentary films, and food, it speaks to a broader Afro-Caribbean-Dutch interest in African roots and heritage that has been on the rise over the past years. This interest finds expression in practices as varied as wearing “African” fashion and hairstyles, dancing to African music (De Witte, “From Bokoe Bullying to Afrobeats”), and DNA research. But seldom does African self-definition seem as definitive as in the case of Call Me African! This demand—emblazoned on flyers (fig. 1), a Facebook page, T-shirts, and other materials—is presented in the Pan-African colours of black, green, and red. It is also accompanied by quotes from Ghana’s first president and Pan-Africanist leader Kwame Nkrumah (“All people of African descent, whether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean or any other part of the world, are Africans and belong to the African nation”) and by Jamaican reggae musician Peter Tosh (“No matter where you come from / As long as you’re a black man / You’re an African”). At the kick-off event at the 2016 Kwaku Festival in Amsterdam Southeast, a street dance performance inserted such Pan-Africanist discourse into a local politics of naming. Dressed in black-and-green Call Me African! T-shirts, three dancers held up signs with the words “*Bokoe*” (a Surinamese curse name for Africans, see below), “*Neger*” (Dutch for negro), and “*Nigger*” and then flipped the signs around to show the Call Me African! logo. This was an explicit demand for self-definition in a context of being defined in derogatory terms by others.

Call Me African! does not, however, answer the question of African identity as conclusively as it seems. In fact, introducing the first dialogue event, the host asked: “How African are we really?” In response to Tosh’s song, she said that the idea of being African is hard to accept for many black (read: Afro-Caribbean) people in Amsterdam, and thus up for debate. She explained:

Centuries of colonialism and slavery have resulted in the fact that Africans from Africa and Africans from the diaspora do not always harmoniously live together as kin. Surinamese, Antilleans, and Dominicans with African roots do not automatically feel connected to Ghanaians, Nigerians, and others with more recent roots in the African continent. And vice versa.

So, while the project strongly echoes a Pan-Africanist discourse of black kinship and unity, it does not take this as an automatic inheritance, but as something to be accomplished: a project of undoing the separation done by the violence of history and reuniting in the face of Dutch racism. This is first of all an Afro-Caribbean-Dutch desire (more marked in the Netherlands indeed than in the Caribbean), and is directed at so-called continental Africans. These include the many first- and second-generation African (post)migrants living in the same neighbourhood, with whom, some of the participants acknowledged, it is not always easy to connect. To explore and experience a shared Africanness, Call Me African! organises dialogues about the differences and similarities between “diasporic” and “continental” Africans, interspersed with performances of music and dance.

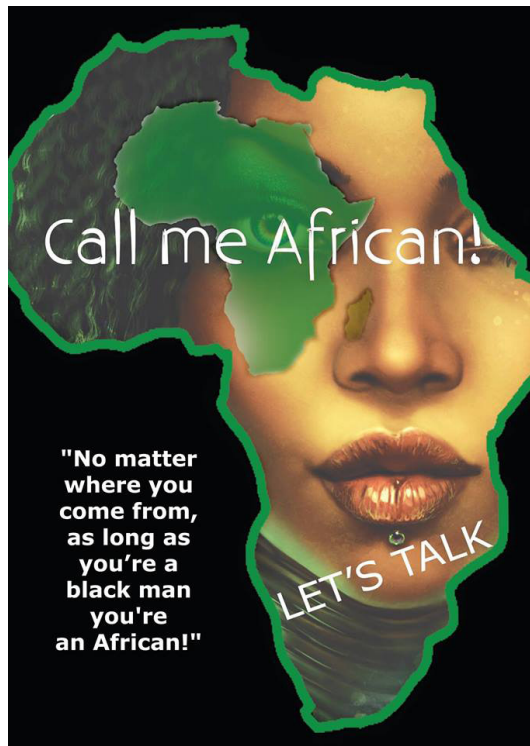


Figure 1. Call me African! flyer.

On November 16, 2016, De Witte attended the second Call Me African! event, held in a community centre in Amsterdam Southeast. The event attracted a mostly Surinamese-Dutch audience, many of whom in their twenties, some Curaçaoan-Dutch, and two West African-Dutch young men who had been invited as speakers. The dress difference between “diasporans” and “continentals” was remarkable, with the former sporting Afrocentric print dresses, large Africa-shaped earrings, afros and other natural hairstyles, and Black Power iconography (the raised black fist, black berets), and the latter dressed in plain trousers and shirts. The event started with presentations about three countries, to “get to know each other”: Suriname (presented by the founder of Call Me African!), Sierra Leone (presented by a Dutch-born young man of Sierra-Leonean-Guinean parents), and Curaçao (presented by a Curaçaoan-Dutch young man). Topics included Surinamese cultural and religious plurality, anti-colonial resistance in Sierra Leone, and the differences among the Dutch Caribbean Islands, but the main interest was in the various Caribbean cultural practices that, as “African survivals,” link Afro-Caribbean people to Africa. Not only was knowledge exchanged *about* such practices but they were also mobilised as material-aesthetic connections to Africa, with a strong sensorial and emotional impact.

This was most clearly so with a Surinamese maroon dance performance and the Q&A with the dancer afterwards, which turned into a sort of comparative study of heritage. After her performance, the dancer, a young Surinamese-Dutch woman, told the audience how, after years of practising Western classical ballet, she had discovered “her own dances” at her great-grandmother’s birthday party in rural Suriname. “*Awassa*,” she explained, “is a dance that is still being danced by various Afro-Surinamese groups in the hinterlands of Suriname. This area is said to be the best conserved piece of Africa outside Africa.” This statement evoked loud applause from the audience. She continued: “This is one of the dance styles, but also how they farm their *kostgrondjes* [small, hand-farmed slash-and-burn fields in the forest], how they make cassava bread, the initiation rites they do when men and women reach adulthood—all of that just comes straight out of Africa.”

During the Q&A, audience members suggested various possible origins of the *awassa* dance: Gambian *mbalax*, Congolese and Angolan traditions, and the Ewe and the Fanti tribes in Ghana. Then, a young man who had been listening quietly asked for the microphone and said: “the dance that you were just doing, I

recognise that. I am from the Asante tribe, and we have exactly the same style, the same dress, the same movements. It is called ‘*adowa*.’ It’s a ceremonial dance. It was deep inside me, but now that I see it again I recognise it, you know.” As his soft voice started trembling, the audience burst into applause. It was a very powerful moment. The dancer responded hesitantly, saying that she had been to Ghana recently, but nobody there had been able to recognise her dance. Ignoring this remark, the host turned to the Asante man, probing: “I want to ask you something because I can hear it in your voice—when you see this, and you feel the energy, what does that *do* to you?” And he answered, “it makes me emotional. Why? Because for a long time I have been turning my back on this kind of thing. . . . But when I saw *that*, I thought ‘Wow! This is us!’” Warm applause and sounds of appreciation and awe followed.

The effort here to rebuild an Afro-Caribbean—African connection and recreate an “us” around shared African roots happened not only through the exchange of knowledge and information but also through the affective power of aesthetic recognition. The sense of African unity and pride thus produced was directed not only at white hegemonic devaluations of Africanness/blackness but also at the reluctance of (some) Surinamese to acknowledge their African roots, as well as at “continental” Africans “turning their back on this kind of thing”—all attitudes rooted in old colonial hierarchies of value. The dominant mode of African self-making encountered here was one of historical roots, black kinship, and a turn to pre-slavery Africa for identity resources. Strikingly, the two West African-Dutch young men were embraced as “continental Africans” in an Afro-Caribbean project that centred on an African cultural past, and that made them representatives of “diasporans” historic origins and sources of knowledge about “African tradition.” This left them little space for their own experiences as European Africans.

Citizens of Alkebulan

Citizens of Alkebulan is a multimedia project initiated by two young Ghanaian-Dutch women dedicated to changing the dominant image of Africa and its citizens by creating a network of “African creatives” in music, art, fashion, and culture. Showcasing “the beauty, diversity and riches of Africa’s cultural heritage, Alkebulan stands for a self-confident Africa that will not settle for being just a charity case,” its website states. It is part of a broader, recently emerging movement of African pride among second-generation African postmigrants that thrives on the circulation and popularity of contemporary African popular culture across Europe. Like Call Me African!, the name of the project—Citizens of Alkebulan—voices a direct demand for self-naming. Alkebulan, according to the founders, is “the name our ancestors gave to Africa before it was called Africa by the Europeans. The name Alkebulan symbolises going back to our roots.” Interestingly, for Alkebulan, resisting European definitions of Africa implies a deliberate inclusion of North Africa, and people of North African descent, in the project and network. The often taken-for-granted distinction between “black Africans” and “North Africans,” “Alkebulians” say, is a European invention based on a misleading fiction of race that disregards centuries of connection, exchange, and mixture among people across the Sahara, facilitated by ancient trade networks. Alkebulan’s “African diaspora,” then, encompasses people with roots all over the continent and routes that include both recent histories of Africa-Europe migration and much older histories of enslavement and transatlantic crossings. Among their network, then, are Moroccan-Dutch, Somali-Dutch, Ghanaian-Dutch, Ghanaian-Belgian, and Afro-Caribbean-Dutch creatives. United as Citizens of Alkebulan, they mobilise African cultural creativity—music, arts, fashion, storytelling, poetry—to challenge common stereotypes about Africa and Africans.

This is important, Alkebulan founder Rudy explained in an interview, because negative feelings about being African are widespread among young Africans growing up in the Netherlands. As she experienced herself, recurrent public imaginings of Africa as poor, hungry, underdeveloped, and struck by wars, dictators, and diseases, and of pitiful Africans in need of Western help, can have a disturbing impact on African-Dutch youth. This trope has a long genealogy in the European colonial “invention” of Africa as the “dark,” “savage,” and “primitive” continent. And it resurfaces today in the media and popular culture, in ignorant questions and “jokes” from non-African peers and schoolteachers about life in Africa, and in the Surinamese ethnic slur for Africans that African kids growing up around Surinamese communities

were confronted with: “*bokoe*,” a term carrying all kind of pejorative connotations of being uncivilized, backward, wild, smelly, dirty, and ugly (De Witte, “From Bokoe Bullying to Afrobeats”). Prevalent among both “white” and “black” Dutch, then, stereotypical misrepresentations of Africa and Africans as Europe’s archetypical opposite crosscut racial categories and profoundly impact the lives of young people struggling to come to terms with being both European and African. As a result, some tried to dissociate themselves from their African background in their teens, identifying with a generalised “black” community instead.



Figure 2. ‘Our artists’ page from Alkebulan website, www.newalkebulan.com

Born from such experiences, the Alkebulan project passionately seeks to counter negative stereotypes of Africa and show Africa as a modern, vibrant, creative, culturally rich continent. Its main aim is to provide African youngsters in the Netherlands with empowering, cool African role models to nurture their African identities and to convey a positive image of Africa to Afro-Caribbean Dutch. With an annual cultural festival and a series of evening events as well as other media outlets, Alkebulan creates a space (online and offline) for African-inspired creative production and critical debate that speaks to a young generation. Their events bring together a wide variety of musicians, writers, fashion designers, photographers, and other artists with roots in Ghana, Morocco, Somalia, and many other African countries, and feature a range of popular music, dance, and spoken word performances as well as panel discussions about hot issues concerning the African diaspora.

The first Alkebulan festival, which De Witte attended on July 10, 2016, in Amsterdam’s Tolhuistuin, opened with a performance by Ghanaian-Dutch female AfroDance trio Rawhln Crew. There was a panel debate about “cultural appropriation” that stimulated the audience’s passionate engagement, and stage performances by Dutch rapper and spoken word artist Akwasi and Afrobeats artist Amartey, both of Ghanaian descent; the Budapest-based Ghanaian rap duo FOKN Bois; and Malique Mohamud, a Dutch poet/comedian/musician of Somali descent. There was Kenyan and Ethiopian food, fashion by Daily Paper, an Amsterdam-based urban fashion brand that references the African heritages of its Moroccan-, Somali-, and Ghanaian-Dutch founders, and a selfie backdrop designed in colourful Ndebele wall painting style. Overall, the festival breathed an atmosphere of African pride and empowerment, and indulgence in contemporary, cool creative production. Indeed, Alkebulan creates environments “to feel African in a good way” and to connect with peers around an “aesthetics of Afro-cool” (De Witte, “Heritage, Blackness, and Afro-Cool”), allowing participants to feel the spirit of a vibrant continent as a source of empowerment. This also means a departure from their parents’ ways of being African: Alkebulians and their audiences seek to invent “their own,” European way of being African and to create spaces, moments, and European networks for sharing this.

Alkebulan's celebration of contemporary African cultural creativity and its image of "the modernised, wandering, global citizen who each conveys a mishmash of cultural inputs and influences from Africa" echoes Afropolitanism, and it contests the marginalisation of Africa in Eurocentric narratives. Disrupting essentialisms of race and territory, and the singularity of dominant identity categories, Alkebulan creates a world where cultural hybridity and multiplicity of being and belonging are the norm (cf. Eze). Stressing Africa's racial diversity, Alkebulan at the same time resists hegemonic formulations of blackness that are grounded in the historical moment of the Middle Passage and tend to reproduce, if unintentionally, Eurocentric notions of Africa as black.

Juxtaposing *Call Me African!* and *Citizens of Alkebulan*, we can see some striking differences and overlaps between the modes of African self-making they exemplify. Both projects place great emphasis on identity, but while *Call Me African!* espouses a race-based idea of Africanness, Alkebulan stresses the racial diversity of African identities. Both projects centre on "African roots," but the routes of transatlantic slavery predominate in *Call Me African!* while for Alkebulan more recent, Mediterranean routes and living connections with specific places in Africa prevail. Accordingly, while both projects promote "African cultural heritage," in the first case, this means "African survivals" traced to a pre-slavery past, and in the latter, it means contemporary African cultural production. Lastly, empowerment is a key aim in both projects, responding to a societal context of racial disempowerment. But while *Call Me African!* aims at black unity against racism, for Alkebulan a white-black dynamic intersects with a specific *African* empowerment vis-à-vis both white and black (Caribbean) Dutch.

Italian Projects of African Self-Making: African and Afro-Italian Perspectives

In the Italian context, we witness increasing participation of Afro-descendant youth in public, artistic, and entrepreneurial life. Their projects challenge political and cultural exclusionary practices and claim recognition of their multiple belongings. Two projects— "African Summer School" and "Nappytalia"—are particularly interesting to analyse the different modes of African self-making that coexist and interact in contemporary postcolonial Italy. Both projects show how young people affirm their way of being Italian and their way of being African, mobilising different cultural and symbolic repertoires, such as Afrocentric narratives and Afro-inspired aesthetic style, and differentiating themselves from first-generation Africans.

African Summer School

African Summer School is a training school organised since 2013 by the *Africasfriends* Association, which is based in Verona and coordinated by Fortuna Ekutsu Mambulu, a Congolese-born young man, aged 34, who has lived in Italy since the age of 17. He graduated with a degree in economics from the University of Verona and then specialised in communications. The project, promoted as "the first training school for Afro-business and African Renaissance," offers an intensive week of lectures addressed to students on various humanities and economic subjects.

When Scarabello asked director Ekutsu Mambulu to explain why he founded the African Summer School, he replied that he had faced difficulties in finding a job in Italy, both during and after his studies. This experience caused him to realise there was an urgent need to combat stereotypes of Africans as low-skilled people, "tribal clichés" (Riccio) about the continent, and the "Afro-pessimism" he saw perpetuated by the first generation of Africans living in Italy. He considered it necessary to "talk about Africa in a different way" and give voice to Pan-African and Afrocentric intellectuals who were "rarely present in academic events in Italy and in Europe." Their perspective, he insisted, was the only one that could valorise the historical and cultural resources of the continent and thus "make Italian-born youth of African origin feel good in their skin."

Drawing attention to the positive global outcome of the heritage left by African politicians and intellectuals is crucial, Ekutsu Mambulu continued, to disrupt the neocolonial representation of Africa as “a poor and underdeveloped continent, in need of aid” and “to create bridges” between different generations and the African and European continents. The participation of young people—with or without African background—in the Summer School has been strongly encouraged as a way to promote cultural exchanges and entrepreneurial collaborations among the youth of different origins. But, Ekutsu concluded, the necessary premise for economic creativity and equal partnership is the transformation of the “cultural paradigm” on the African continent and its heritage. The reinterpretation of African history from an Afrocentric perspective, mainly based on the work of Cheick Anta Diop, has been central in the school’s lectures; this approach decentres the Western interpretation of African history that youth in Italy and in France learn in school. Indeed, the increasing number of students attending the Summer School over the years demonstrates that this Afrocentric perspective meets a pervasive need of young people to research and celebrate their African roots.



Figure 3. The professors of the third edition, coming from France, Belgium and Togo (starting from the left), from the African Summer School website, www.africansummerschool.org

This approach has raised an interesting debate about the conception of African identity. Talking about “Africa” has in itself been criticised: many African-Italian youths recognise that doing so risks consolidating the Eurocentric “invention of Africa” (Mudimbe), which homogenises the specificities of the different African nations, their histories, and their diasporas. Moreover, participants noted that the Summer School’s “politics of Africanity” (Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing”) tend to be rigidly geographically rooted. Its Afrocentric approach focuses on black francophone heritage and experiences—as evident not only in the bibliographic references during the lectures, but also in the networks of the professors, mainly from France, Belgium, or francophone sub-Saharan African countries. This overshadows the pluralities of the experiences and heritages of the African diaspora in Italy, excluding not only North African Arabic countries but also the national, linguistic, and ethnic plurality of the black African diaspora in Italy.

At the same time, the discourses on African identity appear “continent-centred,” with a particular emphasis on this during the first year of the training school. Analysing her experience in an interview with Scarabello, an Italo-Ghanaian student declared that while interacting with intellectuals and youths interested in African issues contributed to making her a “self-confident African,” she also felt uncomfortable with the approach to African identity expressed by the main professor. This implied an African authenticity

that hardly fit the “everyday multiculturalism” (Colombo and Semi) embedded in daily life and multiple identifications of Afro-Italian youth. She explained, “It was difficult for him to consider me as African and Italian at the same time, as I do.” She also added that the school’s radical critique of NGO cooperation projects, which lecturers considered part and parcel of European neocolonial interventions on the continent, was also divisive among the multicultural audience of the training. It risked creating, as she put it, “an African despotism that is not what we, [those of us] born in Italy, want!” This was, she concluded, evidence of “the different approach between the first and second generation in Italy!”

Over the years, the training has continued to maintain a predominantly francophone reference network in Europe, testified to by the participation of Afro-descendant students from Belgium and the organisation, in 2016, of two trainings, in Verona and in Brussels. The training succeeded in attenuating the elements that, in the beginning, risked creating dichotomies (white/black, European born/African born), by including more than one trainer for each session, in order to guarantee balanced discussions in class and to consolidate the intergenerational alliance. The effort to bridge the gap between generations is carried on also through networking activities with a few associations in Italy, such as Redani, which is the main Pan-African association promoted by first-generation sub-Saharan professionals and intellectuals, and Arising Africans, which is a recent association created by youth who are born in or grow up in Italy, who define themselves as “Afro-Italians,” to carry out activities that promote the recognition of multiple identifications. By strengthening this network, the Summer School has become a hub for people sharing the desire to “rebrand Africa” and to “empower Afro-descendant youth.” In this way, the Afrocentric perspective can become “a cultural basis for unified political action” (Werbner 24) and for the construction of a “common symbolic repertoire” (Grégoire 173), one that can encompass biographical and generational differences in the local struggle against racism.

Nappytalia

Nappytalia, originally born as the Facebook page “Afro-Italian Nappy Girls” in December 2013, has become one of the most influential Italian blogs and e-commerce platforms for natural hair care products and practices. Founded by Evelyne Afaawua—an Italo-Ghanaian young woman born in France, who arrived in Italy with her parents when she was one-year-old and who grew up in both Italy and Ghana—the blog and its related activities are driven by her strong desire to highlight her Africanness and for it to be recognized as a hybrid form of Italian identity. Since its beginning, this project has combined offline and online activities through which youth support each other in the decision to “go natural.” Nappytalia promotes natural hairstyles as an anti-racist practice that challenges dominant white-based aesthetic canons (Frisina and Hawthorne). It also encourages young people to research, discuss, and redefine their African roots and heritage. Indeed, as the founder claims, “what unites the followers of the page are our roots and two words: hair and Africa” (Afaawua, “Dove tutto ebbe inizio”).

In March 2014 Scarabello attended Milan’s first “Nappy Hour.”³ At the start of the meeting, attended by many young women and one young man, all of various mixed-race, Latin American, Caribbean, or sub-Saharan backgrounds, Evelyne broke the ice, stating that natural hairstyles have been a way for her to “reconnect to [my] Ghanaian roots and to rediscover the Africanness that before was hidden behind something that bears no resemblance to me.” She shared how difficult the choice to stop straightening her hair was, because it meant not only refusing locally dominant, white beauty standards but also “going against my family.” Hair straightening should be indeed considered among the “embodied practices of beauty, transmitted in family contexts and sedimented in structures of feeling over centuries and generations” (Tate 4). As Evelyne writes in her blog, transitioning to natural hair became an affirmation of her uniqueness, making her “an Afropolitan, with a free mind, with my body and my hair!” (Afaawua, “Io chi sono?”). At that first Nappy Hour, Eveline’s introduction was followed by intense and emotionally charged conversations among participants, who talked about daily hair care routines and practices and how they variously engaged with their African roots through aesthetic choices and professional endeavours,

³ After that, organized in various Italian cities.

including blogging.



Figure 4. Nappy Hour in Milan, January 2015, from the Nappytalia Facebook page

Later that evening, in a conversation with Scarabello, Sophia (pseudonym), an Italo-Dominican blogger, confirmed that for her too, the choice to “go natural” conflicted with the hairdressing practices she had learned from her mother. Her decision was motivated by her personal interest in her Afro-Dominican roots as well as by Afro-influenced fashion trends circulating globally. She said she feels very proud of her Afro-Caribbean origins, where her happy childhood memories and her Afro identity are rooted: “My country has a such a wonderful history: the history of Black Napoleon and of the most important slave revolt in the Caribbean history! And you have to know that the political division of the island—Haitian, Dominican—this makes no sense because we all feel African. We are all Africans in the end!” Sophia was also interested in the professional opportunities created by the popularity of Afro-inspired fashion among urban young people. She recently started a blog named “Afroselvaggio” (Afro-wild), “because,” she declared, “for me this is it: Africa is also being a bit wild!” The title resounds with what Kobena Mercer considers a diasporic imagination of a mythological Africa, as a land of noble savagery and primitive grace. Mercer notes that ascribing “natural hair” to Africa reproduces a Western representation that has very little to do with actual hairstyling practices on the continent.

Eyram (pseudonym), an Italo-Ghanaian woman and administrator of the blog “Natural, Black, and Beautiful” experienced this lack of natural hair styling when she visited Ghana, her family’s country of origin. Her transition to natural hair began almost casually: she stopped using chemical straightening products for health reasons, turning exclusively to so-called protective hairstyles, like braids. Once, when she had to travel to a village near Accra to see her mother, she found herself with no time to go to the hairdresser, but presumed she would be able to do so when she arrived: “I thought: what better place than Ghana to treat natural hair?” But to her surprise, she found that the dominant hairstyling practices included straightening. In an interview with Scarabello, Eyram explained that this was the main reason she founded her blog: “I had to seek out inspiration for natural hairstyles elsewhere, neither in Ghana nor in Italy. And so, I discovered [online] the nappy world of the United States. In Italy, there was nothing about nappy at that time, three years ago, and thus I started my new blog to share my hair journey!” Her online encounters with African-American styles and her direct experiences on the African continent are both central to Eyram’s processes of self-styling (cf. Frisina and Hawthorne). For other Afro-Italian women, a trans-European network is equally important. In Rome, at another Nappy Hour, Scarabello met Malaika (pseudonym), an Italo-Ugandan university student, who explained that she transitioned to natural hair after a six-month stay with an Erasmus scholarship in Paris, where she discovered how widespread natural

hair is in metropolitan contexts outside Italy. Because in Italy there was very little information available, she kept in contact with a Danish-Ugandan blogger, following her suggestions for natural hair care.

The success of Nappytalia is to be found in its blending of inspirational elements derived from different socio-historical contexts and in its giving voice to a specific Afro-Italian experience. It fills a void for locally situated practices and discourses on natural hair and black beauty, as it is written in Italian, and it innovates with respect to other blogs, for instance by posting hairstyle photos shared by the blog's followers. These choices create a sense of belonging and empathy among Italy-based followers, who share not only their hair care practices but also a desire to celebrate Africanness proudly. Two years after Nappytalia was founded, at the end of a Nappy Hour event, one Italo-Nigerian young woman described to Scarabello what she felt during the meeting: "There, we were all young African professionals, well-educated and ambitious. This was the first time I felt part of African brotherhood because we were all young Africans with great aspirations." These events were indeed occasions to create links among youth who, in their daily struggle for professional and social recognition, are contesting Italian society's tendency to marginalise African-descended people and to represent them as subordinate both socially and economically.

This project reinforces the appeal of Afro-style in Italy among "cool and trendy urban people," thus countering media discourses on Africanness that are dedicated exclusively to migration and integration issues. Moreover, the increasing interest in and consumption of black and Afro-inspired objects create new economic spaces for youth entrepreneurship, for instance in fashion or natural hair. This project also sheds light on the intense discussions about identity politics among Afro-descendant youth. Nappytalia's narrative, while bringing together youth in the fight against racism and white-based beauty standards, also raises questions about the normativity implicit in the notion of "natural hair." The association of "being African" exclusively with one stylistic choice—as also seen in the notions of African authenticity advanced by the Summer School—risks overshadowing the variety of individual processes of self-styling and the multiple subject positions people can hold with regard to African heritage and identity. As an Italo-Eritrean young woman emphasised in an interview: "Over the years, I have had both straight hair and afros, but I have always felt African! What is important is not your hairstyle, but your personal choice and awareness."

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the trend towards embracing Africanness or self-identifying as African among young African-descended Europeans. We have proposed to understand this trend in the context of a society that emphasises authentic selfhood, but that leaves little room for people to define Europeaness differently. The current racialised politics of difference and belonging, and a notion of Europeaness that is predicated upon African Otherness, both render it very hard to be recognised as both European and African, or Italian and Nigerian, or Dutch and Ghanaian, et cetera. The issue of African identity thus holds some urgency among young AfroEuropeans, which is manifest in how they take up this question and express their identities through practices of self-styling. Their projects, we argue, must be understood with reference to both the various global genealogies of Africanness and blackness they invoke and the local contexts from which they are born.

We have focused here on two such locations from which Afro-European formations are currently emerging. In the Netherlands, a renewed interest in African roots and self-styling among postcolonial Afro-Caribbean Dutch coincides, and sometimes converges, with the coming of age of a second generation of African postmigrants, who are embracing their African heritage through popular cultural expression. In Italy, the increasing celebration of Africanness corresponds to the growing presence of Afro-descendant youth in various social and professional fields, who differentiate themselves from the migrant experiences of their parents' generation and challenge the marginalisation of Afro-descendant people.

Emerging categories such as Afro-Dutch, Afro-Italian, Italo-Nigerian, Afro-European, or Afropean should not be understood as given "ethnic minority identities," but as the outcome of an ideology of self-making (particularly strong for young people) in a context of the valorisation of cultural assimilation, with nationhood as implicitly white. For our research participants "African identity," "African roots," "African

heritage” are key terms. These are not things that people simply “have,” but something that people “make.” They are part of *projects* of self-making and of group-making—but also of world-making: these projects decentre a particular notion of (white) Europe and Europeaness, designing Africaness into Europe. Of particular importance to these projects are the new, digital networks connecting young African-descended generations across Europe. These enable not only the reassembling and circulation of “African heritage” and “blackness” in unprecedented ways; they also mediate Europe as a space of affiliation and aspiration. We see these projects as a new engagement among African diaspora groups with the European project, as they make claims to Europeaness, in ways that sometimes transcend or even reject national identifications.

The modes of Afro-European self-making discussed here are influenced by global formations of Africaness and blackness—in aesthetic, political, and discursive resonances of Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism, Black Power, and Afropolitanism—and in that sense, they are part of “global Africa” (De Witte and Spronk). At the same time, concepts like Afro-Europe and Afro-European, Afro-Dutch, and Afro-Italian emerge as interventions not only into white Europe but also more established African-American formations. These appear as sources of inspiration and empowerment, but might also be discarded or questioned amidst the complexities of Afro-European identity formations. However varied these projects of African self-making are, they are all born from European cultural, political, and historical experience. In this sense they are Afro-European, or Afropean (Landvreugd). These new Afro and African identities advanced by young Europeans do not turn away from Europeaness (as dominant identity models would assume: the more African, the less European), nor simply add to Europeaness (“multicultural” identities), nor even mix with Europeaness (“hybrid” identities), but are in and of themselves European.

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Research Article

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The Black Mediterranean: Liminality and the Reconfiguration of *Afroeuropéanness*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0035>

Received August 1, 2018; accepted December 14, 2018

Abstract: This article focuses on emerging forms of ethnic identification among Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins. In 2013, in parallel with the so-called refugees' crisis in Europe, children of immigrants engaged in the Milanese management of forced migrations in the diasporic neighbourhood of Milano Porta Venezia. They legitimated their actions by emphasising a shared Habesha ancestral ethnicity with the asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. The article considers their ethnic identification in relation to the changes in the public discourse on the Mediterranean route. These ethnic identifications and mobilisations are interpreted as claims for social recognition as Italians rather than a form of the revivification of their ancestral ethnicity in the analysis. The Black Mediterranean represent a privileged analytical and physical space to work on the resignification of Afro-European subjectivities in contemporary Europe.

Keywords: liminality, Mediterranean route, second generations, Italianness, Eritrea, Ethiopia

Introduction

In present Europe, children of immigrants (the so-called second generations)¹ who trace back their ethnic origins to the African continent are undoubtedly exposed to powerful rhetoric linking their social experience to the African migrations in Europe, and, in the last years, to the forced migrations across the Mediterranean.² The process in question represents the consequence of a widespread assumption: the interconnection between children of immigrants' social experience in the places where they were born and/or raised (Europe) and their ancestral origins (Africa). This assumed natural connection represents nowadays the centre of the public and political debate on children of immigrants' "*structural doubleness*" (Silverstein 374). Furthermore, this assumption is misleadingly used in public discourse as a tool to question their membership as part of the national body (Riccio 117). This perspective is powerful enough to demarcate the self-representation strategies of the children of immigrants.

1 Since its formulation in the early 90s as a marker aimed at describing a new social category arising from the opening of new mobility patterns in South-North relations (Portes and Zhou 74), the expression "second generations" has been widely criticized both as a descriptive and analytical tool. The term, however, is still present in public and the academic debate.

2 The inscription of Europeans of African descents social experience out of the European social fabric strongly mirror in institutional as well as in public and medial differentiation structures. As the European agency for fundamental rights reports, people of African descent in the EU face widespread and entrenched prejudice and exclusion. The data collected in 12 EU member states about harassment and violence motivated by racism, police stops, discrimination and awareness of rights, education and employment, housing and social inclusion underline a dramatic raising of racism all over Europe. Italy has the highest rate of discrimination in almost all of the examined sectors. See Fra, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. Being Black in the EU*.

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While focusing on children of immigrants' ancestral identification patterns, this study takes a different stand. It analyses how Milanese of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins identify with refugees and asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean in a specific part of Milan, in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, which is a point of reference for many diasporic Ethiopians and Eritreans. Specifically, I investigate how they make sense of the term *Habesha*, an ancient ethnonym related to the Horn of Africa,³ as a form of “ethnic-activism” headed for the refugees coming from Ethiopia and Eritrea. This process, I argue, cannot be framed as a mere representation of children of immigrants' in-betweenness or continuity with their ancestral land dynamics. This article, on the contrary, aims at demonstrating how, among children of immigrants, ancestral ethnicity can work as a source of social recognition in Italy, the place they were born and/or raised. It analyses the changing patterns of identifying as *Habesha* which run parallel with the changes of the practices, discourses, and management strategies that reproduce the Mediterranean Route in Italy (and in Europe). In social sciences, there is increasing attention towards the multiple meanings related to the Mediterranean human crossings. This attention can be crucial to explore the past and present asymmetrical relations between the African and the European social space. Drawing on Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, scholars, as well as artists and activists, started to work with the concept of *Black Mediterranean* as a physical as well as an analytical space to make sense of the causes and effects of the Mediterranean Route in Europe.

Focusing on the Black Mediterranean, this article connects the redefinition of the ethnicity of Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins to the changes in the system regulating and controlling transnational forced mobility in Italy in the first period of the so-called European refugees' crisis.⁴ This period begins from the Lampedusa shipwreck on 3rd October 2013, and continues to the dismissal of *Mare Nostrum* operation⁵ and to the exacerbation of the Italian debate on the refugees flow in fall 2014. My analysis draws on the causes and the effects of the redefinition of forced migration regimes on the identification patterns of the Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins.

In my analysis, I employ the perspective of liminality (Turner). I argue that the structural changes in framing the Mediterranean route in Italy, opened a space of possibility (Turner 98) for Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins: a space to redefine their social positioning in the Milanese social space. Their ethnic engagement turned out to be a tool for the enactment of a politics of difference (Grillo 227) in which political recognition (Taylor 39) takes place through a process of socio-cultural differentiation.

By focusing on the relation between children of immigrants and national identity, this article contributes to the discussion on contemporary Afro-European subjectivities in the wake of the Black Mediterranean.

Methodological Note

This article draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Milano between 2014 and 2017. I mainly worked on impregnation (Olivier de Sardan 76), a methodology where the ethnographic experience occurs independently from conscious research intents; a perspective that allows to reconfigure the research object and to abandon pre-comprehensions. Fieldwork experiences have guided my theoretical perspectives and data collection strategies. During the fieldwork and analysis, I gave particular attention to the implicit meanings connected to everyday life (such as outfits, slangs, gestures, etc.) as “markers”

³ The term *Habesha* is a slippery concept concerning the ethnic as well as the racial and the political sphere in the Horn of Africa. It has been used to name geographical pockets of territory and people extending from the Arabian Peninsula to the furthest limits of the Horn of Africa region. The analysis of the term and of its different social and political meanings (the term is very problematic both in Ethiopia and in Eritrea) is far beyond the scope of this work. For an analysis of the term and its conjugations, see Smidt, *The Term Habš—An Ancient Ethnonym of the “Abyssinian” Highlanders and Its Interpretations and Connotation*.

⁴ The terms “refugees crisis” as well as “refugees flow” have been critically addressed since the early 90s as Western hegemonic and de-historicized constructions. See Malkki, *Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization*. All along the work, I will use these terms within a Black Mediterranean perspective in order to make sense of their hegemonic value in the present European social configuration.

⁵ The *Mare Nostrum* operation (October 18th 2013–October 31st 2014) was a military and humanitarian operation aimed at tackling the humanitarian emergency all along the Sicilian channel.

of wider cultural meanings. The research methodology, therefore, draws on what Ginzburg (57) defined as a “clue paradigm.” As the cultural meanings emerged from the fieldwork experience, I adopted mixed data collection strategies. Apart from participant observation, the data I report in this article draws on semi-structured interviews. While the interviews played an important role to analyse research subjects’ engagement with asylum seekers through a perspective of *longue-durée*, in this article, I will report only short extracts of the interviews I conducted with four Italian men and two Italian women of Ethiopian or Eritrean origins born and raised in Milano. I have combined their voices with other research materials to offer an ethnographic description of ethnic identification and identity politics among the research subjects of this study. In this perspective, even the virtual ethnography of their online social interactions concerning their engagement with asylum seekers entered the analytic process. Specifically, it informed about the role of media representations in the redefinition of their social positioning. The age of the people involved ranged from the late 20s to late 30s. To guarantee the anonymity of my interlocutors, I changed the names and the personal information of the people I interviewed.

The Black Mediterranean and the Refugee Crisis

Alessandra Di Maio (143) first coined the term Black Mediterranean in her research on migration across the two shores of the sea. She argued that just as deportation and enslavement related to the construction of the Western idea of progress, so present-day massive migrations relate to the circulation of financial assets and the exploitation of resources in the name of democracy and equal opportunities (Proglío 410). The contemporary refugees’ Mediterranean crossings are part and parcel of Europe’s constitutive history of empire, colonial conquest, and transatlantic slavery (Danewid 3). The so-called refugee crisis in Europe makes visible the nexus between racial violence and the emergence of European modernity as a discrete racial unit (2).⁶ The Mediterranean, first of all, represents a crucial frontier space in the present European configuration: its policies of control, in this perspective, are closely related to the production of a hegemonic European space and citizenship (Raeymaekers 168).

At the same time, however, the Mediterranean is continuously reproducing a fluid space of connection between different cultures, nations, continents, and subjectivities (Proglío 411). This connection is far from being symmetrical: on the contrary, it clearly shows the field of unequal relations producing the contemporary idea of Europe. In the ongoing Mediterranean crossings of people, as well as of social, economic and symbolic flows, it is possible to make sense of the colonial and postcolonial dynamics and their present reverberations. As Proglío suggested, in this perspective, the Mediterranean can be seen as an excess space of signification (411) transfiguring the historicized racial, social and symbolic processes of differentiation reproducing the present European hegemonic identity compared to a migrant otherness.

The Italian case, in this perspective, is very revealing: while the Italian colonial experience had been until recently largely regarded as an incidental aspect of Italy’s past, it represented the touchstone of the production of the Italian identity. The colonial subject had been framed as the counterpart of the production of a racially connoted Italianness.⁷ Since the foundation of the Italian nation-state, structurally unequal relation of North-South produced a racial and social system of differentiation that paved the way for the *two Italies theory*, along with the developing paradigm of modernity in Europe. The hegemonic Italy of the north, self-assimilated to the modern northern European nation-state; the other one, the south, had been assimilated to an attributed savage space related to the African continent (see Giuliani, *l’Italiano Negro*).

The lack of public conscience and a proper state-revisionism about the Italian colonial past and postcolonial legacy crystallised the modes of the definition of Italianness in terms of unspoken whiteness (Giuliani 574). From the end of colonialism onwards, South-North transnational mobility patterns in Italy

⁶ On the Black Mediterranean as a racial construction, see among others Hawthorne, *In Search of Black Italia*, and Saucier, Woods, *Ex Aqua*.

⁷ On the North-South differential relation in the making of the Italian national paradigm see Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*. For a wider discussion on the making of an internal differentiation in the reproduction of Italianness see Patriarca, *Italianità: la costruzione del carattere nazionale*.

(postcolonial mobility, transnational labour migrations, the forced migrations of the new millennium) have been framed through the same perspective. The discourses and the practices of reproducing the Italian hegemonic national paradigm, therefore, produced second-class citizens (Balibar 191). This process, however, does not only happen from a legal point of view, with the structural limitations in the formal acquisition of citizenship in the Italian legislative system.⁸ Even those who gained Italian citizenship can be structurally differentiated if they do not meet the racialised cultural ideas of hegemonic Italianness. The Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins I worked with, despite their Italian citizenship, embody these historic, social and symbolic patterns of differentiation.

From In-Betweenness to Differential Italianness

A common perspective in the studies on children of immigrants (the so-called second-generation studies) considers their social experience as bound to a structural *doubleness* between their ancestral identification and the place they were born and/or raised in. Concepts like “shifting,” “transition,” and “hybridity,” have long represented an analytical starting point in most of the analysis on children of immigrants’ relation with the ancestral land. At the same time, these concepts have long served as the epistemological basis for research on ancestral identification patterns. The term second generation itself semantically underlines an intergenerational continuity with their parents’ experience, and configure children of immigrants as subjects in-between: in between two national paradigms, two social contexts, two belongings and so on.

This analytical perspective then suggests that the Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins identification with refugees in Milano should be connected to their ancestral background. As Thomassen argued, however, the connection between children of immigrants’ social experience and their ancestral land ‘seems to be rhetorically produced by the society they were born and raised in, not an accurate description of their everyday social realities (35). This rhetoric aims at differentiating people within the national body according to a given social, legal, or racial status. It is also a hegemonic discourse that powerfully influences children of immigrants’ social behaviour and patterns of self-representation.

The mobilisation of the Habesha ancestry as a form of identification, cannot be said to *naturally* follow from their supposed in-betweenness of the Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins. On the contrary, it seems necessary to set our sight on the social space they have been constantly confronted with (the Milanese setting) and its transformations concerning the refugees’ flow. These transformations are part of a wider shift repositioning the Italian public and political discourse on the Mediterranean route.

The Re-signification of the Mediterranean Route in Italy

Forced migration and the relevance of the Mediterranean Route have been peripheral in both the European and the Italian public discourse, until recently. Cuttitta, in this respect, has referred to the island of Lampedusa in Southern Italy as the prototype of the European border. The process of “borderization” of the refugees’ issue on a geographical as well as a symbolic level (188) produced a hyper-visibility of the Mediterranean route and at the same time a structural disconnectedness from the core of the European social space. In the Italian context, the Mediterranean route, until recently, laid between public hyper-visibility at the borders of the national space and invisibility right after the boat arrivals.

Things started to change from February 2011, when the Italian government declared a state of emergency to face the rise of asylum seekers arriving on the Sicilian shores after the North-African crisis. Among the extraordinary procedures the Italian government took on, there was the release of humanitarian permits of

⁸ In this perspective, the failure of the citizenship reform in Italy, the so-called *Ius soli*, is very revealing: the reform aimed at overtaking the law 91, 1992, granting Italian citizenship on “*Ius sanguinis*,” and contemplating the concession of Italian citizenship to children of immigrants (only if they were born and continuously raised in Italy) at their 18th. The new citizenship reform would have allowed children of immigrants who are raised in Italy faster paths in their citizenship recognition. The draft law, presented in 2013, was stalled in Parliament for the duration of the whole legislature until its final sinking in December 2017.

six-months validity that allowed asylum seekers to move across the Schengen area.⁹

The state of emergency had been prolonged until the first of January 2013: in this period asylum seekers' transnational mobility, a process that had almost completely been inscribed in the domain of informality turned out to be permitted in Europe. One of the first effects of this phenomenon was how the Mediterranean route was made visible also beyond the European borders. The central squares, the railway stations, and the nodal points of the main European cities started to represent transition spaces for the asylum seekers trying to reach their destinations. This phenomenon, however, erupted with the end of the state of emergency in 2013, and the apparent normalisation of the previous system of migrant mobility control in Italy. The end of the state of emergency did not lead to a reprise of the practices of control and containment of the flow in Italy. In fact, differential treatment of the asylum seekers entered in force. Those nationalities who had high possibilities to receive forms of protection (such as Ethiopians and Especially Eritreans) were left free to cross the Italian borders.¹⁰

In 2013, the Mediterranean route was reproduced through an idiosyncratic relation between public hyper-visibility and institutional invisibility. The opening of a transit space for asylum seekers trying to cross the Italian borders in order to reach North European countries brought the refugees' issue in the centre of the Italian social space.

From 2013 on, the diaspora neighbourhood of Porta Venezia turned out to be representing a crucial nodal point of the informal transit of the Ethiopian and especially Eritrean asylum seekers. Their institutional invisibility, therefore, was counterbalanced by their hyper-visibility in one of the most central neighbourhoods in Milano.

In summer 2013, the refugee issue exponentially grew in the Italian media representations as well as in the Milanese public space. In parallel, the ongoing shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea assumed growing importance in the Italian public representations. The salience of the flow in the public discourse draws attention to the European inactivity concerning the drownings in the Sicilian channel.¹¹ The defensive Frontex¹² approach aimed at controlling the European frontiers rather than rescuing people started to be contested in the public opinion.

The Italian framework that for decades kept the Mediterranean route out of the national interest, therefore, completely turned upside down in summer 2013. The refugees' flow became a constituent issue of the Italian public discourse. Therefore, rather than in the assumed *in-betweenness*, I argue that it is necessary to understand the reconfiguration of Ethiopian and Eritrean Italians' identification with refugees within the suspension of national and transnational system of regulation and control of the forced mobility in Europe.

Changing Identification Patterns in the Black Mediterranean

The redefinition of the Mediterranean route in Italy powerfully acted on the reconfiguration of the immigrants' offsprings' ancestral belonging. The resignification of a second-generation *Habeshanness*, therefore, can be read in parallel with the opening of a liminal stage in the ways the refugees' flow have been framed in Milano.

As Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra pointed out, liminality can be a leading paradigm for understanding transformation in a globalised world (1). The suspension of the hegemonic categories of regulation and the control of transnational forced migrations opened a space of possibility for children of immigrants: a space

⁹ See. Dpcm 5.4.2011, *misure di protezione temporanea per i cittadini stranieri affluiti dai Paesi nordafricani* (see <http://goo.gl/acsjd2>. Last visit. 24.08.2017). The Italian initiative, to some extent, overruled the European system of regulation and control of the forced migrations in the European social space.

¹⁰ See Grimaldi, *In Search of Italianness*.

¹¹ For a genealogy of the Italian institutional approach concerning the rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea until Mare Nostrum Operation, see Panebianco, *the Mediterranean migration crisis: border control versus humanitarian approaches*.

¹² Frontex is the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union and operates since 2004 in patrolling the external European borders.

whence, following Turner, novel configurations of ideas and relations could arise (97). In this perspective, the mobilisation of their ancestral ethnicity can be considered as a source of political recognition in the Milanese public space.

The different ways in which Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins articulated their Habeshanness, therefore, can be symbolically analysed through the threefold distinction of the *rites de passages* (preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal) operated by Van Gennep in *Le rites the passage*. Such a distinction will show the direct interdependency between their changing identification patterns and the processes of the redefinition of the Mediterranean route in Italy.

Habeshanness out of the Habesha Social World

Besides its centrality as a social, economic, and symbolic space of reference in the city of Milano, Porta Venezia, since the 1970s, represents a central hub of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic transnational networks (Arnone 20). The neighbourhood is represented first of all as one of the most important areas of residence fuelling postcolonial mobility patterns from the Horn of Africa to Italy. These mobility patterns mainly involved Ethiopians and Eritreans who worked for the Italians in the urban centres of the region. The political turmoils in the Horn, from the late '60s on, led to civil war in Eritrea and to the deposition of Emperor Haile Selassie and to the institution of a Marxist-Leninist military junta (the Derg) in Ethiopia. In this new setting, Italians progressively abandoned both Ethiopia and Eritrea together with their domestic workers. The main groups who enacted postcolonial mobility patterns were Christians of the highlands of the present Tigray region in Ethiopia and the *Kebessa* (Highland) Eritrea.¹³

Furthermore, all along the 1980s' and the first 1990s' Porta Venezia became a central site in Europe in the long-distance nationalist struggle of the ethnic-based political movements of TPLF (Tigrayan people liberation front) and EPLF (Eritrean people liberation front).¹⁴ From the turn of the new millennium on, the neighbourhood turned to represent a central transit point in Europe of the so-called generation asylum (Hepner 184), people who fled Ethiopia and especially Eritrea¹⁵ after the 1998 Ethiopian-Eritrean border war.¹⁶

The *Habesha* neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, therefore, represents what Brah defines as a diaspora space: a location where transnational politics intersect with politics of location (632) in the wider space of the city. A space fuelled by different migration waves, where generational, ethnic, political and national divisions are immersed in a social field made of shared transnational economic, social and symbolic networks.

The cultural meanings circulating in Porta Venezia, as well as the complex system of social relations marking the neighbourhood, however, had been, until recently, mainly external to the everyday life of the Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins who were born or raised in Milano.

The distance with the *Habesha* neighbourhood of Porta Venezia can be well expressed in the following extract. Miki, an Italian of Eritrean origin in his thirties talks about the 'distance between his social circles

¹³ For a wider account of the postcolonial mobility patterns from the Horn of Africa to Italy see Marchetti, *Le ragazze di Asmara*.

¹⁴ The analysis of the political developments of the longstanding war against the Derg concerning the positionalities of TPLF and EPLF goes far beyond the scopes of this work. For a preliminary overview see Young. For an account of its implications in present diasporic nationalist narratives see Bernal.

¹⁵ Particularly, Eritreans fled the country in order to avoid the permanent military service. All of the citizens between 18 and 50 years (40 for women) have been included in the Eritrean Defense Force and the National Service. They earn a very low salary (25\$ per month), and the dissents are punished by physical punishment, torture, death and detention. For a wider account on Eritrean forced mobility strategies see Costantini and Massa, *So, now I am Eritrean*.

¹⁶ The official cause of the war had been a border issue dispute concerning a small village (almost abandoned) on the Ethiopian Eritrean border, the town of Badme. Because of the low importance of the disputed territory, the international community defined the Ethio-Eritrean conflict as the most senseless ever. Actually, the processes that led to the war played a central role in the definition of an Eritrean and an Ethiopian national identification, and it was considered as the watershed of the contemporary history of the Horn of Africa. Despite all of these processes being central in the understanding of the present Ethiopian and Eritrean nationalist positions (from the tense relations between Ethiopians and Eritreans to the ethnic and political differences between old and new generations migrants), it is beyond the scopes of this work to deeply analyse them. For a detailed account of the social dynamics that led to the Ethio-Eritrean border conflict see Iyob and Negash, Tronvoll.

and the everyday dynamics of Porta Venezia’.

Porta Venezia has always been the place of our parents. It was impossible to do anything, even to smoke a cigarette. We used to come to Porta Venezia when we were kids, but as soon as I started to go out by myself, I stopped.¹⁷

Habesha as a Way to be a Black Italian

The ways Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins experienced the city of Milano produced a strong differentiation compared to their parents’ patterns of identification (Portes, Rumbaut 160). Born and raised in Milano, they had to face the fact of being both black and Italians, two attributes that Andall defines as mutually exclusive in the Italian public space (400). The marginalised Milanese suburbs where they grew up as well as the racialization patterns they had to confront with, played a major role in the orientation of their social patterns within the city context. In this respect, the social and symbolic structures of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic community in Milano, rather than serving as a way to reproduce their parents’ patterns of identification, served as a basis for a new group-making project (Brubaker 19) in the Milanese social space. Specifically, they re-signified the term *Habesha* as a source of belonging and self-identification within the Milanese setting. Until recently this Habeshaness among children of immigrants represented a racial, cultural and symbolic marker they performed, to resist their attributed differential Italianness. The ethnonym, therefore, has long symbolised their condition of racialised Italians rather than the meanings related to the ancestral lands.

The distance between the ways people born in immigrant families used to refer to the term Habesha, and its social meaning in the wider Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora can be traced in the ways they had until recently dealt with forced migrations from the Horn of Africa to Milano.

Until recently there has been a strong differentiation between the social lives of Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins their same cohort of migrants of the so-called “generation asylum.”

The incommensurability between the two social groups was well expressed by Sara, an Italian woman of Ethiopian origins in her late 20s, at the beginning of 2014: “We are different from immigrants. We speak a different language; we did different schools. I think that this association is pointless.”¹⁸ The growing presence of migrants of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins in Milano from the turn of the new millennium on had often caused discomfort in children of immigrants’ everyday life. This is clearly underlined in the words of Jay, a Milanese of Eritrean origin in his late 30s, who talked about the growing presence of black immigrants in the city:

I remember when I was young. It seemed like every African knew each other in the city. And they helped each other. Until some years ago, anytime a black met another black in the streets they used to greet each other. [...] Now it is not like that at all. Even if for the Italians we are all the same.¹⁹

The opposition between citizens and immigrants, one of the most powerful rhetoric reproducing hegemonic conceptions of the Italian national identity (Merrill 278), had long been a touchstone to distinguish a *second generation Habeshaness* from the migrants’ social experience.

Furthermore, while the flow (both through formal channels and through the Mediterranean route), had been central for the older generations of their families, children of immigrants never felt the phenomenon of forced migrations as a central issue in their Milanese everyday life. This process is clearly expressed by Sami, an Italian of Ethiopian origin, whose familiar network is based between Italy, Ethiopia and Eritrea. He talked about his experience of cohabitation with one of his uncles from Eritrea when he was a teenager. His father decided to host Sami’s uncle in the period between his arrival in Italy and his successive movements towards Europe. When I asked him about his cohabitation with his uncle Sami answer was very indicative:

¹⁷ Fieldnotes, 04.06.2015.

¹⁸ Fieldnotes, 04.03.2014.

¹⁹ Fieldnotes, 26.04.2014.

I did not understand him. He misbehaved a lot, and he had some problems with alcohol. My mother was not confident in leaving me and my sister alone with him. [...] My father told us that he would not have spent more than a few days in our house, but he stayed for more than one month.²⁰

In this extract, the activation of the diasporic structures sustaining the migration chains and the familiar transnational networks, far from being a significant part of his modes of social reproduction, represented, in Sami's perspective, nothing more than a discomfort disturbing his everyday life.

Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins have been confronted with transnational flows continuously: they got to know of the models, the tactics, and the networks. Nevertheless, until recently, their models of self-identification in the Milanese public space had been extremely distant from these processes. This configuration of the term *Habesha* as the marker of a racial, cultural and symbolic differentiation compared to the Italian context illuminates a key process fuelling Afro European subjectivities in the Black Mediterranean. Identification of people born in immigrants' families informs us about colonial and postcolonial structures reproducing a race-class-gender differentiation in Italy. At the same time, it sheds light on the processes of differential inclusion and marginalisation among racialised citizens in the nation-state. A theoretical perspective focused on their ancestral background, therefore, seems to be totally useless as an answer to explain why, from Summer 2013 on, they decided to make the refugee issue a central issue of self-identification.

We Are All on that Ship

"On the 12th of October, 2013, for the first time in Milano, Ethiopians and Eritreans marched together as brothers. We are all on that ship."

This sentence was the slogan of the Committee 3.0, a spontaneous group of Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins, who organised the demonstration "We are all on that ship" to commemorate the victims of the forced migrations in the Mediterranean Sea. The commemoration represented the first step of a process of engagement. Until the second half of 2014, immigrants' offspring volunteered to support the Ethiopian and Eritrean asylum seekers arriving in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia. The march "We are all on that ship" had big participation of the Milanese citizenry, and it was considered as the Milanese contribution to the Italian national debate on the Mediterranean route.²¹

Despite its success, the demonstration, which ended in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, produced strong tensions within the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora in Milan. Many of the elders deserted or openly boycotted the march. As Amira, one of the members of Committee 3.0 said:

Most of my friends' parents did not want their children to join the march. Some of them were angry and openly tried to scare us or to boycott the demonstration. However, most of them simply told us that our intentions were good, but that kind of mobilisation was totally useless and counterproductive.²²

The lack of participation among the elders was justified by calling in question their fear of offering a negative representation of the homeland. As Hellen, an Italian of Eritrean origin who participated in the demonstration, stated: "Most of the diasporans mind their own business. They are afraid to talk. It could have been dangerous even to participate in a commemorative march."²³

To avoid any form of identification within the fragmented Ethiopian and Eritrean political panorama,²⁴ the organisers chose to ban any flag or symbol associated with a specific political side. Instead, they chose

²⁰ Fieldnotes, Milano, 04.09.2015.

²¹ Few days after the march, on 18th of October 2013, the Italian government launched the Mare Nostrum Operation.

²² Fieldnotes, 10.04.2014.

²³ Fieldnotes, 04.05.2014.

²⁴ In July 2018 a peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea entered in force after 20 years. Its effects are yet to be explored both in the homeland and in the diaspora.

to identify with a common *Habesha* ethnic belonging: on the one hand, it was a way to emphasise a political disengagement from Ethiopian and Eritrean internal issues; on the other hand, they conveyed a message of brotherhood uniting the Milanese diaspora to the homelands. As one of the organisers stated during an interview with *Corriere della Sera* covering the mobilisation:

We are the same people, *Habesha*; we are brothers with the people crossing the Mediterranean. I have been lucky because my parents made different choices during their youth. Otherwise, I could have been one of those people drowning.²⁵

The mobilisation presented above represents a powerful transformation in the social patterns that have long sustained the *Habeshanness* of Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins. The effects of the repositioning of their ancestral ethnicity as a space of common identification with the asylum seekers, however, produced a strong conflict with their parents' generation.

Their engagement with the refugees, actually, was connected to the ways public debate around asylum seekers changed in Italy from 2013 onwards. The redefinition of the Mediterranean route produced a suspension of the categories of identification and difference in the Italian public space. In relation to the refugees' arrival, the racial and symbolic attributions reproducing the hegemonic notions of Italianness became deactivated. In this liminal configuration, their ancestral ethnicity turned out to represent a source of political recognition in the Milanese public space.

Committee 3.0: Habesha Ethnic Engagement as an Italian Phenomenon.

The idea of the march was born on the 30th of September, right after the Sampieri shipwreck. Lampedusa came after that. At the mobilisation, by the way, all of the people only talked about Lampedusa.²⁶

In the extract above, Jack, the main organiser of the mobilisation “We are all on that ship” talked about the issues that arose during the march.

The process of organising the mobilisation started from a Facebook status he posted after the shipwreck of 30th September 2013 in Sampieri (Ragusa). A boat wrecked 15-20 meters from the shore, and 13 people (Ethiopians, Somalis and Eritreans), not able to swim, died. By posting a picture of burning candles²⁷ around the sinking boat, he wrote: “I think that if we, the people of the diaspora, who have the power and who are safe in Europe and in the US if we do not do anything it will not be the last time. Rest in peace.”²⁸ In his Facebook post, therefore, rather than focusing on the effects of the Mediterranean route management, Jack emphasised the issues related to the Ethiopian and Eritrean social space as the main responsible for the flow.

Following his message, some Milanese of both Ethiopian and Eritrean origins started to get together to organise a mobilisation in order to raise public awareness of the issue within the diasporic context.

On the 3rd of October 2013, during the organisation process, however, the Lampedusa shipwreck caught attention in the Italian news media and public debate. The effect the Lampedusa tragedy had on Italian public discourse was huge. The day after, the Italian government proclaimed a day of national mourning and state funerals were organised on the island.

Lampedusa shipwreck, with the international coverage it received, represented the watershed moment in the European politics on the Mediterranean route. The Mediterranean route, once in the periphery of Italian public discussion, became now a central issue in media and politics. Italian (and consequently

²⁵ Milano.corriere.it Eritrei, Etiopi e Somali per la prima volta in corteo “Lampedusa, siamo tutti su quella barca” <https://goo.gl/H7Xhak>

²⁶ Fieldnotes, Milano, 15.03.2015.

²⁷ . The burning candle represents a symbol of mourning in Christian Ethiopia and Eritrea. During the 2013 Mediterranean tragedies, it was utilised worldwide as a symbol of mourning, and it became the symbol of the 3rd of October.

²⁸ Jack's Facebook post, 30.09.2013 (my translation).

European) border politics changed fundamentally. On 18th of October, the Italian government promoted the *Mare Nostrum Operation*, a mission of search and rescue in the Mediterranean Sea, which replaced the Frontex defensive paradigm aimed at controlling the European border.

This configuration strongly influenced the mobilisation organised by Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins. The goals of mobilisation gradually changed from raising awareness in the diaspora to questioning the European framework of regulating the Mediterranean crossings.

The public and media attention in the Milanese social space, and the formal endorsement of the Milanese institutions, besides leading to significant participation of the Milanese citizenry, turned the march to a mobilisation of the “*second generations*.” Their ethnic origins filled the disjuncture between the Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporic social life and the Italian discourses on the Mediterranean route. A common identification with refugees (despite being Italians), therefore, created a space of political legitimisation for immigrants’ offspring: the emphasis on their ancestral belonging turned out to represent a vantage point to gain social recognition within the Milanese public debate on forced migrations. The repositioning of their *Habeshanness*, this way, turned out to represent a way to navigate the politics of difference (Grillo 227, Soja and Hooper 181) within the Italian public discourse.

In these respects, it is important to consider the interpretations of the name they chose to represent themselves as a political unit. The activists chose the name Committee 3.0 (three point zero) to underline their difference with the public and political organisations of “second generations” in Milano (such as *Rete G2*, or *Citizens 2.0*). In most of the media that covered the organisation of the march, however, the name of the committee changed from “three point zero” to “3 October.” By assuming that the march was the outcome of the 3 October Lampedusa shipwreck, the media misunderstood the graphic symbols of the Committee name. The interpretations of their name show how the hegemonic discourses on the Mediterranean route that spread in Italy during 2013 absorbed the meanings that led to their mobilisation.

“*We are all on that ship*” represented the first step of a wider engagement with the Milanese refugee issue among children of immigrants. From April 2014 onwards, in congruence with the eruption of the so-called refugees’ crisis in the major Italian cities, Committee 3.0, together with social and political activists of both Italian and Ethiopian and Eritrean origins, started to arrange a humanitarian chain in the midst of Porta Venezia.

Differential Italianness as a Source of Legitimation

Do you believe in genius loci? Do you know what it is? It is the church of Lazzaretto. That of the Promessi Sposi. [...] Do you realise that today, after 400 years, marginalised people are here again?²⁹

In the extract above, Stefano, a Milanese architect residing in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, used Manzonian parallelism to describe the condition of the Eritrean asylum seekers. From April 2014, for almost one year, an informal help chain was set up by a group of Italian of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins in Largo Bellintani, the square in front of the church of Lazzaretto. The place represented the symbolic centre of Porta Venezia, and the area around was the core of the diasporic space.

Their engagement played a complementary role and, at the same time, was integrated within the institutional structures that were responsible for the organisation and the management of the forced migrations. Their activities were mainly threefold:

- 1) Daily activities ranging from food supply to the supply of basic clothes and medical care, providing a proper alternative to the institutional machine of the first reception.
- 2) At the same time, they constantly interacted with the institutions involved in the formal management of the arriving asylum seekers. They confronted the municipality structures, especially to look for night accommodations for the asylum seekers. They also had to reassure asylum seekers about the absence of identification practices in the institutional night centres

²⁹ Fieldnotes, 20.04.2014.

- 3) Lastly, the humanitarian chain they arranged intersected with the informal networks of the diaspora in supporting the mobility of asylum seekers in Northern Europe. The activities included contacting people in the diasporic networks, up to the assistance of train tickets purchase and the indication of the most suitable rail routes to cross the Italian border.

When considering the main activities of the informal help chain, two main features stand out. On the one hand, Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins performed their perceived doubleness by acting as cultural brokers (De Jong 46) to legitimate their presence in the Milanese public discourse over the refugee flow. On the other hand, in the first months of the reception, due to the growing attention to the refugee flow in the public discourse, they struggled to turn the refugees' issue into an affair that concerned the whole Milanese public space. This process is clearly expressed in the aims of the Committee 3.0. As they state in their official presentation: "We are a group of young Milanese aimed at defending human rights as well as the rights of the asylum seekers. We want to make the coming Italian community more sympathetic and antiracist."³⁰

The suspension of the European regimes regulating forced mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 183), therefore, allowed the people born in immigrant families to play their supposed ethnic *know-how* as a way to legitimate their perceived differential Italianness as a source of recognition.

From a Black Mediterranean perspective, it is possible to see this process within a wider process of re-signification of the Afro-European frontier. The opening of liminal space in the processes of regulating the Mediterranean route produced a resignification of the identification patterns and of the social spaces connoting the social condition of Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins. Their ethnic engagement, in this perspective, represented a way to re-articulate their membership as Afro-Italian and Afro-European citizens and to re-signify their differential condition.

The interdependency between the resignification of *Habeshaness* and the configuration of the Mediterranean route in the Italian public discourse clearly emerged in the processes that led to the end of children of immigrants' help chain in the neighbourhood. From the second half of 2014 on, a new phase in the understanding of the Mediterranean route was inaugurated; a post-liminal phase that structurally excluded children of immigrants.

When the Mediterranean Route Becomes too Italian

Since the second half of 2014, in parallel with the institutionalisation of the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia as one of the main Hub of the asylum seekers' reception in Milano, the Committee 3.0 started to decrease its participation to the public debate on refugees. From the opening of the Mare Nostrum operation on, the new configuration of the Mediterranean route as a central issue in both national identification and civic participation, generated powerful political, economic, and symbolic circuits.³¹ In this context, two main oppositional paradigms arose—humanitarianism and securitarianism—and the neighbourhood turned out to be the battlefield of opposed political factions.

Residential and shop owner committees publicly protested against the asylum seekers' presence. For example, a restaurant owner in via Lazzaro Palazzi, a street of the neighbourhood with one of the highest concentration of asylum seekers hung up a protest banner at the entrance of the restaurant, publicly positioning himself against the asylum seekers' presence in the neighbourhood. He specifically talked about the "African degradation" they led in the district.³²

In Porta Venezia, there was the institutionalisation of the oppositional rhetoric between "Us" and "Them." The neighbourhood turned out to be the home base of Milanese far-right political movements, and

³⁰ Comitato 3.0 Facebook presentation <https://www.facebook.com/comitato.trepuntozero>. Last visit, 04.08.2017.

³¹ The salience of the Mediterranean route in the Italian national politics led to the dismissal of the operation Mare Nostrum, and the opening of the European joint Triton Mission (01.11.2014), aimed at defending the European borders rather than searching and rescuing people in the Mediterranean.

³² For a deeper understanding of the dynamics that developed in the neighbourhood concerning the asylum seekers presence, see Grimaldi, *Goffman e l'antropologia applicata*, 52.

there was a spread of public and media narratives calling the neighbourhood as an unhealthy place as well as a space of illegality.

The takeover of different discourses was reflected even in the reconfiguration of the neighbourhood as a space of engagement for the city's political activist groups and humanitarian associations. The growing presence of humanitarian professionals led to a progressive externalisation of the asylum seekers presence from the neighbourhood dynamics. This process has been clearly expressed firstly on spatial terms: since the summer of 2014, the informal reception had been redirected in a park immediately out of the neighbourhood, with an almost stable presence of the police aimed at preventing gatherings in the district's area.

The humanitarian logic that developed in Porta Venezia, furthermore, led to a disjunction of the Mediterranean route from the wider Milanese social space resulting in a division of the "helpers" from the "helped" (de Jong 57).

The politics of recognition in the volunteer work by the Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins was surrounded by hegemonic representations of Italianness: the refugee issues and its management became soon *too Italian* to represent a space of public legitimation for people of immigrant family background. The restoration of a European border regime and of the Italian national paradigm in the Black Mediterranean space, therefore, was mirrored in the reactivation of children of immigrants' structural marginality in the wider Milanese space.

Conclusion: Black Mediterranean and Afroeuropéanness

For over 20 years, the Mediterranean route has been redesigning the social, political, and symbolic landscape of Europe. It continuously activates a series of structural processes intersecting with each other and redefining the social constructions of identity and difference on a local, national and transnational level.

This study sheds light on the direct connection between the redefinition of the regimes of mobility concerning the refugees' flow and the reposition of the categories of identification and difference among racialised citizens. The analysis of the resignification of the *Habesha* identification among Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins represented a vantage point to consider the Black Mediterranean as both a space of analysis and a theoretical framework. The Black Mediterranean, on the one hand, represents a wider transnational setting whose interconnections reverberate in apparently disconnected social spaces. The analysis of the diasporic neighbourhood of Porta Venezia allows us to consider the effects of wider transformations on a national and transnational level from a situated spatial perspective. Exploring the relation between Porta Venezia and the Mediterranean route enabled to make sense of the ways the diasporic setting was internally reconfigured in the wake of the refugees' flow. Furthermore, it has been possible to consider the transformation of the relation between the diasporic setting and the wider city space. This spatial perspective, finally, allows us to explore the processes of resignification of the diasporic space among Italians of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins without implying any predetermined ethnic or cultural continuity with the refugees' experience. Within the Black Mediterranean, the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia turned out to represent a space of possibility that allowed redefining the relations to the wider city space and national discourse.

On the other hand, the concept of Black Mediterranean works as a powerful theoretical framework to make sense of the processes redefining ethnic, national and transnational identity in the contemporary European context. By considering the activation of the *Habesha* ethnic belonging among Milanese of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins, it has been possible to analyse the ways they re-signified hegemonic national categories of identification and difference, as well as to consider the various structural processes they intersected with during their ethnic mobilisation.

These processes mirror the present social formations that are becoming common among racialised European citizens. They also show how historicized hegemonic productions that reproduce European modernity as a discrete racial unit are resisted. As a theoretical perspective, the Black Mediterranean allows

deconstructing the narratives reproducing *Afro-Europeans'* life paths in Europe. The attention to the local, national and transnational processes related to the refugees' flow in present Europe, on the contrary frame the Mediterranean route itself as an integral part of the European social landscape. The Black Mediterranean, in this perspective, configures as a privileged analytical site to make sense of the power relations as well as of the ongoing resignification processes reproducing Afro-European subjectivities.

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Research Article

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Narrative Constructions of Online Imagined Afro-diasporic Communities in Spain and Portugal

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0026>

Received August 13, 2018; accepted December 9, 2018

Abstract: This article focuses on representative digital platforms created and coordinated by African and Afro-descendant people from Spain and Portugal. It argues that, by sharing and articulating mutual narratives online, these platforms act as spaces where Afro-diasporic communities are being imagined. To that effect, this paper not only builds on theoretical reflections on how Blackness and Afrodescendence are conceptualised on the internet. Adopting a cultural studies' approach that offers an interpretation of selected posts, it deduces the main narratives displayed and the diverse identificational spaces intertwined in those narratives. In doing so, the paper shows that these platforms challenge biased perspectives on Afro-diasporic communities and, within the digital space, conceptualise alternative, decentred—national and transnational—communities of Afro-diasporic people that are based on shared experiences of displacement, exclusion, resistance and self-empowerment.

Keywords: Afro-European studies, diaspora studies, digital media, Iberian cultural studies

Introduction

In a *Huffington Post UK* blog post from December 17, 2017, Madeline Wilson-Ojo highlights the crucial role of social media networks for Black women in the UK, for there “We are being represented. We are being inspired. A simple thing that mainstream media has failed to do.” She argues that internet has given the hitherto silenced a “voice that can reach anyone with an internet connection—uncensored and uninterrupted.” The online mobilisation of Black Europeans who use the internet as a space to defy the Eurocentric mainstream discourse on Africans and Afro-descendants mentioned by Wilson-Ojo is not a phenomenon limited to the UK but one that can be observed across Europe.

Whereas “Black Britain” is a phenomenon that has already been studied in extenso, this is less true for African and Afro-descendant communities from Spain and Portugal and their self-positioning in the Internet. This paper argues that the internet serves as a space of counterdiscourse for Afro-diasporic communities as it allows them to voice their own narratives and, thus, to actively participate in producing and circulating knowledge. Considering examples from Spain and Portugal such as *Afroféminas*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Plataforma Gueto*, this article examines how digital platforms—created by and for Africans and Afro-descendants—articulate collectively meaningful narratives that conceptualise online

Article note: Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – project number 353492083, joint publication by Julia Borst and Danae Gallo González

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imagined Afro-diasporic communities, ones that African and Afro-descendant individuals in Spain and Portugal can embrace and relate to.

In a first step, this paper tackles the potential of the internet as space where otherwise marginalised groups can gain visibility and raise their voices to promote empowering narratives and alternative knowledges that challenge the hegemony of Eurocentric perceptions of Black people in Europe. Approaching the phenomenon from the perspective of cultural studies, it builds on theoretical reflections about how Blackness and Afrodescendancy are conceptualised in the internet and studies the specificities of the Spanish and Portuguese context. In a second step, through close readings of selected posts, this paper deduces and compares the main narratives to untangle the diverse intertwined identificational spaces.

Theoretical Remarks

With the Web 2.0 launch around 2004, the Internet has become a more interactive space, enabling new venues for human communication and sociability and, therefore, giving a new impulse to what André Lemos called the “post-mass media” functions (cf. Lemos). In contrast to the hierarchical, univocal and mostly national and benefit-oriented knowledge production of mass media, post-mass media potentially enable a more participatory and multidirectional structure, one that can release producers and consumers from several constrictions of traditional emission and reception, such as national borders and the hierarchical, capitalist logic underlying mass media functions.¹ Although post-mass media are not exclusively a recent phenomenon—analogue flyers, fanzines and alternative radio stations have existed for years (cf. Lemos 404)—in particular digital media have transformed the communicational landscape due to the new low-budget venues opened by social networks and to other information-communication technologies (ICT) being omnipresent in everyday life. Not only do these avenues increase the flow of messages we produce and receive instantaneously no matter where we are, but they also transcend the hitherto existing sender-recipient dichotomy. Users, now, have become content-producers who engage in a “many-to-many communication” (Fuchs 56), a decentralized structure that potentially allows users to participate in collective positionings and community building that are not (or, at least, less) based on a hegemonic top-to-bottom approach, as is the case in traditional media (cf. 56).

Still, social inequality does not elude the digital sphere, as the ongoing debate about “digital divides” shows: that is, the class-derived gap in access to digital technology; the socioeconomic gap in the use, ability and motivation to take advantage of the internet’s potentialities and the unequal opportunities of extrapolating to the “real world” the knowledge and social resources acquired online (cf. Azzonlini and Schizzerotto; Ragneda and Muschert; Leurs). Furthermore, critical postcolonial media studies not only point to the necessity of accounting for both the intersections of class, “race” and other discriminatory regimes when debating accessibility to digital technology and hierarchical structures, norms and mainstream users’ habitus in cyberspace “that may restrict subaltern users in their ability to become active agents in their own representation” (Leurs 251; cf. also Buccitelli 2-3).² They also warn of media studies’ Eurocentric and universalising tendencies and signal that online interactions may reproduce variations of “subaltern” positionings in the digital space (cf. Merten and Krämer; Gajjala). In fact, the democratising force and the real impact of post-mass media functions in the Internet should not be overestimated. However, the mere existence—and, even more so, the noticeable number—of venues of digital communication by people of African descent indicate that the internet does provide a space for Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people to articulate their positionings, as we analyse in the following. So, what stories do they tell in the Internet and how do they imagine themselves as communities?³

¹ Lemos does not use the prefix “post” to allude to something that “arrives at the end of mass media process, but a new way to understand what cannot be put under the label ‘mass communication’” (417).

² While the consequences of colonialism in the everyday experiences of Afro-descendants are more than evident, the effect of the digital gaps for these people in Europe—not to speak about Spain and Portugal—has not yet been examined at length.

³ During our research for this article, we found dozens of examples of blogs, video blogs and other digital formats that deal with and/or originate from within Afro-diasporic communities in Spain and Portugal—and our list is far from exhaustive.

In her study on indigenous and diasporic peoples, Kyra Landzelius argues that “cyberspace not only assists in the emplotment and mediation of diaspora, it actively keeps the ideology of diaspora alive” (“Introduction” 21) for it “arguably boosts the value of ‘being’ diasporic as a sustainable identity construction” (21). The internet thus represents a space to stay connected, “write [oneself] into larger histories” (24) and to articulate a shared diasporic condition (cf. also Kumar; Brinkerhoff, “Digital” 32-33). Such an articulation can comprise a meaningful and empowering moment with respect to a diasporic subjectivity that is otherwise often characterised by a feeling of alienness and marginalisation within the host society and that, thus, can (re-)connect to a virtual diasporic community.

Yet, Landzelius’s analysis puts into focus a concept of diaspora that strongly relies on the idea of return—both physical and symbolic/fantasized—to an actual “homeland” or a dream of one (cf. 20-21). Such a conception draws on William Safran’s frequently quoted definition of diaspora as an expatriate minority community that—among other characteristics—shares a collective vision of an original homeland to which the diasporic subject relates—as a potential place to return to in the future—and the relation to which strongly shapes the group’s consciousness as a community (cf. Safran 83-84). However, given that many communities commonly considered diasporic—in particular in a postcolonial framework—would not comply with Safran’s idea of an “ideal type” based on the Jewish diaspora (cf. Clifford 305-06), other notions of diaspora have developed. They notably emerged from a debate of postcolonial displacement and transnational migration and direct attention to the possibility of non-territorial, symbolic frames of reference and lateral ties beyond “homeland” and “hostland” (cf. Faist 12).

Accordingly, such newer notions emphasize the significance of “a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering adaptation, or resistance” (Clifford 306) that gives rise to a collectively meaningful narrative of commonality: a common framework of reference and solidarity that, with respect to the diasporic community’s self-image, might be as or even more important than “the projection of a specific origin” (306). Such an approach—as propagated, for instance, by Paul Gilroy in his study on *The Black Atlantic*—simultaneously shifts the focus from a unidirectional connection to a “lost centre” to decentred, plural and lateral connections between different Afro-descendant diasporic communities and their transnational practices. Gilroy’s notion of the “Black Atlantic” is insightful in this context, for he, as Ruth Mayer argues, puts emphasis on the constructedness of the Black diaspora “as a result of a history of adscriptions, projections, prejudices and self-presentations” (83) in terms of a shared lived reality that constructs the experience of Blackness in the first place (cf. 83; also Brinkerhoff, “Digital” 32; Banjo 2).⁴

Yet, in particular, if we talk about “Black Europe,” we have to bear in mind the heterogeneity of Afro-diasporic communities around the globe and even within Europe. For this reason, scholar Michelle Wright advocates thinking beyond a dominant master narrative of Blackness—one that is linked to the geography and temporality of the Middle Passage, the transatlantic slave trade, as well as “the heteropatriarchal male body as the Black norm” (*Physics* 12). Such a narrative, thus, does not capture the multidimensionality of Black experiences and excludes alternative narratives of Blackness, in particular in an era of “increasing proliferation of [...] ‘hyphenated’ Black identities” (5; cf. also *Becoming* 5-6; Falola 1, 244).

Dealing with online self-positionings of Afro-European communities in general, we need to bear Wright’s warning in mind, not only to remind us of the limits of potential “generalizing assumptions” we make within our analysis (cf. Wright, *Physics* 13) but also while subsequently analysing the complexity of the communities’ shared narratives that circulate in the digital space. That is, narratives that go beyond a Middle Passage Epistemology and, likewise, broach the issues of (forced) movements of enslaved Africans beyond the transatlantic route, of discriminatory border politics—characteristic of a postcolonial era of transnational migratory flows—and of racist experiences in everyday life in Europe, which, nevertheless, are closely entangled with a legacy of European colonialism and its underlying hegemonic thinking patterns (cf. 8).

In addition, Europe itself is all but a homogeneous space, and we need to consider the specific context of Spain and Portugal (cf. Crumly Deventer and Thomas 336-37), two countries that not only both geographically represent Europe’s “borderland” to Africa but also look back on a long history of migratory

⁴ All translations of quotes into English are ours if not otherwise indicated.

movements between the African continent and the Iberian peninsula that tends to be pushed aside in the collective memory (cf., e.g., Henriques Castro; Lowe; Herzog; Maser; Vi-Makomè). The presence of African people in the Iberian Peninsula has a long history that goes back to the Roman Empire, and thus includes the Al-Andalus period and, later on, the maritime-commercial ventures and the conquest of the Americas. Some scholars even argue that the early modern Iberian Peninsula had the largest African and Afro-descendant population in Europe (cf. Martín Casares and Barranco 52; Arenas 169). After a decline of the Black population after the abolition of slavery (cf. Arenas 168; Martín Casares 20), the consequences of Iberian colonialism and postcolonial politics in Africa as well as an economic boom in the 1980s/90s attracted migratory flows from the African continent to Spain and Portugal, with arrival peaks at the turn of the 21st century (cf. Ferrero Turrión 87).

Despite this (more or less numerous but) continuous presence of African and Afro-descendant people in Portugal and Spain, both countries share the paradoxical tendency to foster a biased discourse on their national identities as generally homogeneous “white” European nations. This is a discourse that has framed Afro-descendant people in Spain and Portugal as “aliens” to both societies and relegated them to the status of (mostly undocumented) immigrants (cf. Arenas 171; Vi-Makomè). Yet, several studies argue that Spain and Portugal were less racist than other European countries until the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 (cf. González-Enríquez 155, Rinken 222). This crisis, however, led to the countries’ economic situations deteriorating and, thus, added fuel to lingering racist and xenophobic attitudes that were fostered by the mass media disseminating stereotypical pictures of immigrants and spreading anxiety among the alleged “original” population (cf. Berriane and de Haas 2).

Now, if we follow Stephen Small’s argument in his recent article, despite this inhomogeneity, there are salient “[s]imilarities in the ambiguous visibility and endemic vulnerability in which black people find themselves” (“Theorizing” 2) throughout Europe. As he elaborates, a shared narrative of what he calls “Black Europe” emerges from this context, a narrative that is characterized both by an experience of race-thinking and institutional racism within European societies and by the persistence of a colonized knowledge production about Black people based on racist clichés that still dominate a European imaginary about Blackness (cf. Small, *20 Questions* 11-13). Yet, as he confirms, “for every act of racism there is an act of resistance—collective, organized, individual, or spontaneous” (21), as, e.g., in terms of cultural products that generate alternative narratives on Black Europe and, thus, trigger a critical knowledge production subversively challenging Eurocentric interpretations of Black culture (cf. 21-22, 66; also Alzouma).

In the extra-academia alternative spaces of Black mobilization and knowledge production that play a central role, it is, in particular, digital networks and social media that are crucial: They give rise to “new routes of circulation, [where] uncharted forms of emancipation emerge” (Vergès 46) and, as a form of “counterpublic” (cf. Fraser), provide a space to uncover and disseminate Afro-diasporic people’s self-images and self-positionings (cf. also Small, “Theorizing” 5, 9; *20 Questions* 18; also Nakamura 5). Correspondingly, Afro-German activist and writer Noah Sow emphasizes the potential of ICTs to enable Africans and Afro-descendants to “self-publish digitally, reach anyone who is interested, and use networks to get the word out, autonomously and on a global scale” (30) and, thus, to “communicate *directly*, [...] using virtualities to form the tangible” (29-30) in the sense of a digital diasporic space in which people of African descent can connect with each other on a transareal and/or global level (cf. Grassmuck and Wahjudi; Alzouma).

Although we should not idealize the digital space due to the afore-mentioned power structures that are at work here as well as to the (ab)use of ICTs to spread extremist ideologies and hate-speech (cf. Buccitelli 1; ENAR 15; also Landzelius, “Postscript” 295; Mansell 107-08), our analysis shows that the internet, regardless, provides a space for the marginalized Afro-diasporic subject to articulate “the tensions between chosen identities and given identities” (Gilroy, “Roots” 19). Being an alternative option to hegemonic media structures, whose representations of Black culture frequently serve “the interests of non-black people, who mainly control its finance and distribution” (Small, “Theorizing” 9), these self-articulations enacted online might play a crucial role in the context of Black social mobilisation. As Koen Leurs comparably argues in his study on how Moroccan-Dutch youth articulate identity in cyberspace, digital platforms can be considered as “ambiguous constellations full of tensions and hierarchies but with room for subversion” (23) as the content producers become agents in their own representations by articulating self-determined

identificational spaces (cf. also 25; de Leeuw and Rydin 175). Accordingly, the mentioned self-articulations might act as strategic positionings—positionings that do not necessarily rely primarily on a racialised notion of identity as origin or descent but, rather, on a lived reality of being “the racialized Other” (cf. Crumly Deventer and Thomas 337).

Common narratives articulated and shared online create a consciousness of belonging to a community (cf. Falola 252; Leurs 21). In this sense, as several studies have signalled (cf. Fox; Lutz and du Toit; Grădinaru; Mahmood), these identity-building emplotments are articulated around the same logic that underlies Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”: it refers to the shared perception of belonging to a community—a community whose members the individual might never have met, but that is held “together by stories, images and symbols that represent shared meanings about itself” (de Leeuw and Rydin 178). The individual relates to this community, which—independent of its ontological status—is imagined as such.

While Anderson refers to the national identity-building processes in 19th-century Europe that emerged from the circulation of (selective) vernacular narratives in the context of the democratisation of the printing press, which was facilitated by technical improvements, we apply the concept of “imagined communities” to a different context. If we speak about online “Afro-diasporic imagined communities,” we, first, have to keep in mind the contextual and medial particularities of the 21st century. It is as an age in which diasporic communities and their cultural practices are progressively gaining rising visibility and in which shared narratives—narratives that, relating to diasporic subjects’ everyday experiences, create a sense of belonging and, thus, give rise to an imagined community—“are increasingly constructed through and in media” (de Leeuw and Rydin 178) in general and notably in digital media (cf. 178; Bailey, et al. 2; Alzouma 204; Siaper, *Understanding* 174). Although by no means unaffected by existing hegemonic structures of power and privileges, digital media allow for a more decentralised and liberated content production and consumption so that narratives arise that tend to be overlooked or repressed elsewhere (cf. Small, *20 Questions* 219).

Second, and most importantly, we need to take into consideration that these online imagined communities do not necessarily refer to a common national and/or cultural origin and do not primarily revolve around the axes of the nation as the narrative thread but around transnational networks and experiences related to “race,” or more precisely “racialization.” For in Spain and Portugal—as in Europe in general—national identities have been constructed not only “in *inclusionary* terms as the result of constitutive formations structured around existing demographic, historical and cultural modalities” but also “through recourse to *exclusionary* constructs in which identity is simply expressed in negative and dissociative registers—being European means not being African, Latin American, Asian, and so on” (Crumly Deventer and Thomas 336-37), a double-edged construct that, within Spain and Portugal, however, tends to not be openly discussed.⁵

Correspondingly, the articulation of shared narratives that shape an image of a transnational Afro-diasporic community in the Internet and, consequently, create mediated symbolic spaces for identification has a political dimension. As previous research affirms, “mainstream media mostly define the representation of ethnic minorities’ identities in the public sphere while diasporic media allow for resistance, appropriation, and counter representation as well as identity assertion” (Bailey 212; cf. also Georgiou 17, 25; Siaper, *Understanding* 185). To that effect, they bear the potential of constituting digitally mediated “counterpublics” which, according to Nancy Fraser’s argument, represent “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (123; cf. also Siaper, *Cultural* 97-102). Accordingly, digital platforms that challenge mainstream perceptions of so-called “minority groups” stage alternative perspectives articulated by Afro-diasporic people as “strategic positions for self-expression and representations” (Bailey et al. 2; cf. also Fraser 126). Doing this, they both imagine *and* negotiate narratives of commonality “advanc[ing] processes of critical and reflexive engagement with imagined communities” (Bailey et al. 3). Yet, their political impetus can be considered as both promoting an intra-community debate and potentially reaching a wider audience to make it aware of the relevance of the matters discussed and, simultaneously, destabilise mainstream views (cf. also Fraser 124; Siaper, *Cultural* 106).

⁵ In this respect cf. also Brabazon; Balibar.

Other than media and communication studies and/or social sciences approaches that discuss the interrelations between mediated diasporic spaces (as “alternative” public spheres) and their effects on diasporic communities in the “offline world” (cf., e.g., Brinkerhoff, *Digital*; “Digital”; Kumar; Mainsah; Bailey; Leurs; Siapera, *Cultural*), we adopt a cultural studies perspective. This perspective allows us to concentrate on an analysis of shared narratives and discourse traditions that become manifest within digital platforms coordinated and written by Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people and that, consequently, provide a basis for a mediated imagination of Afro-diasporic communities in national and transnational contexts, which are characterised by certain commonalities. Therefore, a key question is: do the studied digital platforms stage narratives that give rise to an imagined Afro-Spanish/Afro-Portuguese and/or Afro-diasporic community and, if so, what are these shared narratives? While this paper concentrates on the narratives that function as potential identificational spaces for Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people, these issues also outline a field for further (empirical) research that links online articulations and their effects on the offline world. The issues give rise to questions such as whether those self-representations do, in fact, mobilise communities in “real life” and what effects they might have on communities’ collective memories as well as on the general political debate on past and present migratory movements or on social and political participation of “minority groups” within mainstream society.

In the following, we, accordingly, investigate the potential of individuals’ and/or collectives’ online positionings to give rise to common narratives. These common narratives frame an imagined Afro-diasporic community based on shared experiences of transnational belonging—evoking diasporic subjectivities that inhabit an in-between space—and of “being Black in Europe.” These experiences are shaped by the ongoing effects of a colonial legacy and a discursive tradition of racism and/or racialization of “the Black Other” in present-day Europe as well as of a Black social mobilization against such a tradition and a subversive epistemological re-appropriation of Blackness. Correspondingly, we examine to what extent our case studies map counter-images that antagonise Eurocentric assumptions about Blackness and relate to powerful moments of African and Afro-descendant resistance and empowerment within a national (Spanish/Portuguese) and transnational context (cf. also Alzouma 210).

Case Studies

The last years have seen an impressive rise in the variety of digital platforms managed and/or written by African and Afro-descendant people in Portugal and Spain. These range from webzines and digital databases to individual and collective blogs, video blogs or video channels on platforms such as Youtube, podcasts and social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Examples from the Spanish context are *Africanidad*, *Afrofeminas*, *Radio Africa Magazine*, *Comunidad Melanina*, *Negrxs Magazine*, *Nadie nos ha dado vela en este entierro*, Desirée Bela-Lobedde’s (aka *La negra flor*) blog and videos, *Espacio Afro* and *Black Barcelona*, to name but a few. In the Portuguese context, one could enumerate *Plataforma Gueto*, *Femafro*, *Roda das Pretas*, *Afroportuguesa*, *Fórum Afroportugal*, *Djass—Associação de Afrodescendentes*, *Afrolis*, *Diário de uma Africana* or Yolanda Tati’s Instagram and Youtube accounts.⁶

In the following, we focus on four examples: *Afrofeminas*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Plataforma Gueto*. By offering an exhaustive analysis of the discourses expressed within these platforms’ posts, we take a closer look at the communities they imagine for Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people, thus, shedding

⁶ Many of these examples are recent and provide evidence of increasing use of the internet by representatives of communities that tend to be marginalised in mainstream media but aim at gaining visibility and participating in the creation/transformation of knowledge about these communities within the digital space. Whereas this paper focuses on examples where African or Afro-descendant people in Spain and Portugal speak for themselves, one can also find several cases where non-Africans or non-Afro-descendants edit digital magazines, coordinate digital platforms and/or write blogs that deal with issues of African and Afro-descendant people in Spain and Portugal and their cultures such as *Afribuku*, *Wiriko*, newspaper *El País’s África no es un país* or *Publico’s Racismo à Portuguesa*. Moreover, it needs to be born in mind that digital authorship is not always clearly discernible on digital platforms.

light on the narratives they articulate to conceptualise those communities.⁷ From this comprehensive analysis of the platforms' individual posts, we deduce the key discourses, illustrating our argument with chosen representative examples.

In general, these platforms, which combine their own websites and/or blogs and social media networks, have a significant number of followers and/or a comparatively long history. While content from all channels is considered in this paper, the main focus is the more extensive and elaborate statements and comments that mostly appear on the websites and blogs. Furthermore, the studied platforms illustrate the connectedness of the respective community for they both gather texts by individuals who are active in real life and on other internet platforms and relate to the activities of other platforms and initiatives. These are all parameters that establish them as important points of reference for the online African and Afro-descendant communities in Portugal and Spain, and they show how community-related discourses circulate in the Internet.

Main Foci of the Studied Platforms

Afroféminas is an Afrofeminist blog founded in 2013, with multiple entries and linked to social media networks such as Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, where both the blog's own posts and content by other (Afro)-feminist and/or antiracist activists and initiatives are reposted/retweeted. It is coordinated by Antoinette Torres Soler and mostly written by more or less ten different bloggers (cf. Civieta). Having an impressive number of followers—as at July 9, 2018, over 10,000 on Twitter and Instagram, nearly 40,000 on Facebook and 2,048 on the blog itself—*Afroféminas*, as “an online community for Afro-descendant/Black women,”⁸ brings together Spanish-speaking African and Afro-descendant women to fight non- and/or misrepresentation in Spanish society and media.⁹ It aims at “celebrating” these women’s knowledge on all kind of topics and is, therefore, considered a “fundamental tool for our collective liberation”¹⁰ that makes people listen to the heterogeneous discourse of Afro-Spanish women who, within *Afroféminas*, finally speak for themselves.¹¹

As the webpage editors confirm (cf. Editorial NGX), *Negrxs Magazine* emerged from the collective initiative *Espacio Afroconciencia* (since February 13, 2018, at Facebook as *Espacio Afro*), which—by organizing cultural, artistic and social activities and, thus, providing visibility—aims at empowering Africans and Afro-descendants in Spain and allowing them to participate in initiatives and social transformation.¹² To expedite this project, the digital journal *Negrxs Magazine* was founded at the end of 2017 to address issues and disseminate information of relevance to the Afro-Spanish community. Conceptualized as a platform of reference that brings together different Afro-Spanish initiatives/voices and establishes a communication network on a national and international level,¹³ *Negrxs Magazine* focuses on constructing “the world from our blacknesses in a self-determined manner” (Editorial NGX), allowing for the heterogeneity of African

7 In the following, when quoting, *Afroféminas* will be indicated as AF, *Femafro* as FA, *Negrxs Magazine* as NM and *Plataforma Gueto* as PG.

8 AF, “¿Quiénes somos?” afrofeminas.com/acerca-de/.

9 Cf. AF, “Entrevista a Antoinette Torres, creadora de Afroféminas.” 25 June 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/06/25/entrevista-a-antoinette-torres-creadora-de-afrofeminas/.

10 AF on Instagram, www.instagram.com/p/BUPdvFjlBg4/.

11 AF, “Comportamiento de negro/a.” 18 January 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/01/18/comportamiento-de-negroa/.

12 Cf. *Matadero Madrid*. “Espacio Afroconciencia: grupo de pensamiento y acción colectiva.” www.mataderomadrid.org/ficha/6032/espacio-afroconciencia.html.

13 As in the text on Brazilian activist Marielle Franco that is signed by a number of Afro-diasporic activist groups from other European countries (cf. NM, “A nuestra hermana Marielle: el puño levantado, el corazón en un puño.” Start Page, www.negrxs.com). Moreover, the posts include, e.g., texts by popular activists and/or authors of digital content who are also active on other digital platforms such as Lucía Asué Mbomío Bacheng, Antumi Toasijé, Desirée Bela-Lobedde or yos erchxs piña narváez.

and Afro-descendant people in Spain and their diverse identity constructions.¹⁴

Similar to *Negrxs Magazine*, which emerged from a thinking group and collective action, *Plataforma Gueto* and *Femafro* are the online expressions of two associations in Lisbon with a strong political and social commitment. Correspondingly, the often rather short posts—in particular on *Femafro*—mostly compendiously share information on the activities of the association and of other initiatives, upload materials such as a scanned version of a magazine published by *Plataforma Gueto* and disseminate news of interest for the Afro-Portuguese community.

Plataforma Gueto is a self-defined “Black social movement” born in 2005 that, since June 2012, holds one of the oldest blogs managed by and written for Africans and Afro-descendants in Portugal—among others by Flávio Almada and Jakilson Pereira (cf. Gorjão Henriques). Its goal is to “defend the self-determination of all peoples in the struggle against capitalism/imperialism, colonialism and racism.”¹⁵ *Femafro* is younger, having emerged from a Facebook page that, in 2016, led to the creation of an association for Black, Afro-descendant and African Women, which was founded by Raquel Rodrigues, Joanna Sales and Dary Carvalho (cf. Gorjão Henriques). Nowadays, it holds a website and a powerful Facebook account with around 1,900 followers, as of July 9, 2018. Its goal is to gather people “around the fight against racism, sexism, xenophobia, classism, discrimination and violence on the basis of gender by means of promoting their active participation and representativity in the public and private sphere.”¹⁶

Denouncing (Past and Present) Racisms and Marginalization of Afro-diasporic Communities

All platforms studied in this paper emphasise the long history of racism and marginalisation of African and Afro-descendant people, with a particular focus on the situation of Afro-diasporic communities in Europe, which relates to a master-narrative of Africans’ and Afro-descendants’ oppression worldwide but also reveals local histories specific to the Iberian Peninsula. Moreover, as we show in the following, they likewise embody the communities’ quest to counteract the persistence of racism and to empower their readers by offering visions of resistance and affirmative identificational spaces.

Personal testimonies and theoretical discussions of every-day racism and discrimination in Spain are numerous on *Afrofeminas*. Though historical Black figures and diachronic persistencies of racism are discussed,¹⁷ the majority of posts tend to deal with present-age phenomena such as the devaluation of African and Afro-descendant people’s natural hair,¹⁸ the stereotyping of Africans and Afro-descendants in the public’s perception and in media and advertising¹⁹ and racism in the education system or working

¹⁴ Cf. NM, “About Ux.” www.negrxs.com/aboutux/. The magazine’s official webpage is supplemented by a Facebook page where the website’s texts and other texts dealing with similar issues are reposted. Furthermore, it disseminates information about current antiracist and/or cultural events of interest to African and Afro-descendant people in Spain. As it has been recently founded, *Negrxs Magazine* has only 132 followers and 128 likes on Facebook (with a rising tendency) and 1,148 followers on Twitter as at July 9, 2018. *Espacio Afro* on Facebook has 3,733 followers.

¹⁵ PG, “Plataforma Gueto.” 13 January 2012, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2012/01/13/plataforma-gueto/.

¹⁶ FA, “Home.” femafro.pt.

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., AF, “Del Blackface y otros demonios.” 25 December 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/12/25/del-blackface-y-otros-demonios/; “Antumi Toasijé: ‘Hay una invisibilización total de los aportes de las personas africanas y afrodescendientes en la historia de España.’” 2 January 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/01/02/antumi-toasije-hay-una-invisibilizacion-total-de-los-aportes-de-las-personas-africanas-y-afrodescendientes-en-la-historia-de-espana/.

¹⁸ Cf., e.g., AF, “¡Quien manda en mi pelo soy yo!” 28 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/28/quien-manda-en-mi-pelo-afro-soy-yo/; “8 razones por las que quieren tocar el pelo de las mujeres negras y por las que decir que no.” 26 April 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/26/8-razones-por-las-que-quieren-tocar-el-pelo-de-las-mujeres-negras-y-por-las-que-decir-que-no/; “Pelo malo... Pelo bueno.” 9 April 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/09/pelo-malo-pelo-bueno/.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., AF, “La violencia simbólica vende.” 23 April 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/23/la-violencia-simbolica-vende/; “Cola Cao nos insulta.” 24 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/24/cola-cao-nos-insulta/; “La hipersexualización de la mujer negra. Testimonio.” 5 June 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/06/05/la-hipersexualizacion-de-la-mujer-negra-testimonio/; “Reconociendo estereotipos racistas: Jezebel, la negra insaciable.” 20 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/20/reconociendo-estereotipos-racistas-jezebel-la-negra-insaciable/.

environments.²⁰ The blog also gets involved with socio-political debates and reacts to current scandals such as the highly problematic advertising campaign by H&M in 2018.²¹ There is a specific focus on (the omnipresence of) microracisms in Spain, that is, circumstantial gestures in daily life that are, nevertheless, offensive and violating as they rely on discriminatory stereotypes, as in the comment “you are very beautiful for being black.”²²

Although the posts tie in with internationally discussed issues such as the *Black Lives Matter* movement,²³ our reasoning above details how a particular focus on the Spanish context can be observed that enables the readers to reconnect to their own realm of experience, as for instance the scandals of Blackfacing in the Spanish TV-show *Sálvame* or in the context of the Alcoy Christmas traditions.²⁴ Moreover, posts discuss how the situation of Afro-descendant people in Spain differs from that in other European countries due to Spanish society’s particular perception of Black people as being “foreigners” and the conspicuous lack of Black people as role models or in positions of power within the Spanish context (cf. also Vi-Makomé 54; Carretero).²⁵

Similarly, both Portuguese platforms denounce racism in all their manifestations inside and outside Portugal’s borders, although national cases prevail for the purposes commented above for *Afrofeminas*. *Plataforma Gueto* incisively criticises the violence inflicted by the Portuguese police against Black youths in Cova da Moura in Lisbon,²⁶ sustained by their discursive and factual criminalisation within the Portuguese prison system. The platform further argues that this is the “slaveocratic legacy,”²⁷ “an old ghost”²⁸ in Portugal’s history of slavery and colonialism: “we further suffer the consequences of colonialism and slavery, which . . . are not past things but processes that have barely changed their appearance.”²⁹ Furthermore, several posts at *Plataforma Gueto* discuss the set of Portuguese laws that allow the state to imprison or deport Africans and Afro-descendants without Portuguese citizenship and explicitly relates the logic that

20 Cf., e.g., AF, “Mujer, negra, española y policía nacional.” 13 April 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/13/mujer-negra-espanola-y-policia-nacional/; “Diario de una mujer negra en el mundo del trabajo.” 14 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/14/diario-de-una-mujer-negra-en-el-mundo-del-trabajo/; “Racismo en la escuela pública española.” 19 November 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/11/09/racismo-en-la-escuela-publica-espanola/; “Para quién aún se pregunta si sufrí acoso escolar de tipo racista en el colegio.” 5 April 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/05/para-quien-aun-se-pregunta-si-sufri-acoso-escolar-de-tipo-racista-en-el-colegio/.

21 Cf., e.g., AF, “Negrofobia en H&M para vender sudaderas.” 9 January 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/01/09/negrofobia-en-hm-para-vender-sudaderas/.

22 AF, “Manual contra los microracismos.” 5 February 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/02/05/manual-contra-los-microracismos/. Cf. also AF, “6 ejemplos de microracismos contra las mujeres negras.” 22 May 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/05/22/6-ejemplos-de-micro-racismos-contra-las-mujeres-negras/; “MicroRacismos.” 24 March 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/03/24/microracismos/.

23 Cf., e.g., AF, “Black Lives Matter.” 13 July 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/07/13/black-lives-matters/; “Otra vida menos, otro muerto más #blacklivesmatter.” 11 July 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/07/11/otra-vida-menos-otro-muerto-mas-blacklivesmatter/.

24 Cf., e.g., AF, “Un BlackFace masivo en Alcoy, ¿puede ser patrimonio inmaterial de la humanidad?” 7 December 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/12/07/un-blackface-masivo-en-alcoy-puede-ser-patrimonio-inmaterial-de-la-humanidad/; “Sálvame iniciará una campaña para que la Rambla de Catalunya pase a llamarse ‘El Rastro 2’.” 27 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/27/salvame-iniciara-una-campana-para-que-la-rambla-de-catalunya-pase-a-llamarse-el-rastro-2/.

25 Cf., e.g., AF, “Tu nombre.” 5 July 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/07/05/tu-nombre/; “De negra carbón a Princesa.” 29 September 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/09/29/de-negra-carbon-a-princesa/; “El racismo sigue siendo un problema.” 1 January 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/01/01/el-racismo-sigue-siendo-un-problema/; “El primer alcalde negro de Mallorca.” 19 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/19/el-primer-alcalde-de-mallorca/. Specifically, the personal account of a British Erasmus student of Nigerian descent about her experiences in Spain is symptomatic in this context, cf. AF, “Racismo en los Erasmus en España.” 13 April 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/13/racismo-en-los-erasmus-en-espana/.

26 Cf., e.g., PG, “Excepcionalidade Jurídica do Gueto e Legitimidade do Uso da Força.” 17 July 2017, plataformageto.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/excepcionalidade-juridica-do-gueto-e-legitimidade-do-uso-da-forca/; “2 Anos Depois, A Persistência da Brutalidade Policial em Portugal.” 7 February 2017, plataformageto.wordpress.com/2017/02/07/2-anos-depois-a-persistencia-da-brutalidade-policial-em-portugal/; “Video do Genocídio da Polícia Portuguesa contra Jovens Negros.” 27 February 2017, plataformageto.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/video-do-genocidio-da-policia-portuguesa-contra-jovens-negros/.

27 PG, “A falácia do ‘racismo inverso’—JOACINE KATAR MOREIRA.” 17 July 2017, plataformageto.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/a-falacia-do-racismo-inverso-joacine-katar-moreira/.

28 PG, “Jornal Gueto. Olhos, Ouvido e Vozes.” 10 April 2017, plataformageto.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/625/.

29 PG, “Jornal.”

justifies these laws to the institution of slavery: “slavery is an indissoluble principle in Law.”³⁰

Femafro informs about these cases as well but rather focuses intersectionally on gender-related racism and structural and institutionalized racism—e.g. by reposting news on housing politics and social insurance,³¹ as well as on the racist logic that underlies the invisibilization of Black Portuguese people and their history.³² Furthermore, *Femafro* unveils the miserable situation of Black women in Portugal, who still lack essential rights such as access to a health system. In this context, it also signals the sharp chronological break between the revindications for which Black women in Portugal need to fight and those already achieved for white occidental women—a critical approach to Western feminism that *Femafro* in particular shares with *Afrofêminas*.³³

However, in both Portugal-based platforms, there is a special impetus in revealing the history of slavery not only in the Americas but also within Portugal by reposting pieces of news about an exposition on slavery in Portugal as well as about activities that deal with the topic by other associations such as *Djass*.³⁴ By addressing the reality of Africans and Afro-descendants in Portugal throughout history, they, thus, diversify the perspective on the enslavement of African people from a Portuguese perspective in compliance with Wright’s argument (cf. *Physics*) by thinking beyond the transatlantic slave trade to the Americas.

Negrxs Magazine tackles racism by referring to internationally discussed current events such as the sit-in of migrants and refugees at the old Escola Massana in Barcelona in 2018, which protested against racism and claimed greater rights, or the violent deaths of the Senegalese migrant and undocumented street vendor Mame Mbaye and of the Brazilian activist Marielle Franco in the same year—events that serve as examples of the racism in Spanish society and the “acceptability of killing”³⁵ of Black lives in Spain and elsewhere, which is also denounced in the poem “Trozos de rabia” [Pieces of Rage] by Yeison F. García López, integrated with another post.³⁶ Comparable to the Portuguese examples that emphasise the momentous event of slavery, there is an insightful post in which this present-day violence is traced back in time: “the Black extermination started during colonisation and in the slave trade and . . . still continues.”³⁷

Given “the pact . . . of oblivion . . . and lack of memory”³⁸ reigning in Spain, digital platforms such as *Negrxs Magazine* or *Afrofêminas*, consequently, serve as digital archives to remember African and Afro-descendant people’s past and present stories—otherwise forgotten or silenced—and to fight, with joint forces, against a colonial legacy.³⁹ Simultaneously, individual posts criticise Spain’s silence about

30 PG, “Correlações entre Direito e Escravidão,” 30 April 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/04/30/correlacoes-entre-direito-e-escravidao/; cf. also “Justiça por código de barras,” 28 April 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/04/28/justica-por-codigo-de-barras/.

31 Cf., e.g., FA, “Oracismo no acesso à habitação,” 26 August 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1991305457768973; “Esta é a realidade de milhares de mulheres negras/africanas/imigrantes em Portugal,” 26 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2088855921347259.

32 Cf., e.g., FA, “O discurso sobre a história africana é muitas vezes baseado unicamente na perspetiva das antigas potências coloniais. Os jovens africanos não têm acesso fácil à documentação histórica,” 24 January 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2058823761017142; “A falta de representatividade em vários sectores da vida portuguesa por pessoas não brancas é evidente. Desde a política à educação,” 2 November 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2020465698186282; “Investigadora em Ciências Agrárias e da Alimentação e cientista social, Nina Vigon Manso critica a forma como a relação entre ‘o eu e o outro’ é representada nos manuais,” 9 September 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1997293290503523.

33 Cf., e.g., FA, “Que 8 de Março para as mulheres Negras,” 8 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/?hc_ref=ARR eH3FyAiGsljOlFDzipVhLhQMk7Vwq9C0ZGsmXj-AiNE6jj-VvARtoCmTs9OwoTiQ&fref=nf; AF, “Por qué Afrofêminas no se suma a la Huelga Feminista,” 5 March 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/03/05/porque-afrofeminas-no-se-suma-a-la-huelga-feminista/.

34 Cf., e.g., FA, “Divulgamos: Sessão Djass com a exibição do episódio ‘Os Escravos e a Escravidão em Portugal’, da série documental da RTP ‘História a História’, da autoria de Fernando Rosas,” 20 February 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2071964376369747.

35 NM, “La presencia de la ausencia,” Start Page, www.negrxs.com.

36 Cf. NM, “Tarajal: en memoria de nuestros hermanos,” 6 February 2018, www.negrxs.com/numero-2/2018/2/6/tarajal-en-memoria-de-nuestros-hermanos.

37 NM, “La presencia.”

38 NM, “La presencia.”

39 Cf., e.g., NM, “La presencia”; “Nota de prensa,” Start Page, www.negrxs.com; “El silenciamiento blanco es una estrategia histórica para opacar nuestras voces,” 29 June 2018, www.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/6/29/el-silenciamiento-blanco-es-una-estrategia-historica-de-opacar-nuestras-vozes.

its own involvement in the enslavement of Africans as well as about the age-long coexistence of Africans and Europeans on Spanish territory in the times of Al-Andalus. They remind Spanish society of the long presence of enslaved and free Africans not only in the country's former colonies but in Spain itself, thus, comparable to the Portuguese platforms, unveiling the particularities of the history of African and Afro-descendant people in Spain.⁴⁰

The problem of racism is also picked up on *Negrxs Magazine* by a subcategory entitled #RACISMOESBULLYING that subsumes the testimonies of Black people in Spain on their every-day experiences of racism. Furthermore, the webpage comprises a subcategory entitled "ISSUES" that, as of July 9, 2018, contains three issues. Each one includes several texts that, likewise, discuss the historical dimensions of racism in Spain (and Europe) that emerged from a legacy of colonial oppression and enslavement of African people and persists until the present day, although commonly denied by Spanish mainstream society.⁴¹

Constructing Narratives of Resistance and Fuelling Self-Empowerment

However, pursuant to Small's argument that racist actions have not, at any time, remained unanswered (cf. *20 Questions* 21), one can find on all four platforms numerous posts that deal with African and Afro-descendants answers to racism. Frequently, racism is tackled in relation to the historical dimensions of African/Black resistance and activism against racism and oppression with a particular emphasis on movements in Spain and Portugal and on Afrofeminist movements in the case of *Afrofêminas* and *Femafro*.⁴² This display of resistance shows that the self-image constructed within these platforms, thus, can allow the initial experience of oppression and suffering to be partly superimposed by (historical and present) moments of individual and/or collective resistance: it unveils alternative narratives of empowerment that may serve as a source for a self-determined discourse on Blackness in the present. This is a discourse that thwarts stereotypical notions of the "Black Other"—as seen through the white gaze—and serves as an identificational space for Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people.⁴³ For they replace discourses that tend to exclude Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people from the Eurocentric notion of "community" with

40 Cf. AF, "Antumi"; "De negra"; "Celebrando la barbarie. Perspectiva decolonial." 12 October 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/10/12/celebrando-la-barbarie/; NM, "Nota"; "Activismo africano y afrodescendiente en España." 18 February 2018, www.negrxs.com/numero-2/2018/2/18/activismo-africano-y-afrodescendiente-en-espaa.

41 Cf., e.g., NM, "El Orgullo será antirracista o no será." 6 November 2017, www.negrxs.com/numberone/2017/11/6/sera-antirracista-o-no-sera; "Racismo, ¿cuestión de ignorancia ... o estrategia?" 31 May 2018, www.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/5/31/racismo-cuestin-de-ignorancia-o-de-estrategia; "II Guerra Mundial: muerte, horror y negritud." www.negrxs.com/numero-2/muerte-horror-y-negritud.

42 Cf., e.g., NM, "Tarajal"; "Activismo"; "El 12N." 6 November 2017, www.negrxs.com/numberone/2017/11/6/donde-hablam-pe88p; "Esto también es feminismo." 6 November 2017, www.negrxs.com/numberone/2017/11/6/esto-tambin-es-feminismo-647ap; "Allí estuve, allí lo hice" / "Black in the Days." www.negrxs.com/numero-2/back-in-the-days; AF, "Antumi"; "Una historia del Afro." 16 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/16/una-historia-del-afro; "Algunos nombres de la lucha de la mujer en África." 9 July 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/07/09/algunos-nombres-de-la-lucha-de-la-mujer-en-africa; "El futuro del Panafricanismo." 20 May 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/05/20/el-futuro-del-panafricanismo/; PG, "Primavera global." 11 May 2012, plataformagueto.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/522770_392816937430033_195547923823603_1204164_773130065_n.jpg; FA, "Amanhã." 16 May 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2113264988906352; "Numa altura de grande consternação e questionamento, importa reflectir sobre: Qual o nosso papel na cultura, na arte, na política, educação e direitos humanos?" 16 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2083900251842826; "Efeito-Suruba." 6 December 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2035770299989155; "A não perder." 24 October 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2016692931896892.

43 Cf., e.g., AF, "Antumi"; NM, "Desde donde hablamos." 6 November 2017, www.negrxs.com/numberone/2017/11/6/donde-hablam; "Resistencia desde el activismo estético." www.negrxs.com/numero-2/resistencia-desde-el-activismo-estetico; "Querida Afroconciencia." 31 May 2018, www.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/5/31/querida-afroconciencia; FA, "Um projecto maravilhoso!" 9 November 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2023530774546441; PG, "Sobre o Despacho do Caso 5 de Fevereiro de 2015." 15 June 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/07/15/sobre-o-despacho-do-caso-5-de-fevereiro-de-2015/.

alternative images of inclusion that those so far usually excluded are invited to relate to. Accordingly, the reveal perspectives of African and Afro-descendant people's past and present that are usually unavailable in mainstream perception and media.

This joint opposition to racism gives rise to the "collective project"⁴⁴ of a Black community—"We Blacks"—⁴⁵ that defies a Eurocentric "whitewashing" of history and knowledge through collective resistance and action: "They want us in silence, but we are here, screaming, denouncing, reinventing ourselves and resisting."⁴⁶ This joint resistance, as called for by *Negrxs Magazine*, is represented as a fight against racism and for the appraisal of Black people and their cultures across national and linguistic borders. It is represented as global solidarity due to a shared experience of racist violence in its historical dimension.⁴⁷

Notably, all platforms show examples where opposition in "real life" and in the digital sphere intersect, hinting at two spheres of (actual and digital) community building, for several texts deal with current antiracist protests—in Spain, Portugal and elsewhere—that, in a second step, are made visible in the internet.⁴⁸ Furthermore, resistance to racism and other forms of discrimination also becomes evident via many practical guidelines on antiracist behaviour and on facing racism.⁴⁹ A vivid example is a manual on *Plataforma Gueto* of how to survive police violence if one is Black. It clarifies the rights and duties of those affected in order to "awaken awareness" with the belief that "knowing them would somehow protect our population."⁵⁰

Moreover, activism and resistance are often exhibited within the portraits and interviews of individual Black women (and men) such as in the subcategory "Referentes negros" [Black role models] on *Afrofeminas*. Both there and on *Femafro*, numerous portraits are available of individuals from Spain, Portugal and elsewhere who exert resistance in an open or subtle manner, which is why those representations frequently have an empowering impetus.⁵¹ Comparable to those portraits is *Negrxs Magazine's* subcategory "D-NEGRX-A-NEGRX," which aims at visibilizing testimonies "in which we can recognise ourselves" and that are considered as being part of "a narrative that we construct between us all."⁵²

Another central issue concerning resistance to racism and Eurocentric thinking, distinctive for *Afrofeminas*, is the decolonisation of Western beauty ideals. By using both texts and highly aesthetic pictures, numerous posts display Black women's "decolonized bodies"⁵³ as beautiful, thus counteracting "the dominating visual world" and fostering Black women's "self-esteem."⁵⁴ Consequently, they can be considered as exerting a "contestatory function" (Fraser 124) characteristic of counterpublic spaces that aim at disseminating alternative, oppositional notions to challenge conventional hegemonic representations (cf.

⁴⁴ NM, "Desde donde."

⁴⁵ NM, "Desde donde."

⁴⁶ NM, "El silenciamiento."

⁴⁷ See also yos erchxs piña narvæez's lyrical text called "Para mis hermanos negros," cf. NM, "#Blacklove We feeling my beautiful self." 13 February 2018, www.negrxs.com/numero-2/2018/2/13/blacklove-we-feeling-my-beautiful-self.

⁴⁸ Cf., e.g., NM, "El 12N"; "El silenciamiento"; "Tarajal"; PG, "Sobre o despacho"; FA, "Partidismos à parte." 19 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2085653851667466; "No passado dia 11 de Dezembro de 2017." 18 December 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2041126749453510; AF, "El pueblo de Buenaventura no se rindió." 6 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/06/el-pueblo-de-buenaventura-no-se-rindio/; "Las mujeres negras alzaron su voz de resistencia en Sanpachito en Medellín." 16 October 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/10/16/las-mujeres-negras-alzaron-su-voz-de-resistencia-en-sanpachito-en-medellin/; "El día de las Trenzas." 19 May 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/05/19/el-dia-de-las-trenzas/.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., PG, "Sobre o despacho"; AF, "10 consejos para mi pareja blanca." 26 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/26/10-consejos-para-mi-pareja-blanca/; "6 cosas que personas aliadas de la lucha anti racista no pueden olvidar." 31 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/31/6-cosas-que-personas-aliadas-de-la-lucha-anti-racista-no-pueden-olvidar/.

⁵⁰ PG, "Sobre o despacho."

⁵¹ These posts include famous women such as the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, U.S. American talk show host Oprah Winfrey as well as ordinary women such as a Spanish Black female surgeon or referee for instance. They deal with historical figures such as Harriet Tubman as well as today's activists from Spain, Portugal and elsewhere such as the Spanish politician Rita Bosaho, the Angolan journalist and sociologist Luzia Moniz, the Costa Rican writer Shirley Campell Barr, the Colombian unionist María Roa Borja or the Spanish decolonial anthropologist Elena García, to name but a few of numerous examples.

⁵² NM, "D-NEGRXS-A-NEGRXS." www.negrxs.com/interviews-btw-blk/.

⁵³ AF, "Yo soy porque nosotras somos." 12 March 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/03/12/yo-soy-porque-nosotras-somos/.

⁵⁴ AF, "Somos bellas y por eso lo mostramos." 25 November 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/11/25/somos-bellas/.

also 123). The re-visibilization and re-valuation of the Black female body within the digital space turn this body itself into an act of resistance: “It isn’t frivolous, it’s a fight,”⁵⁵ for “to show oneself” means “putting your body in the space from where it has been expelled by Society.”⁵⁶ Specifically, ubiquitous esthetical representations of African and Afro-descendant women’s skin colour and natural hair play a crucial role in this context, which is interesting as these are bodily features that tend to be depreciated as “inferior” from a Eurocentric and colonial perspective and which are now explicitly exposed—or one might even say “celebrated”—as a means of re-appropriation of Blackness that turns the Black female body—historically considered an object of possession—into a space of empowerment: “Let’s celebrate and be proud of our heritage and of what our appearance, our colour, our Blackness represent.”⁵⁷

Accordingly, *Afroféminas* not only displays Black women’s beauty but also comprises numerous posts that promote Black culture and announce important cultural or activist events that aim at making Afro-Spanish voices heard, empowering Afro-Spanish people and/or celebrating their cultural heritage—as does *Negrxs Magazine* by disseminating information on cultural artefacts and activities, for instance through videos and an event calendar with the vivid title “NEGRXSAGENDA.”⁵⁸

Plataforma Gueto and *Femafro* also centre on divulging knowledge produced by Africans and people of African descent, not only to promote their visibility in the present but to explicitly recover the “African epistemicide,”⁵⁹ which has been historically silenced in several knowledge domains that have sustained Portugal’s idea of a “white European nation”—this has for instance been the case at universities, schools and in photography.⁶⁰ They raise visibility by posting both links to online depositories of books by Black intellectuals from around the globe translated into Portuguese and book recommendations. Moreover, they upload texts such as Aimé Césaire’s letter to the French Communist Party and announce any kind of meeting, conference and activity organised by and for Afro-descendants in and outside Portugal, thereby relating to powerful moments of Black empowerment and resistance throughout time and beyond national borders.⁶¹

In contrast to *Afroféminas*’ focus on Black aesthetics as an essential strategy for resistance and empowerment, pictures and aesthetics play a minor role in *Femafro* and *Plataforma Gueto*. This evinces that these platforms follow an approach less reminiscent of the fourth-wave feminism with respect

55 AF, “Somos bellas.”

56 AF, “¿Qué es ser activista?” 21 April 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/21/que-es-ser-activista/.

57 AF, “¿Qué está mal con nosotras?” 9 September 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/09/09/que-esta-mal-con-nosotras/; cf. also “Mujeres negras y el despojo de sus cuerpos.” 30 June 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/06/30/mujeres-negras-y-el-despojo-de-sus-cuerpos/.

58 Cf., e.g., AF, “Recomendaciones literarias de Afroféminas para celebrar el día del libro.” 23 April 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/23/recomendaciones-literarias-de-afrofeminas-para-celebrar-el-dia-del-libro/; “Sobre ‘No es país para negras’ — La obra.” 18 July 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/07/18/sobre-no-es-pais-para-negras-la-obra/; “Taller Feminismos Negros (I) en Madrid.” 1 May 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/05/01/taller-feminismos-negros-i-en-madrid/; “La mujer negra protagoniza la muestra de teatro Noviembre Vaca 2017 en Barcelona.” 5 November 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/11/05/la-mujer-negra-protagoniza-la-muestra-de-teatro-noviembre-vaca-2017-en-barcelona/; “Presentación del libro ‘Mujeres Africanas: más allá del tópico de la jovialidad’ de Remei Sipi en Zaragoza.” 22 May 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/05/22/presentacion-del-libro-mujeres-africanas-mas-alla-del-topico-de-la-jovialidad-de-remei-sipi-en-zaragoza/; as well as NM, CVLTVRECLVB. www.negrxs.com/culture-club/; NEGRXSAGENDA. www.negrxs.com/ngrxsagenda/?view=calendar&month=July-2018.

59 PG, “A falácia.”

60 Cf. FA, “Investigadora”; “Entrevista a Inocência Matta, investigadora e a única professora negra na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, no Público.” 9 September 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1997180503848135; “Sobre a invisibilidade das/os negras/os na fotografia portuguesa.” 25 August 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1991098001123052.

61 Cf., e.g., PG, “Site reúne obras de filósofos africanos.” 20 February 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/02/20/site-reune-obras-de-filosofos-africanos/; “Paternalismo e Fraternalismo.” 11 February 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/02/11/carta-a-maurice-thorez-paternalismo-e-fraternalismo-de-aime-cesaire-deputado-da-martinica-traduzida-do-frances-pela-plataforma-gueto-do-site-httpmsi-net-fevereiro-de-2017/; FA, “Online e gratuita. BIBLIOPRETA.” 20 October 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2015082032057982; “Começar o ano om boas leituras.” 4 January 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2049142395318612.

to the role of social media and the aesthetics of the body.⁶² In fact, *Plataforma Gueto* and *Femafro*, in general, seem rather sceptical in relation to mainstream social media and accuse them of practising “media’s cannibalism.”⁶³ Moreover, this lack of attention to the body reflects the nature and purpose of these associations in the digital world: they tend to both consider themselves an archive of “real world” activities and put less emphasis on the digital space as an autonomous sphere of (digital) activism that offers resistance mainly through the written word and/or posted (audio-)visual material.⁶⁴ Accordingly, the visual material posted on the Portuguese platforms—such as posters announcing events or pictures taken at activities—serves mostly to illustrate the associations’ participation in diverse activities in “real life.” Instead of gaining visibility via visual content, they both, thus, focus on producing and disseminating textual-based knowledge, giving rise to a knowledge that, first, circulates in paper and/or in meetings and physical libraries to fuel Black agency and consciousness-raising within the Afro-Portuguese community itself but, then, is supposed to have the potential to unsettle Portugal’s majority society and, thus, foster social change.

An insightful example that vividly illustrates intersections of digital and “real life” activism in this context is a series of events organised by *Plataforma Gueto* entitled “Universidades” [Universities] and targeted at decolonising Eurocentric academic practices that silence the “Black Other” or generate one-sided perceptions. As real-life events of “popular education” that do not take place at actual universities and are open to the general public, they are, afterwards, partly uploaded as a video.⁶⁵ The label “Universidades,” furthermore, is striking in this context, for it subtly challenges traditional universities as (exclusive) places of—according to Small’s critique (cf. *20 Questions* 18)—biased knowledge production and establishes alternative counter-spheres (cf. also Fraser).

Negrxs Magazine articulates a similar goal, which forms the basis of the platform’s creation, that is, “make visible and promote Black, Afro-descendant, African-descendant and Afro-diasporic cultural production: our thoughts, knowledges, history, worries and feelings” that, given “the tyrannies of silence of hegemonic media,”⁶⁶ otherwise, remain suppressed.

Projecting Digital Afro-diasporic Networks

To allow for alternative knowledge production and dissemination, the analysed platforms represent networks of information, as, by re-posting, they circulate news and content from other platforms and initiatives. In compliance with Grassmuck’s and Wahjudi’s notion, they act as digital diasporas in the sense that, in the digital realm, they bundle knowledge to which diasporic subjects at diverse geographical locations and different local communities can relate: “‘Digital Diaspora’ means an informational being/existence/realm that is relocated to an outside without that the speakers, too, necessarily leave their location” (Grassmuck and Wahjudi). Re-postings, though abundantly existent on all analysed platforms, are a specifically distinctive feature of *Femafro* on its website and its Facebook page as the majority of its posts link to other platforms.

In this context, it is important to note that all platforms studied in this paper not only disseminate content from within the respective communities in Spain and Portugal but also adopt a transreal perspective when fostering knowledge for and about African and Afro-descendant people. They transcend geographical borders by comprising numerous posts on other cultural contexts or—partly translated—re-postings from

⁶² Fourth-wave feminists explicitly reclaim the right to appropriate mainstream stereotypical femininity and girliness in an empowering manner and to expose it within social media—these being conceived of as powerful means of conducting online activism in its own right (cf. Rivers).

⁶³ Cf. PG, “Excepcionalidade”; cf. also FA, “Partidismos à parte.” In this context, they point out the media’s tendency to benefit from the pain of others, for instance.

⁶⁴ Cf., e.g., AF, “¿Qué es ser?”

⁶⁵ Cf. PG, “VI Universidade da Plataforma Gueto—A Guerra KKKontra Kwame Turé (Stokely Carmichael). Com a Presença de Bob Brown.” 14 April 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/04/14/vi-universidade-da-plataforma-gueto-a-guerra-kkkontra-kwame-ture-stokely-carmichael-com-a-presenca-de-bob-brown/.

⁶⁶ NM, “Desde donde.”

both other Spanish or Portuguese and non-Spanish or non-Portuguese platforms. This transnational perspective, first, aims at emphasising the shared history and experiences of African and Afro-descendant communities around the globe (cf., e.g., Gilroy, *Black*), but, second, also makes knowledge—originally articulated in other languages—available in Spanish and/or in Portuguese. This accessibility is important if we recall that a self-determined debate about Black identities in Spain and Portugal emerged only recently in comparison to other European countries such as France or the UK or to the United States (cf. Small, *20 Questions*; Crumly Deventer and Thomas; Brancato).

These other contexts tackled on the platforms are other European countries, but also the African American community, which is often perceived as an important point of reference due to its preponderance within the global discourse about Blackness and its seminal Black movements in history.⁶⁷ However, as our line of argument has shown so far, *Plataforma Gueto*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Afrofeminas* explicitly do not limit their perspectives to a U.S.-centred narrative of Blackness. Instead, if we follow Michelle Wright's line of argument and look beyond what she calls the Middle Passage Epistemology (cf. *Physics*), we can detect that the studied platforms specifically give space to other identificational spaces that embrace not only perspectives and stories from the African continent itself but also from the other Americas, that is, Middle and South America (cf., e.g., *PG*, "Comunicado").⁶⁸ This reference to decentred diasporic spaces is conspicuously pronounced in the case of *Afrofeminas*, where testimonies by, portraits about or interviews with Afro-Latinamerican women abound.⁶⁹ Through these referential ramifications, the platforms not only divulge lateral and decentred ties within a global African diaspora but also unfold historical entanglements

⁶⁷ Cf., e.g., *NM*, "El Orgullo"; *AF*, "Harriet Tubman: una mujer llamada Moisés." 5 March 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/03/05/harriet-tubman-una-mujer-llamada-moisés/; "El amor, una categoría política del Black Power." 6 November 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/11/06/blackpower/; "Soy afrobritánica. Testimonio." 5 May 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/05/05/soy-afrobritanica-testimonio/; *FA*, "Discurso de Oprah Winfrey na cerimónia dos Globos de Ouro, Estados Unidos." 8 January 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2050954668470718; "Desde 1896 que os Estados Unidos de America diferenciavam raças." 27 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2089393607960157; *PG*, "Documentário 'Eu Não Sou Seu Negro' estreia no Brasil." 8 February 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/02/09/documentario-eu-nao-sou-seu-negro-estreia-no-brasil/; "Ferguson Fala." 30 November 2014, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2014/11/30/ferguson-fala/.

⁶⁸ Cf., e.g., *NM*, "Esto también"; "La inocencia blanca es un dispositivo de naturalización de la violencia." 28 June 2018, www.negrxs.com/dnr-x-a-negrxblog/2018/6/28/la-inocencia-blanca-es-un-dispositivo-de-naturalizacin-de-la-violencia/; "Nuestro reto es mantenernos vivxs." 24 June 2018, www.negrxs.com/dnr-x-a-negrxblog/2018/6/24/nuestro-reto/; *AF*, "¿Por qué es tan difícil hablar de racismo en República Dominicana?" 24 April 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/24/por-que-es-tan-dificil-hablar-de-racismo-en-republica-dominicana/; "La violencia y la mujer negra en Colombia." 5 June 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/06/05/la-violencia-y-la-mujer-negra-en-colombia/; "Soy chilena y soy negra, soy Afrochilena. Testimonio." 23 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/23/soy-chilena-y-soy-negra-soy-afrochilena-testimonio/; "Las mujeres Afro en la política uruguaya." 28 October 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/10/28/las-mujeres-afro-en-la-politica-uruguaya/; "Corrientes del feminismo africano." 16 November 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/11/16/corrientes-del-feminismo-africano/; "El regreso del cabello natural a Mozambique." 5 May 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/05/05/el-regreso-del-cabello-natural-a-mozambique/; *FA*, "Em homenagem à vereadora assassinada Marielle Franco, a Fundação Ford, a Open Society Foundations e o Instituto Ibirapitanga anunciaram a criação de um fundo para incentivar e apoiar as mulheres negras que aspiram à liderança política no Brasil." 6 April 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2094206997478818; "Campanha contra VBG - Violência Baseada no Género, em Cabo-Verde. Porque a representatividade importa." 29 January 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2061213767444808; "Só nos últimos tres meses, quatro mulheres foram mortas na procíncia moçambicana de Zambezia." 17 April 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2099419013624283; *PG*, "25 de julho o filme completo feminismo negro contado em primeira pessoa." 31 May 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/05/31/25-de-julho-o-filme-completo-feminismo-negro-contado-em-primeira-pessoa/; "Comunicado de imprensa Líder Guarani-Kaiowá visita Portugal para denunciar genocídio dos povos indígenas no Brasil." 1 June 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/06/01/comunicado-de-imprensa-lider-guarani-kaiowa-visita-portugal-para-denunciar-genocidio-dos-povos-indigenas-no-brasil/.

⁶⁹ Cf. moreover *AF*, "Tertulia de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas. Hablemos de pelo." 10 July 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/07/10/tertulida-de-mujeres-afrolatinoamericanas-hablemos-de-pelo/; "Indhira Serrano, actriz afrocolombiana." 23 May 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/05/23/indhira-serrano-actriz-afrocolombiana/; "'Nariz de papa.' Testimonio." 4 July 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/07/04/nariz-de-papa-testimonio/; "Entrevista con la escritora Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro." 1 April 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/04/01/entrevista-con-la-escritora-yolanda-arroyo-pizarro/; "Georgina Marcelino: 'Existe la idea de que por ser negra solo vas a abarcar ciertas temáticas en el Arte.'" 25 April 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/25/georgina-marcelino-existe-la-idea-de-que-por-ser-negra-solo-vas-a-abarcar-ciertas-tematicas-en-el-arte/; "Afrodescendencia en México." 11 September 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/09/11/afrodescendencia-en-mexico/.

of the two European nations and their former American colonies.⁷⁰

As the existence of the transareal networks created within the digital space indicates, the platforms analysed in this paper conceptualise a Black community that is not constrained by national borders or cultural contexts and whose narratives—despite the African diaspora's dispersedness (cf. Clifford 304)—can be merged in the virtual realm. Strongly bearing on the intersections of diverging histories and experiences, the platforms, thus, tend to imagine an Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese community within the framework of a global diaspora that emanated from the colonisation of Africa and the transatlantic slave trade and call on a symbolical global bond among African and Afro-descendant people.⁷¹

In this context, it is striking that most of the platforms studied in this paper resort to an “imagery of fight” that, to a certain extent, echoes internationalist socialist-Marxist rhetoric and is reminiscent of the Black nationalist movements of the 1920s and the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Tomás; Robinson). They use that rhetoric to articulate their resistance to racism and induce a “brotherhood and sisterhood” across the world to imagine a global Black community defined by solidarity. Repeatedly, the posts at *Negrxs Magazine* evoke this collective fight that unites Black communities throughout the African diaspora: “We believe in the internationalism of black fights. Our combats converge. It is in the frame of this black internationalism that we work to construct our solidarities and solid bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood.”⁷² Consequently, current resistance to racism in Spain and Portugal is not only discussed in a historical dimension but also put into relation to protests elsewhere, as discussed above.⁷³

Similarly, another text on *Negrxs Magazine* argues that “Afroconsciousness isn't individual”⁷⁴ but experienced within a collective, which is why many posts use metaphors of communality such as “a pack where we embrace each other”⁷⁵ or “a home to which we can resort at any moment, a home in which we know that we are looked after and understood, a field of flowers in the middle of a constant battle field.”⁷⁶ Repeatedly, this communality is articulated through expressions of family ties such as “granddaughters,”⁷⁷ to relate to a diachronic tradition of resistance, or “sisters and brothers,”⁷⁸ to relate to present-day Black

⁷⁰ While perspectives on and re-postings from contexts where the same language is spoken prevail, there is an exchange of ideas between Hispanophone and Lusophone communities, too; cf. NM, “La Inocencia”; AF, “Yo soy”; “Adriana Barbosa directora de Feira Preta. ‘No podemos hablar de empoderamiento en las personas negras si no hablamos de dinero.’” 27 December 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/12/27/adriana-barbosa-directora-de-feira-preta-no-podemos-hablar-de-empoderamiento-en-las-personas-negras-si-no-hablamos-de-dinero/; FA, “Testemunho sobre o que é ser-se mulher afrodescendente no Chile.” 25 August 2017, pt-pt.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1991019711130881; “Eterna invisibilidade.” 7 August 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/1982974795268706.

⁷¹ Cf., e.g., NM, “Desde donde”; “A nuestra hermana Marielle”; AF, “Ser hermanos es más fácil que ser enemigos.” 8 February 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/02/08/ser-hermanos-es-mas-facil-que-ser-enemigos/; PG, “Jornal”; “Marcelismos contemporáneos.” 17 June 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/06/17/marcelismos-contemporaneos/; FA, “É já amanhã!” 6 December 2017, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2035801453319373.

⁷² NM, “A nuestra hermana Marielle”; cf. also “Nota”; “La presencia.”

⁷³ Cf., e.g., NM, “El Orgullo”; AF, “Black Lives”; FA, “Amanhã”; PG, “Primavera.”

⁷⁴ NM, “Querida.”

⁷⁵ NM, “El Orgullo.”

⁷⁶ NM, “EFAE.” 6 November 2017, www.negrxs.com/numberone/2017/11/6/efae-2.

⁷⁷ NM, “Desde donde.”

⁷⁸ NM, “El Orgullo.”

activism.⁷⁹

Plataforma Gueto also uses such semantics to conceptualise a community based on a common experience that creates a bond among those affected: “We appeal to all brothers and sisters: join us . . . Our union will make us certainly win.”⁸⁰ There, the awareness of the battle to be fought in the future explicitly rises from a historical dimension “if Black people have some rights today, it is because our ancestors fought and bled for it.”⁸¹ Emphasising, in particular, the commonalities that unite African and Afro-descendant people on a global level, *Plataforma Gueto* adopts a clearly Panafricanist idea of community building and brings up dichotomous oppositions that display Europe as the oppressor abusing “African communities in Portugal.”⁸² Being African people, the members of these communities are asked to stop identifying with Europe, since Europe oppresses them; an approach that would, consequently, deny them the possibility of strategically articulating multiple identificational spaces, such as those of Afro-European and/or Afro-Portuguese identity constructions.

Femafro, although less leftist connoted, makes use of such a vocabulary in particular in the context of news about international cases of extreme racism in the present day, for instance, about a demonstration against the slavery experiences of “our siblings” in Libya. Likewise, a post that announces a demonstration honouring the Brazilian activist Marielle France combines the terms “luta” [fight] e “luto” [mourning], which indirectly reveals the empowering impetus that can be found in a commonly felt and expressed vulnerability.⁸³

Although such imagery (fight and brotherhood/sisterhood) is less pronounced at *Afrofeminas*, numerous posts construct alliances and call for solidarity based on the experience of racism and marginalisation, since, as one blogger says to her (African and Afro-descendant) readers: “that song, you know it.”⁸⁴ For despite African and Afro-descendant people’s heterogeneity and different backgrounds, they all share

⁷⁹ Cf. also NM, “El 12N”; “Tarajal”; “#Blacklove”; “D-NEGRXS”; as well as AF, “Nací negra. Testimonio.” 24 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/24/naci-negra-1testimonio/; “Afrohispanidad (I).” 14 December 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/12/14/afrohispanidad-i/. Comparable to the fact that the studied platforms do not just focus on racism in general but frequently discuss racism in an intersectional context of other discriminatory practices such as sexism, homophobia, transphobia or Islamophobia, many posts indicate that solidarity is not limited to the Black community. Instead, it includes other racialised and/or marginalised groups such as Romani people, Muslims or Asians, homosexual and transgender people as well. Posts tackle, for instance, LGTBQI rights, demonstrations for a reform of the respective national legislation on citizenship and the rising phenomenon of Islamophobia. Cf., e.g., FA, “Amanhã”; “A Íris Angola, as poucas Associações LGBT em África, teve seu registo aceito pelo Ministério da Justiça após cinco anos de espera.” 26 June 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2141384959427688; PG, “A Mesquita de Lisboa foi vandalizada esta madrugada.” 13 February 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/02/13/a-mesquita-de-lisboa-foi-vandalizada-esta-madrugada/; NM, “Nota”; “El Orgullo”; “El 12N”; “10 cosas sobre el Black-Pride.” 28 June 2018, www.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/6/28/10-cosas-sobre-el-black-pride/; AF, “¿Por qué Afrofeminas?”; “Sobre banderas, patrias y el 12N Sin Racismo.” 11 November 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/11/11/sobre-banderas-patrias-y-el-12n-sin-racismo/. This solidarity to other marginalized groups can also be found on *Femafro* explicitly as a supporter and partner of the campaign #TraduzTeEmForça for empowering immigrant women from all over the world (cf. FA, “A FEMAFRO apoia enquanto parceira o #TraduzTeEmForça - campanha de sensibilização de e para mulheres imigrantes.” 21 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2086167854949399). Although solidarity among women, in general, is also picked up as a theme in individual posts, there is a stronger tendency to a generally critical view of the universalising tendencies of Western feminism. Cf., e.g., AF, “Yo no soy tu enemiga.” 22 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/22/yo-no-soy-tu-enemiga/; “Desmitifiquemos el abuso sexual.” 23 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/23/desmitifiquemos-el-abuso-sexual/; respectively FA, “Qué 8 Março”; AF, “Por qué Afrofeminas”; “Colonialidad del feminismo blanco.” 29 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/29/colonialidad-del-feminismo-blanco/; “¿Por qué no me identifico con el feminismo, incluso si es interseccional? Testimonio.” 7 August 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/07/porque-no-me-identifico-con-el-feminismo-incluso-si-es-interseccional-testimonio/; “Entendiendo el Afrofeminismo.” 13 June 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/06/13/entendiendo-el-afrofeminismo/; NM, “8 de Marzo, Día de ¿las mujeres?” 23 May 2018, www.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/5/23/8-de-marzo-da-de-las-mujeres.

⁸⁰ PG, “Jornal.”

⁸¹ PG, “Sobre o Despacho.”

⁸² PG, “Jornal.”

⁸³ Cf. FA, “É ja amanhã”; “Seguimos em luta e em luto!” 15 March 2018, www.facebook.com/femafroportugal/posts/2083401998559318; “A luta pela descolonização continua.” 19 March 2017, plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2017/03/19/a-luta-pela-descolonizacao-continua/.

⁸⁴ AF, “Querido hermano negro, sí, a ti: te quiero.” 28 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/28/querido-hermano-negro-si-a-ti-te-quiero/comment-page-1/; cf. also “Nací.”

this condition: “We aren’t all immigrants, nor do we all think the same, but we all do suffer the same bullying and rejection.”⁸⁵ Therefore, the term “afro” can be understood as “a word that contains a hundred million stories that reach from Somalia to Lima; from Cape Town to Stockholm.”⁸⁶ When suffering from the persistence of stereotypes, claiming one’s own affiliation to an Afro-descendant community that endows oneself with the strength to fight discrimination is represented as empowering at *Afroféminas*: “we need identity, we, who resist day after day . . . We need to be black women to carry the banner of processes of consciousness-raising, fight and empowerment given how others racially perceive us and how we perceive ourselves.”⁸⁷

Yet, there are also voices that challenge Blackness as an overarching narrative and critically point to the heterogeneity of such a global Black community.⁸⁸ In particular, examples abound explicitly reattaching reflections on self-positionings of Africans and Afro-descendants living in Spain to the local context.⁸⁹ Frequently, posts discuss the bloggers’ feeling of being deprived of any attachment, as they are turned down by a Spanish society—mostly conceiving of itself as “white”—that is nevertheless their home (cf. Carretero).⁹⁰ Many texts, however, also emphasise the ambiguity of diasporic identity constructions that relate to multiple spaces and cultures (cf. Hall 112), which is why the individual, as a “polyhedral being,”⁹¹ should embrace both the African heritage and the ties to a local, Spanish context.⁹²

Furthermore, terms such as the label “Afro-Spanish” are questioned in this context, for expressions “like Afro-something”⁹³ oversimplify fairly complex forms of self-perceptions and, according to bloggers on *Afroféminas*, detract attention from the real problem: that is, the fact that skin colour still turns you into “a different type of Spaniard one needs to refer to using a distinct word”⁹⁴ or even denies you being acknowledged as a Spaniard: “Because if a Spaniard ‘of the Premier League,’ that is, a white Spaniard, asks me where I am from, my answer can never be I am Spaniard and that’s it. . . . I automatically pass as being from the country of my father who is black.”⁹⁵

Against the background of this debate about frictions of (chosen and given) identificational spaces—of being part of Spanish society and often not being accepted as such—there is an interesting tendency among *Afroféminas*’s bloggers to emphasize that the story of every single person—despite their affiliation to many

85 AF, “Por una presencia real de los Afro.” 7 June 2016, afrofequinas.com/2016/06/07/por-una-presencia-real-de-los-afro/.

86 AF, “Llámalo Afro, negro o X.” 26 January 2015, afrofequinas.com/2015/01/26/llamalo-afro-negro-o-x/.

87 AF, “¿Necesitamos la identidad?” 18 May 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/05/18/necesitamos-la-identidad/. For a similar thought cf. Yeison García López’s poem on NM, “Tarajal.”

88 Cf. AF, “De negra”; “Ser negro, ¿cuestión de territorios?” 21 November 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/11/21/ser-negro-cuestion-de-territorios/; NM, “Soy negra por dentro.” 30 May 2018, swww.negrxs.com/new-blog/2018/5/30/soy-negra-por-dentro.

89 Alike, *Afroféminas* also includes numerous posts in which Afro-descendants elaborate on their (non-)relatedness to other (European and Latin American) national contexts. *Femafro*, in contrast, does not elaborate on identity-building self-positionings of Afro-Portuguese people within the local Portuguese context in a mentionable manner, apart from using the label “Black Portuguese Feminist” several times in titles and reposting two entries from *Afroféminas* and *Catraca livre* on the issue. Cf., e.g., AF, “Afrodescendencia”; “Soy chilena”; “Soy afrobritánica”; “Ni de aquí ni de allá: Ciudadana del Mundo (testimonio).” 13 October 2015, afrofequinas.com/2015/10/13/ni-de-aqui-ni-de-alla-ciudadana-del-mundo-testimonio/; “¿Negra o afrovenezolana?” 30 September 2014, afrofequinas.com/2014/09/30/negra-o-afrovenezolana/; “Feminismo Afro sueco... en español.” 9 December 2014, afrofequinas.com/2014/12/09/feminismo-afrosueco/; respectively FA, “Testemunho”; “Eterna.”

90 Cf., e.g., AF, “Mis dudas con la afroespañolidad.” 7 July 2015, afrofequinas.com/2015/07/07/mis-dudas-con-la-afroespanolidad/; “Mi confusión con mi color de piel. Testimonio.” 17 October 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/10/17/testimonios-afrofequinas-colorismo/; “Ser de ninguna parte.” 29 March 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/03/29/ser-de-ninguna-parte/; “¿Afroespañolas o negras?” 5 March 2015, afrofequinas.com/2015/03/05/afroespanolas-o-negras/.

91 AF, “¿Afroespañolas?”

92 It is noticeable that this ambiguity is often articulated through the phrasing of questions that reflect the unsteadiness of feelings of belonging such as “¿Afroespañolas o negras?” [Afro-Spanish or Black?], or “Y tú... ¿De dónde eres?” [“And you... Where are you from?”]. Cf. also AF, “Negra, afroespañola: ¿a dónde voy?” 11 April 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/04/11/negra-afroespanola-a-donde-voy/; “¿Español o afroespañol?” 29 August 2016, afrofequinas.com/2016/08/29/espanol-o-afroespanol/; “¿Somos negras o afrodescendientes? por Cristiane Mare Da Silva.” 12 January 2015, afrofequinas.com/2015/01/12/somos-negras-o-afrodescendientes/.

93 AF, “¿Afroespañolas?”

94 AF, “¿Español?” Cf. also Gbadamosi.

95 AF, “Y tú... ¿De dónde eres?” 24 April 2017, afrofequinas.com/2017/04/24/y-tu-de-donde-eres-2/. Cf. also “Llámalo.”

different frames of (cultural, historical, national etc.) reference that locate the individual at the intersections of diverse identity-building spheres—is, in the end, always a unique story.⁹⁶ Correspondingly, quite a few posts remind their readers of the fact that the debate about the empowering moments of Blackness should not make one forget that “somos individuos al final” [we are individuals in the end],⁹⁷ human beings with individual stories that deserve to be acknowledged and respected as equally valuable.⁹⁸

Conclusion

By means of the examples of *Afroféminas*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Plataforma Gueto*, this contribution has examined how Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people use digital platforms to articulate collectively meaningful narratives that conceptualise imagined Afro-diasporic communities African and Afro-descendant individuals in Spain and Portugal can embrace and relate to. To that effect, we have shown that the platforms challenge biased perspectives on Afro-diasporic communities and conceptualise alternative, decentred—national and transnational—communities of Afro-diasporic people within the digital space, communities that are based on shared experiences of displacement, exclusion, resistance and self-empowerment.

As has been exposed, they conceptualise imagined Afro-diasporic communities by, first, mediating stories of racism and marginalisation experienced by African and Afro-descendant people in Spain and Portugal on a daily basis. Stories that the platforms' readers know well, which lets them relate these stories to their own realm of experience and consciously perceive the symbolical bond that connects them. This shared experience of oppression is furthermore genealogically emplotted in a transareal and historical narrative framework of enslavement and colonialism that emphasises the persistence of this oppression's impact in the present. Furthermore, these references to the past simultaneously relate the particularities of Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people's entangled histories to a transnational African diaspora.

Second, we have identified that narratives of racism are interlaced with both narratives and strategies of empowerment and resistance that, within the platforms, are understood as a collective project: against the “whitewashing” of history and knowledge, they claim the re-appropriation of knowledge production and circulation for, about and by African and Afro-descendant people. And as we have seen, they do not only claim it but, in fact, re-appropriate it, and that beyond national and linguistic borders: they announce, report on and foster activist mobilization in the “real” and the digital world and, as well, provide portraits of role models that serve as identificational spaces for Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese people.

Last, we have shown that these identificational spaces are by no means homogeneous, but vary from racialised frames of reference to hyphenated identity constructions based on hybrid, plurinational, transcultural adscriptions and to exclusivist dichotomic articulations that oppose Africa and Europe and refer to oppressor/victim narratives.

The results must be understood as first operational hypotheses since they are derived from the systematic analysis of only four representative platforms. To be able to draw further conclusions, it would be insightful to verify our findings by looking into a broader range of case studies and/or examples from other European spaces. Another promising research question would be to look closer at the user's comments to assess the extent to which they pursue, engage into dialogue with, challenge and/or reject the arguments articulated in the posts. Finally, it would be revealing to examine the actual impact of these digital platforms on both Afro-diasporic people and the majority society in the respective countries, as well as the power relations regulating the digital space. Accordingly, an important starting point for further research would be to ask whether the digitally mediated community constructions find an echo in the “real world” and foster “offline” community building and identity politics. In this context, it would be particularly insightful to closely examine online counter-narratives of Blackness as a potential moment of empowerment for Afro-

⁹⁶ Cf., e.g., AF, “¿Afroespañolas?”

⁹⁷ AF, “De negra.”

⁹⁸ Cf., e.g., “De negra”; “¿Afroespañolas?”; “Mi papel.” 29 December 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/12/29/mi-papel/; “Ser humano.” 7 September 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/09/07/ser-humano/.

diasporic people. Worthy of investigation is thus the empirical impact those counter-narratives might have on individuals and collectives both within cyberspace and in the “offline world,” for instance, within cyberspace, by analysing how narratives possibly resurface in the context of social media networks or, offline, by conducting interviews with the platforms’ producers and/or consumers.

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Research Article

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The Black Archives: Exploring the Politics of Black Dutch Radicals

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0034>

Received September 6, 2018; accepted December 12, 2018

Abstract: In this article, the authors introduce “The Black Archives”—an alternative archive consisting of more than 8,000 books, official documents and artefacts. The archive is a critical intervention, challenging dominant historical narratives, which tend to downplay histories of colonialism, slavery and their legacy. The authors explore how archival research and art can be used to make visible the histories that have been marginalised in dominant historical narratives. This is done with a case study: an exhibition based on archival research on two Black radicals, Hermina and Otto Huiswoud. The research reveals the history of the black and Surinamese activism in the Netherlands which intersects with global histories of the black radicalism.

Keywords: alternative archives, black radicalism, Surinam, Netherlands, black art, slavery, heritage, activism

The archive is not a neutral space. Oftentimes, archives are merely seen as storehouses of documents related to a specific institution: local or national government. However, several scholars, such as Derrida and Foucault, challenge this traditional view of archives by emphasising that archives reflect power relations and specific systems of order. Stoler (2002) writes how these archives in particular, and the knowledge they constitute, should be critically interrogated.

Building upon the work of Derrida (1998) and Foucault (1972), Powell (2018) states that the archive “is a system governed by those who have the power to choose what gets archived and therefore produce meaning through that discursive formation” (26). Powell uses queer and feminist approaches to archives as examples of how to ask what has been excluded from an archive, as traditional archives tend to record the views and perspectives of those in positions of power and authority. Powell proposes an “alternative ledger” theory (30), which recognises the incompleteness of traditional archives and historical narratives and provides space for additions, interactions and questions. Recognising the incomplete form of traditional historical records and archives paves the way for counter-histories and narratives. We suggest that The Black Archives can be seen as an “alternative archive” which encapsulates counternarratives to the dominant Eurocentric narrative.

To enhance the public programming of the archive, which includes the development of the exhibition “Black & Revolutionary: The Story of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud,” the authors of this article invited three Surinamese-Dutch artists, Raul Balai, Iris Kensmil, and Brian Elstak to create art based on their archival research on the history of the Huiswouds and to show how their struggle is related to the present. The exhibition was open from November 25th 2017 to July 2018 in the Nola Hatterman Gallery, a space that was historically used to provide a platform for Surinamese artists in the building of “our Surinam.” The exhibition and the public related program were visited by more than 2,500 visitors with different cultural backgrounds and gained a significant amount of attention in the Dutch media. In October 2018 The Black

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Archives won the Amsterdam Art Prize, the Jury stated the following in their report: “They are difficult to pin down. Because it is an art institution, a historical archive, a place where activists come together or a debate centre? It is all of this and that combination—at the intersection of several disciplines—makes this initiative so special” (Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunsten).

The exhibition contained panels with historical information on the life of Hermina en Otto Huiswoud divided into six chapters. The historical information was accompanied by murals by the artist Brian Elstak showing several people who were included in the story, like Hermina and Otto Huiswoud, Marcus and Amy Jacques Garvey, Langston Hughes, Anton de Kom, W.E.B. and Shirley Du Bois. The artist Iris Kensmil drew portraits of black activists who have been demonstrating peacefully against the Dutch blackfacing tradition “Zwart Piet” since 2011. The designer and the artist Raul Balai developed a video installation, wallpapers based on the FBI-file on Hermina and Otto Huiswoud and on a correspondence between Hermina and Langston Hughes. He designed the exhibition in a visually artistic manner to make it attractive to the audience, who would otherwise not necessarily become interested in topics such as these. Most of the historical sources came from the literature based on The Black Archives and the Hermina Huiswoud papers. In addition, a series of events consisting of lectures, dialogues and tours were organised weekly in relation to the exhibition. This usage of the archive can be thought of as a case study on how black people and people of African descent in Europe use alternative archives as spaces to challenge unequal power relations in writing about the past and the present.

Black People in the Netherlands

The Netherlands was one of the major colonial empires involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. This history has left behind traces in the contemporary Dutch society, and yet it is underexposed in the Dutch public memory. One legacy of this colonial past is the current number of people from the former Dutch colonies in Surinam (351.681 people) and the former Dutch Antillean islands Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, St. Maarten and St. Eustatius, to the Netherlands (157.114 people). In addition, there are significant groups with a migrant background who came to the Netherlands as “guest labourers” from Turkey (404.459 people) and Morocco (396.539 people) (Statistics Netherlands 2018). The majority of these people migrated to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, approximately 250,000 people from several African countries live in the Netherlands, most have migrated recently for economic reasons and as political refugees. Both in a public debate and in academic research the emphasis is put on the lack of social, political, and economic integration of ethnic minorities. Within this dominant narrative, issues of racism and discrimination are often denied and downplayed by a dynamic network of academic researchers and policy makers, which Nimako and Essed call “Dutch minority research industry” (284).

In public discourse, it has been and arguably continues to be, a taboo to address racism (Nimako and Willemsen 2011 and Weiner 2014). The history of slavery, colonialism, and its legacies conflict with the dominant self-image based on the values of tolerance, democracy, and freedom that the (white) Dutch hold near and dear. In her book *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016) anthropologist Gloria Wekker describes this concept as:

A strong paradox that is operative in the Netherlands and that, as I argue, is at the heart of the nation: the passion, forcefulness, and even aggression that race, in its intersections with gender, sexuality, and class, elicits among the white population, while at the same time the reactions of denial, disavowal, and elusiveness reign supreme. (4)

Accessing a cultural archive, built during over 400 years of Dutch colonial rule, Wekker fundamentally challenges Dutch racial exceptionalism by undermining the dominant narrative of the Netherlands as a “gentle” and “ethical” nation (17). Wekker’s theoretical position is based on her perspective of the concept “the cultural archive,” which was developed by the postcolonial scholar Edward Said (Wekker 2). A concept he referred to as a storehouse of “a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference” (Said qtd. in Wekker 2), which was embedded in the self-image of Europe’s imperial nations, encompasses the structures of inequality not just in the institutions, but in people’s thoughts and feelings based on race.

Furthermore, Wekker builds on the work of Stoler (2002), who carried out research on the archives of Dutch colonialism in the East Indies and wrote about these archives as a “repository of memory,” which is defined as being “the memories, the knowledge, and affect with regard to race that were deposited within metropolitan populations and the power relations embedded within them” (Wekker 19). Thus, Wekker positions the “cultural archive” more as a metaphor than an actual physical archive; to which she also suggests that the “cultural archive” may, in fact, overlap with the colonial archive. The paradox of this dominant self-image is that the Dutch colonial and imperial past is largely erased from the public memory in the Netherlands (Weiner 1).

Developing the Black Archives

The Black Archives is a historical archive with a unique collection of books, documents, and artefacts, which are the legacy of Black Dutch writers, scientists, and activists. It documents the history of Black emancipation movements and individuals in the Netherlands. Currently, the archive consists of more than 8,000 historical books, documents, photographs, films, and artefacts about Surinamese and Black history in the Netherlands. Central topics from the archives, such as racism, slavery, and information concerning former colonies and the Black emancipation are underexposed; even though everyone should possess knowledge about this part of the Surinamese, Caribbean, African, and Dutch history. In an attempt to remedy this widespread lack of knowledge, The Black Archives provides book collections and literature which are not, or rarely, discussed in schools and within universities (Weiner 2014). In this way, black literature, knowledge, and information are made accessible for study and research. The archives aim to inspire conversations, activities and literature from black and other perspectives that are often overlooked elsewhere, and to make black Dutch history accessible to a wide audience.

The Black Archives is managed by the New Urban Collective (NUC), which is a network of students and young professionals with the mission to empower young people with ethnic minority backgrounds, in particular of African descent. The NUC aims to strengthen the position of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds by stimulating their personal development, raising their self-awareness and advocating on their behalf (New Urban Collective, Missie & Visie). The collective organises symposia, conferences, debates and mentoring programs in the areas of education, career, cultural diversity and anti-racism. With around 40 volunteers and a network of 2000-2500 youth, students and young professionals, it aims to bridge the gap between the local community, grassroots organisations, private institutions and (local) government.

In 2015, New Urban Collective was approached by Thiemo and Miguel Heilbron, the sons of the Surinamese sociologist Waldo Heilbron, who passed away in 2009. Waldo Heilbron had left behind a significant collection of books which his sons inherited. In honour of their father, who had been active inside and outside of the academy on the issues of slavery, colonialism and emancipation, they wanted to make the collection available for the public, in particular for Black and Surinamese students and scholars. They ended up donating half of the collection to the Anton de Kom University in Surinam, and the other half they shared with the NUC. Waldo Heilbron was a sociologist at the University of Amsterdam who studied post-colonialism, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its legacy, racism and historiography. In his book *The Future of the Past: Reflections on Dutch History of Slavery and its Legacy* (2006) Heilbron wrote:

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery left deep traces; in society and in the individual lives of many who are heirs of this history. In the public debate about the Dutch history of slavery, that rose at the end of the last century; it is this part of the history that is largely the “silenced past.” A lot of what is concealed is forgotten. ... In deepening the knowledge about us? “concealed past,” new ways of thinking and research are needed. (my translation; 6).

It was Heilbron’s mission to develop new perspectives within the historiography and social sciences by contributing to alternative methodologies and critical perspectives. Besides his work at the university, he was active at Vereniging Ons Suriname (Association “Our Surinam” or VOS) and set up the Surinam Museum in 1995. Together with the Heilbron brothers, the NUC made the collection available by opening the New Urban Café in Amsterdam North, space where the book collection could be accessed, and small-scale events

such as dinner and lunch discussion were organised. However, due to gentrification, the New Urban Café had to move from its location. In 2016, the NUC's it was relocated to the premises of VOS on the east side of Amsterdam (The Black Archives, Over Ons). The association had been co-founded on January 18th, 1919 by Julius Jacob Gemmel, a Surinamese civil servant who studied in the Netherlands. It was established to bring unemployed Surinamese people into contact with one another and became a cultural association. Throughout its history, the association developed an expansive archival collection of books, documents and artefacts about the Surinamese community in the Netherlands in relation to an international context.

As the New Urban Café moved to the building of VOS, the different collections of books and documents were brought together. Furthermore, several collections of books were donated by black intellectuals, individuals and movements. The Black Archives grew out of these different collections coming together at VOS. The Black Archives is able to document the history of The Black emancipation movements and individuals in the Netherlands and its international network. It is also able to map the theoretical frameworks and knowledge production within the Black Dutch context.

The family of Glenn Willemsen (1948-2008) donated an important book collection as well. Willemsen studied Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam and obtained his doctorate in 1980. He was also the first director of the NiNsee (National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy). In his last book *Dagen van Gejuich en Gejubel* [Days of Cheers and Jubilation; my trans.] he described how the abolition of slavery on July 1st 1863 was experienced in the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean (The Black Archives, Willemsen Collectie).

The collection of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud is the oldest book collection in The Black Archives. It exposed a silenced history of Black Dutch radicalism. These Dutch-speaking Caribbean activists were part of the early Black radical networks in the interwar period from the late 1910s to the 1940s. Hermina preserved articles, documents and books about her life and her husband Otto's and the fight against colonialism and imperialism. Hermina passed away in 1998 in Amsterdam. Her collection forms an essential basis for The Black Archives. The archive shows a connection between the lives and work of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud, the independence movement in Surinam and contemporary generations of anti-colonial and radical movements of the Surinamese and the Black people in the Netherlands.

The Black Archives serves as “witnesses” of a history that has largely remained invisible to the large public. To make this history more visible The Black Archives uses art and public programs such as debates, dialogues, movie screenings and exhibitions. Examples of public programming include a book presentation by Gloria Wekker, after the Dutch translation of her book *White Innocence* had been launched in January 2018. Dr Philomena Essed gave a book presentation after a new edition of her book *Everyday Racism* was re-published in February 2018.

Within the exhibition, The Black Archives offered a special program and tours around themes involving the story of the Huiswouds. In December 2017 Hakim Adi, the author of the book *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, gave a lecture on his book and engaged in dialogue with local activists and students about the relevance of understanding this history to engage in the contemporary struggle against inequality. In May 2018, the renowned scholar, activist, icon of the Black power movement and former member of the Communist Party of the US, Angela Davis, visited The Black Archives. In her lecture at the VU University, she connected the history of the Huiswouds to her own history in the Black radical movements and the necessity to connect it to contemporary global struggles against imperialism, authoritarianism and racism (Davis 20188).

Black & Revolutionary: An Exhibition about the Lives of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud

To make the history of colonialism, slavery, its legacy and resistance against it more accessible for a broad audience the decision was made to develop an exhibition based on the lives of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud. Complex concepts and histories such as imperialism, colonialism and communism were translated into texts which were understandable and relatable for diverse audiences of different generations and cultures.

The authors of this article did research in the archives of the Huiswouds in The Black Archives and at the Tamiment Library of the New York University where the archives of Hermina can be found.

The Black Archives, the exhibition “Black and Revolutionary” and the related program were visited by more than 2,500 visitors and gained a significant amount of attention in Dutch media. Within the exhibition of 200 square feet, the visitor was guided by six chapters and its panels with historical information on Hermina and Otto Huiswoud and their struggle for the Black liberation since the early 1920s as communists. Each panel represented a thematic part in their lives as professional revolutionaries who travelled across the globe. As a result, guests were taken on a chronical journey of the Black Dutch radicalism and its intersection with African American/Caribbean history and communism. The story-line was illustrated through displays with historical information, archival images combined with contemporary art which gave insights into how issues from this past still occur in our everyday lives.

Because the legacy of slavery and colonialism are complex histories with various highs and lows, a timeline facilitated a guide to understanding how the past led to a contemporary context. In this sense, the exhibition was also intended to raise awareness around issues such as social exclusion, discrimination and racism, and current Black movements. With the collaboration with artists Raul Balai, Iris Kensmil and Brian Elstak, the exhibition identified links with the past through artworks. In the next sections, we will provide a reflection and summary of the historical storyline of the Huiswouds in the exhibition through six chapters in relation to contemporary issues.

Migration from the Guyanas to New York

The first chapter showed how the story of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud originates from a long history of colonialism in Guyana's. Their birth countries, British Guyana and Suriname, formerly known as Dutch Guyana, bordered on the Northern coast of South America, were occupied since the seventeenth century by the European colonialists. The colonial powers developed plantation economies-based labour of enslaved and indentured after the abolition of slavery (Nimako and Willemsen 4).

Otto Huiswoud was the second child in a family of five. He was born on the 28th of October, 1893 in Paramaribo, Suriname. His father, Rudolf Francis Huiswoud, lived until the age of ten in slavery in the City of Paramaribo. At the age of sixteen, Otto became a sailor. Travelling to Amsterdam from Surinam he left the ship in New York because the captain was drunk. New York would remain his home for the subsequent years (Turner and Enckevort).

Hermina Alicia Dumont, alias Hermie, was born on 8th October 1905 in New Amsterdam, British Guiana, which is now known as Guyana. Hermina and her mother decided to move to New York in 1919. After the young Hermina was able to work in Harlem, she was exposed to political ideologies and networks that would inspire her activism at a later stage in life (Turner). This first part of the exhibition was designed in this way to challenge dominant narratives of migration about Surinamese and other Caribbean people. It shows different patterns of migration in the period after the abolition of slavery. In addition, it fostered discussions about parallels about current flows of migration between former colonies in the Caribbean and metropolises such as New York and Amsterdam.

Black Co-Founder of the Communist Party of the USA

Within the exhibition, the time period around the 1920s played an important role in their growth of becoming the Black Dutch Radicals. Otto and Hermina ended up in Harlem during a period of artistic, political and social explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1937) (Turner). This movement partly arose out of “the Great Migration” of hundreds of thousands of African-Americans escaping the racial segregation and white supremacist violence in the South of the United States and the migration of the Caribbean people to Harlem, New York. In this context of intellectual and artistic development, Otto came in touch with socialist and communist ideologies via organisers such as Hubert A. Harrison. He became an active member of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in 1916. After the Bolshevik Revolution tension arose within the socialist

party, the left-wing of the party split off the organisation and founded the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) in 1919. Otto was the only black person present during the founding of the CPUSA and would play an important role in the subsequent period by articulating the issue of race within the Left (Adi 2013; Turner and van Enkevort).

One of the panels of this second chapter revealed the relationship between Otto Huiswoud and Hermina Dumont through their marriage certificate. It was after meeting Otto Huiswoud in Harlem in 1923 when the seventeen-year-old Hermina Dumont became politicised since her arrival in the United States. Although she was less politically active than Otto during her early years in Harlem, she was aware of social problems through her mother's interest in the politics of Guyana (Turner). When she married Otto Huiswoud in 1926, her marriage and involvement with Otto's politics accelerated her passion for social change and a life-long commitment to political action. In 1928, she became a member of the Communist Party as she believed that communism could provide solutions for the socio-economic issues faced by the working class (Turner). This second chapter reflected different ways that people became politicised and fostered discussion on how people had become aware of social and political issues in contemporary society. Otto Huiswoud became aware through his contact with socialist newspapers and soapbox speakers on the streets of Harlem and because of the racism he was confronted with in the US. During tours, a parallel was made with the role of social media in contemporary society which fosters the growth of political and social awareness around issues such as institutional racism and socioeconomic inequality.

Caribbean Radicals during the Harlem Renaissance

In the third chapter, the Black communism was at the centre; it was divided into two parts. The first part presented the ideology of the Black communists such as Otto. According to Bergin, one of the reasons communism spoke to the Black and Caribbean members of the ABB was Lenin's publication *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, which tied anti-colonialism to anti-capitalism. In 1922 Otto Huiswoud was selected as a delegate of the Workers Party to go to the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern, the international communist organisation with a membership of national communist parties promoting world revolution. The exhibition included a picture of a young Otto Huiswoud and the Jamaican poet Claude McKay. In his speech to the delegates of the Congress, Otto addressed the situation of the black working class in the US, the Caribbean and Africa and ended with four resolutions emphasising the need of mobilising black people for the world revolution (van Enkevort).

International Trade Union Committee for Negro Workers (ITUCNW)

The second part of the third chapter displays one of the main organisations where Otto and Hermina Huiswoud were active, International Trade Union Committee for Negro Workers (ITUCNW). The ITUCNW was first led by the African-American communist James Ford from 1928 to 1931. He was succeeded by George Padmore in 1931. After Padmore was expelled from the communist movement in 1933, Otto Huiswoud became head of the ITUCNW (Adi, van Enkevort 2008). He held this position until the organisation's dissolution in 1937. The ITUCNW did not have a mass following. However, through its publication *The Negro Worker*, it was able to reach activists and the Black workers in different parts of the world. In the publication, the Black activists and organisers published articles about issues such as imperialism, colonialism, and racism in different countries on the African continent, in the Caribbean, the United States, and Europe. In the exhibition, several texts and images from *The Negro Worker* were reproduced. Furthermore, in the exhibition, the role of the Black women to communism was addressed through the story of Hermina. Hermina assisted with editing, publishing and distributing *The Negro Worker* (Turner and Weiss). Under the pseudonym Helen Davis, she published several articles between 1934 and 1937 showing that the Black women played an important role in the Black emancipation movement as well.

This section, especially the adventurous story of the young Otto travelling to Moscow, spoke to the public because it challenged dominant narratives on communism and the Black emancipation. The majority of visitors,

for example, were familiar with the Black emancipation movements such as the US-based the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement symbolised by dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X but they had never heard about the Black communists. During events with scholars Hakim Adi in February 2018 and Keeyanga Yahmatta Taylor in April 2018, the history of the Black radicals, such as the Huiswouds was related to contemporary issues. One of the legacies of colonialism is racism which manifests itself in the form of discrimination on the labour market and income inequality (Nimako and Willemsen). By placing contemporary issues, such as these, in this historical context of black communists and black radicals, the discussion about racism was broadened to include intersections with capitalism, class and gender. A discussion arose among students and activists after students of a student movement at the University of Color had organised an intervention at the University of Amsterdam in December 2017. They questioned why no Black woman was included in the academic event in which the work of Black women was the central topic. Esajas wrote an article titled *“Lessons from the hidden history of the Black Radical tradition”* in which the intervention was placed in the historical context of the Black radical tradition which included Hermina and Otto Huiswoud.

The Travellings of Professional Revolutionaries

As advocates for a world revolution, Hermina and Otto Huiswoud travelled across the globe. The fourth chapter was translated into an interactive part of the exhibition by artist Raul Balai. Visitors were invited to move blocks with short stories about the places the Huiswouds visited on a large printed world map to make them aware of many places they had visited as “professional revolutionaries” (van Enckevort).

In 1929 Otto was sent on this trip to recruit Caribbean representatives for an international congress of Negro workers which was planned in July 1930, in Hamburg (Post). A year later the couple visited Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Columbia, Curacao, Venezuela, Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guyana and Suriname. During the journey in 1929, Otto Huiswoud had a debate with Marcus Garvey, the co-founder of one of the largest Black emancipation movements Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey’s vision was based on the principles of economic self-reliance, race pride and repatriation “Back to Africa.” The UNIA set up laundries, grocery stores, doll making and printing companies, the “Black Star” shipping line and other businesses. The organisation had millions of followers and hundreds of chapters across the African diaspora, and on the African continent. Initially, the Black communists such as Huiswoud and Domingo attempted to cooperate with Garvey by trying to influence him and his followers (Turner). As these attempts failed, tension and rivalry between Garvey and the Black communists arose. This was one of the reasons why Otto Huiswoud was sent as a delegate of the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) to the UNIA convention in Jamaica. Garvey challenged Huiswoud to a public debate on the motion “the Negro problem can only be solved by International Labour cooperation between white and black labour” (Post 3). Huiswoud, defending the affirmative based on his Marxist ideas, stated that the “Negro problem was definitely a class problem, fundamentally a class one and not a race one” (Post 3). As Garvey is a relatively well-known figure within the African Diaspora, artist Brian Elstak created a mural of Garvey and his wife Amy Garvey across the one of the Huiswouds. Similarly, to the second chapter of the exhibition, this story allowed us to place contemporary debates about the Black emancipation and structural inequality in a broader, historical context. It challenged the visitors to the exhibition and the public to think and discuss strategies of emancipation and solidarity. Huiswoud advocated solidarity between working class people from a different cultural background as opposed to a focus on solely Black People. This historical debate was echoed in discussions that took place about the need for solidarity in contemporary society. As a response to a question about “the importance of a politics of solidarity, of seeing the Black liberation struggle as bound up with a class struggle against capitalism” the scholar responded as follows: “There actually has to be a political argument articulated for solidarity, and not just solidarity because it is good and makes us feel better about ourselves, but because it is an indispensable political strategy for us to defend what we have, let alone to mount a movement for reform” (Taylor). During the event with Taylor in April 2018 discussion were held about the need for solidarity in the face of the upcoming election of Donald Trump in the US and extreme right-wing movements across the globe.

Labour Rebellions in the Caribbean and Anton de Kom

Another historical figure that was featured in the fourth chapter was Anton de Kom. Artist Brian Elstak made a mural about him. The financial crash of 1929 and the subsequent world economic crisis had its impact on the Caribbean region. Grievances among the population of workers caused a wave of labour rebellions which hit the Dutch colony Suriname as well. In October 1930 a group of unemployed workers rebelled in Paramaribo, Suriname, led by Louis Doedel (Meel 257). Two years later the unrest among the workers and the unemployed came to the surface again. Anton de Kom, who was born in Surinam in 1898 but moved to find work in Haiti, Curacao, and eventually the Netherlands, had returned to Suriname. Although he never was a formal member of the Communist Party, he was sympathetic to socialist and communist ideas. Aware of the miserable conditions many workers had to deal with, Anton de Kom started a consultancy for workers in his parent's house in the capital Paramaribo. Attracting large numbers of workers, the colonial authorities saw him as a threat and arrested him on February 1st, 1933. Large numbers of people demanded his release and gathered in front of the office of the Attorney General on February 7th 1933. Rumour had it that de Kom would be released, but the crowd refused to disperse. The police opened fire, 30 people got wounded, and two people were killed. Anton de Kom was deported to the Netherlands without a trial in May 1933. In the Netherlands, he wrote and finished his book *Wij slaven van Suriname* (*We Slaves of Surinam*; my trans.), in which he elaborately criticised the miserable conditions the masses of the people in Surinam had to live in, because of the colonial policies of the Dutch authorities in Surinam. In 1934 de Kom met Otto Huiswoud in Amsterdam, they attended the meeting of the Anti-Imperialist League in Paris. Otto also asked him to write for *The Negro Worker*, which led to the 1934 piece "Misery and Starvation in Surinam" by de Kom. In this article, he criticised the harsh conditions and poverty under which the workers class in Suriname lived: "Workers, organise and fight against exploitation, unemployment and starvation! Close ranks in struggle for the emancipation of the colonial toilers! Demand the independence of Dutch Guiana!" (De Kom 19).

The life of Anton de Kom is more recognised within the collective memory than the Huiswouds due to the work of Surinamese activists in the 1970s. Therefore, The Black Archives organised a series of events to (also) push for recognition of the history of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud to expand Surinamese history. One of the events was organised around the annual commemoration of Anton de Kom in February 2018. In addition, author Karin Amatmoekrim wrote an article in a series of articles which were published with the theme "silenced history" on the Dutch media platform "De Correspondent" in cooperation with The Black Archives and urban radio station FunX. Amatmoekrim wrote: "Silencing is an active happening; you have known something and decide not to tell it further. Because you think that awareness about it is dangerous or unimportant, or it distracts from a subject which you would prefer the conversation to be about" (Amatmoekrim). The series of articles, the events and exhibition can be seen as an intervention in the dominant Eurocentric narrative by making histories visible which had remained silenced for a long time.

WOII—Imprisonment and Separation

After the period in which Otto and Hermina travelled as professional revolutionaries around the world, a time of uncertainty was discussed in the fifth chapter. Therefore, this panel was displayed through two separate pieces to mark the physical distance between Hermina and Otto in this period. In 1941 Otto was advised to recover in a tropical climate from a kidney surgery and pneumonia, so he travelled to Suriname. One day after his arrival in Paramaribo, he was ordered to be arrested and incarcerated by the governor Kielstra. Huiswoud was incarcerated, together with the suspected members of the National Socialist Party, suspected Nazis, (Jewish) Germans and other Surinamese people accused of being a communist. After Otto was released in August 1942, he was forced to sign a "statement of non-activity." This forced him to declare that he was not a member of any political party and that he acknowledged the Government. Otto was banned from attending political meetings, and he had to be at home by 10 p.m. every day. The arrests

of both Anton de Kom and Otto Huiswoud by the Dutch colonial authorities in Surinam saw the movements of workers, especially those with ties to the communist parties as a threat which had to be repressed.

One of the panels showed how the authorities intercepted letters which were exchanged between Otto and Hermina, who was still residing in New York during Otto's imprisonment. Despite the long imprisonment of her husband, she continued her work and political activities in the United States (Turner). The imprisonment of Otto Huiswoud in Surinam during the war, which was translated into a visual installation by artist Raul Balai, provided an alternative way of remembering the Second World War. Wekker argued that the dominant "white innocence" narrative around the remembrance of the Second World War is focused on the Dutch as victims of aggression and not on what happened in the colonies. This specific part of the exhibition challenged this dominant view by focusing on the ways in which Dutch authorities engaged in different forms of aggression during the war as well.

Amsterdam: Vereniging Ons Suriname (VOS)

In the sixth and last chapter, the narrative centred on the Netherlands from the 1950s onwards. After the war, Hermina and Otto moved to Amsterdam where they spend the remainder of their lives. In 1947 Otto Huiswoud became a member of the vereniging Ons Suriname (VOS, Association "Our Surinam"). In 1954 Otto was elected as its chairman. Due to his experience with being arrested because of his membership in the Communist Party and the anti-communist sentiment, Otto and his wife Hermina did not openly talk about their communist past, but they did bring their experiences, knowledge and network with them. Under Otto's leadership, the association became a hub of anti-colonial and intellectual exchange and mobilisation.

Anti-colonial Movement at VOS

One of the important initiatives under the leadership of Otto was the creation of the monthly publication *De Koerier* (The Courier; my trans.) which the visitor could view via a reproduction in the exhibition. Hermina and Otto knew the value of producing and distributing an independent paper. In October 1954 the first edition of *De Koerier* was published. With *De Koerier*, VOS attempted to create awareness around issues of colonialism and freedom in an international context. It contained articles on the developments of Surinam but also on anti-colonial struggles across the African continent and in Asia and the ongoing civil rights movement in the United States.

Hermina and Otto built a great network due to their work as professional revolutionaries for many years. They maintained contact from Amsterdam with activists from their political past. In 1954 W.E.B. Du Bois, the prominent African-American sociologist and pan-Africanist, who had become a member of the Communist Party of the United States, visited "Our Surinam" association (Corsten). Du Bois was the co-organizer of the first Pan-African Congress in 1900 and the co-founder of the civil rights organisation National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. The Huiswouds and DuBois have been in contact since the 1920s.

Within this VOS network, working groups were formed to organise activities, such as lectures and an annual Ketu Ketu event. Ketu Ketu, the commemoration of the abolishment of slavery in the Dutch Kingdom on July the 1st was an important moment. Together with organisations such as Wie Eegie Sani and the Surinamese Students Association, VOS used Ketu Ketu to mobilise people and share views on anti-colonialism and independence. Today Ketu Ketu has become an important moment of public remembrance of the history of slavery, colonialism and its legacy. After a prolonged struggle, mainly by Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Caribbean people, to establish monuments in honour of their ancestors who had lived through, resisted or died during the period of slavery, a national monument was revealed in Amsterdam in 2002 (Willemsen and Nimako).

In addition, the NinSee was founded, an institution with the task to conduct research, disseminate knowledge and information around this history and its legacy. One of the main activities NinSee organises,

together with 529 Productions, is the annual commemoration of the abolishment of slavery through the Ketikoti festival in Amsterdam. It has attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors between 2013 and 2018. During Ketikoti 2017 The Black Archives launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for the development of the exhibition. Within a few weeks, more than €20.000 was collected by more than 700 donators, reflecting the broad support and need for these kinds of “alternative archives.”

The Huiswouds and the Dutch Black Radical Tradition

Otto was dealing with health issues at the beginning of the 1960s. From his deathbed, he still gave instructions for a protest, for the murder on a Congolese freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba. In February 1961 Otto passed away. Until the end, he was committed to the emancipation of the Black People. Hermina stayed active within the association, and she maintained contact with active (board) members and her international network. One of her missions was to secure the story of her husband Otto Huiswoud so it could be told. Based on the papers and documents that Hermina left behind, The Black Archives was able to share this history that had remained silenced.

The exhibition aimed to show how Hermina and Otto Huiswoud can be seen as part of a tradition of the Black radical thinkers and organisers. In addition, we aimed to show how contemporary Black Activism in the Netherlands is a part of a longer tradition of the Black resistance, a history which has been silenced. Coming from countries under the colonial rule of European powers. Caribbean migrants were confronted with dreadful conditions the masses of Black People faced in the United States: racial segregation and discrimination, and economic insecurity. A number of these Caribbean migrants were drawn to socialist ideas of class struggle and revolution, especially after the October Revolution in the Soviet Union in 1917. Their experience in the Caribbean colonies and being racialised as the Black in the United States, however, forced them to think and organise around the issues of race as well as to create a dynamic interplay between the “emancipatory ideas” and “militant action” about race and class (Stevens 3). Robinson states that these Black political activists drawn to socialism, communism and Marxism constituted “the black radical tradition,” which could not be analysed from the European models of history:

Black radicalism, consequently, cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis. It is not a variant of Western radicalism whose proponents happen to be Black. Rather, it is a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization” (Robinson 97).

In Robinson’s book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* the author illustrates his arguments by describing the development of Marxism in Europe and Black resistance against colonial oppression. He exemplifies this by describing how these traditions influenced Black thinkers W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Richard Wright. Stevens, however, refutes the idea that Black radicalism is a “tradition of great men,” as this approach neglects the role of collective organisation and black workers as a class. In addition, Davies and McDuffie write about the pivotal role women played in these Black radical movements by bringing gender into the equation besides the issues of race and class.

Through the exhibition’s public programme which ended with a summer school on the Black Radical Thought with dr. Tony Bogues, The Black Archives made an important contribution to the historiography of the Black radicalism besides the intervention in dominant historical narratives.

With the interpretation of Surinamese-Dutch artists, the exhibition shows how black radical thinking is still relevant to understand contemporary issues that Black people in the Netherlands face from a historical perspective. Especially the artwork of Raul Balai and Iris Kensmil shows how the history of Hermina and Otto Huiswoud intersects with present-day challenges as the fight against the Dutch blackfacing tradition *Zwarte Piet*. The drawing of the Black activists and their slogan “*Zwarte Piet Is Racism*” was her artistic interpretation of connecting the history of the Black radicalism and the Huiswouds to the contemporary movement against *Zwarte Piet* (Helsloot). In the video installation of artist Raul Balai, the imprisonment of Otto Huiswoud was visualised with the unlawful arrests of anti-*Zwarte Piet* activist who were jailed. Black

activists fighting against contemporary forms of racism and anti-blackness such as Zwarte Piet were invited to use the space for their meetings and gatherings as one of the few places they could meet. In an article titled “Colonialism,” the editors of *The Courier* which was being led by Otto Huiswoud wrote:

The upbringing is aimed directly against the history of the people, historical facts are being falsified, the history of the people is completely suppressed by that of the motherland, or it is simply concealed. National heroes become criminals and terrorists while the colonists are presented as paternal, humane and highly developed, and sometimes they are even elevated to national heroes. (Vereniging Ons Suriname 2)

Huiswoud edited a paper in which this process of the suppression of historical narratives was being discussed. Ironically, he became subject to this process, his life and the life of his wife Hermina has remained hidden for a long time. This exhibition of The Black Archives is an example of how ‘alternative archives’ can be used to make hidden histories visible again, challenge dominant narratives which tend to downplay or deny histories of slavery and colonialism and its legacies such as the narrative of “white innocence” (Wekker 18). An archive is not a neutral space, and an ‘alternative archive’ itself will not necessarily change dominant structures of knowledge and public memory. It is the engagement with the archive through public programmes and the dynamic interplay between activists, artists, educators and institutions that sparks change.

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Research Article

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Concerning “the Eurocentric African Problem” (Meschac Gaba)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0025>

Received July 30, 2018; accepted November 19, 2018

Abstract: Even as it is often eclipsed by reference to the “contemporary,” modernity is widely celebrated in European museums and galleries. When refracted through the commitments of an avowedly Black artistic agenda, how might these institutions reconceive their understanding of modernism in light of African, diasporic, or Afropean perspectives? How might concerns with African agency be enacted in these cultural spaces as they project historical narratives and produce a “public” memory in their own image? What are the implications of the fact that critical resistance to modes of cultural appropriation may, nonetheless, reproduce a discourse that attempts to immunise itself from the association of modernism with colonialism? In the formation of modernist canons, what role might an example of African conceptual art have to play, even when consigned to a museum’s storage space? This paper explores such questions through the paradoxes engaged by Mechac Gaba’s reflections on his 1997-2002 project, “Museum for Contemporary African Art,” now owned by Tate Modern. In particular, it considers the dichotomy between “modern” and “traditional” as this has been constitutive of twentieth-century art history, informing a sense of the African presence within European museums. How might reference to the “contemporary” here relate to the potentials of decolonial cultural politics within such spaces?

Keywords: modernity, hybridity, tradition, ethnography, art

Historically, the conflict over blackness has been inseparable from the question of our modernity.

(Mbembe 30)

While exhibitions of ethnographic artefacts and modern art in European museums have been intertwined during the twentieth century, they often seem to remain parallel worlds, even as these very categories have come under renewed scrutiny. Although a celebration of the “contemporary” has led to the transformation of erstwhile ethnographic museums (now museums of “world cultures”)—where today one is as likely to find work by, for example, Sokari Douglas-Camp or Romauld Hazoumé in the British Museum as in Tate Modern—this enduring curatorial parallelism has occluded a specifically African modernist art history in European museums. How does the difference of institutional context still affect the sense of this art’s presence in European—indeed, in Afropean—cultural memory? What continuities and discontinuities of research are entailed by these different histories of collection and exhibition? Although this has long been a concern of Rasheed Araeen, for example, and much developed in the journal, *Third Text*, that he founded in 1987, these questions will be addressed here by drawing on reflections by the Benin artist, Meschac Gaba.

Gaba’s comments in an interview (2001) about his project for a “Museum of Contemporary African Art,” a twelve-room installation developed over several years (1997-2002), offer a point of departure for considering what might be claimed by reference to “Africa” in European museums’ collections. After all, what is “African” may be supposed to name its own contribution to a changing sense of world perspectives,

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while also offering a disarticulation of the claimed universalism of inherited Eurocentric views. While Gaba’s “museum” project is situated by Okwui Enwezor, for example, in “the historical struggle between competing visions of contemporary African art in the ethnographic museum and in the museum of art” (139), its incorporation into the collection of Tate Modern in 2013 exposes various issues of institutional-historical location that reflect back on, precisely, those “competing visions.” The difference marked by reference to the contemporary between these different European museum settings—addressing the identification of and with the ethnographic or the modern—becomes itself a lens for refracting a discourse invoking the African art presence in Europe. It is with the discourse of what Gaba identifies as “the Eurocentric African problem” (15)—expressive of the particular role that museums and galleries play in mediating, or historicising, an African art presence in Europe—that this essay is concerned, particularly in the formation of canons and the curatorial knowledge that accompanies them.

That the reference to “African” art in Gaba’s “museum” project might itself be problematic—not least, from an Afrocentric viewpoint—offers, nonetheless, an important starting point for situating how the contemporary may be distinguished from the modern, as also the modern from the traditional. Olu Oguibe, for example, cautions that: “To employ the ‘problems’ paradigm in discussing modernity and modernism in Africa is simply to buy into existing structures of reference, which not only peculiarise modernity in Africa but also forebode crisis.” (8) Although ostensibly posing a question of African art, Gaba’s “museum” concept peculiarises, rather, modernity and modernism in the European institutions that it addresses. Indeed, regarding what is contemporary in these museums, Gaba can perhaps be seen to be following Oguibe’s recommendation that: “What needs to be done is to reject that peculiarisation [concerning modernity in Africa] and all those structures and ideational constructs that underlie it”—at least, in so far as this exposes the underlying paradoxes of, precisely, such an attempt to “reject” these same “ideational constructs.”

Rather than reviewing its actual installation, which is now purely virtual (as items in Tate Modern’s archive of collections, accessible through its website), it is the idea of Gaba’s work that will be referenced here. After all, in Gaba’s own terms, his museum is as much a conceptual work as a material one, where (according to the artist) the project is “a positive way of addressing Eurocentrism, as it’s Europeans who created museums.” (18) This is not to say that Europeans created the projection of power and prestige through collections and their display—but, rather, that institutional claims to universalism remain a problem of the Eurocentric even when museums associate themselves with the contemporary, not least where this association is made in the name of African art. Following Oguibe, this problem arises from the historical occlusion of the modern in relation to African art, which in Gaba’s case specifically means the occlusion of an Afrocentric conceptual art history. (It is this that his work aims to remedy in the name of its own “museum.”) The displacement of the modern by appeal to the contemporary reinforces the sense that these categories are corollaries of the traditional. As suggested by Salah Hassan: “This traditional versus contemporary distinction was created by the colonising structure in Africa, and is equally rooted in the epistemological roots of African art scholarship, which is basically Eurocentric. Any serious effort to define contemporary African art forms must start by examining this dichotomy and its validity.” (219)

On the Critical Judgment of What is “Modern”

Even when occluded by reference to the contemporary, the reproduction of such dichotomies is not the least of the paradoxes underlying Gaba’s claim to a position beyond them when refusing one of their terms, the traditional, in the name of an other, the modern. Gaba explicitly states, for instance, that the “Eurocentric . . . problem” is the object of his concern as a modern, rather than traditional, African artist: “I don’t come from traditional Africa, but from modern Africa: that’s why I ask questions about the education I had. If I create a museum for contemporary African art, it’s because I say that the people who gave me that education didn’t give us everything. They shut me up inside tradition” (18). Paradoxically, this distinction between the modern and the traditional (as if between Europe and Africa in the museum context) still informs the artist’s self-identification—or, rather, his relation to “universal” institutional identification—and might be

understood as expressive, as much as explanatory, of what this “Eurocentric African problem” might be.

Nothing is as traditionally modernist as the way that modernity distinguishes itself from tradition, whether that of (“provincial”) European art history or as identified by European museums—and many European artists—with African art. In this context, it is important to note that what was conceived as “pre-modern,” the so-called “savage” or “primitive,” was recognised as the very epitome of the modern in European avant-garde circles during the twentieth century. Modernity, as a Eurocentric universalism, constructs itself as if by a difference that has proved to be its own phantasm. This was succinctly expressed by the curators of the *Neolithic Childhood* exhibition, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2018, who note that for European modernists the “primitive,” as an avant-garde version of the “traditional,” “fulfilled the function of a self-constitutive, negative mirror, an arena for the relocation and projection of unsolved ontological riddles concerning the origin and ‘magical’ powers of sign-systems and collective symbolisations” (319). Indeed, this implication is already satirised by Gaba’s own suggestion that his museum involves an “improved ethnography” (14), referring to one pole of the Eurocentric curatorial episteme (as identified by Enwezor, for example); the other being the global art market. The point here is not simply what Gaba himself may or may not intend by his commentary; but also the way in which his appeal to an African cultural space (as a conceptual museum) in Europe today is pre-empted by a conceptual history that is reproduced even in his critical resistance to it.

For example, in the following, lengthy quotation from Hassan, the very question of the modern-traditional dichotomy, underlying a contrastive appeal to the contemporary, is finally answered in, precisely, the modernist terms that still frame the contested question of cultural recognition here:

The failure to recognise the above dialogue [between African artists concerning their own, diverse influences], despite the statements articulated by African artists, is due to the prevailing dichotomies of “modern/ traditional,” or “Western modern/ non-Western traditional,” and all their implications. It is the failure to recognise the fact that long ago Africans and other Third-World people entered the dialogue on modernism and have challenged it on their own soil. Hence, despite recent negative connotations associated with the term in Western intellectual circles, “modern” is more suitable for such new African artistic expressions, because it symbolises the experience and practices that the art forms embody. To call it “modern” distinguishes it from the merely contemporary; for where “contemporary” is a term of neutral reference, “modern” is a term of critical judgment. Moreover, modernism in the African context, as elsewhere, entails a self-conscious attempt to break with the past and a search for new forms of expression. (223)

While the key point concerns the situating of such “critical judgement,” as between the possibilities of old Eurocentric conceptions and new Afrocentric ones, this twofold interweaving—as if between the traditional and the modern—still precludes a sense of “multiple modernities” that are not limited to the terms of this inherited dichotomy.

The hermeneutic politics that precede questions of African cultural space in European museums is a corollary of the intrinsic relation between modernity and colonialism, manifest in such pervasive discriminations as those between the “developed” and “developing” worlds, the metropolitan and the peripheral, elite arts and popular crafts, the “authenticity” of communities and the “autonomy” of individuals, and so on. While the meaning of such supposedly comparative terms is continually changing, the sense of what is “authentic” often adheres still to the traditional within the denegation of modernity. This ascription is renewed when the authentic becomes re-aligned with the contemporary as if by-passing the fraught genealogy of the modern. Particularly in the desire to evade associations with ethnography, this offers another displacement of African modernities within the work of cultural appropriation, now made in the name of the global art market rather than “civilisation.” The latter is reconceived (or re-branded) as “world culture” in the museum context, as if this somehow made that context “post-colonial.”

On Modernism’s Disavowal of Its Own Traditions

While the hybrid aspect of much of Western modern art (the emblem of which is generally supposed to be Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*) is widely recognised, the sense of the hybrid modernity of African art—contemporary with the Eurocentric examples with which it is usually contrasted—is either overlooked

or, amongst those pursuing claims concerning the authentic, subjected to a denigratory judgment as being derivative. This situation is recounted, for example, by Gaba in describing André Magnin’s trips to Benin when he was researching for the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition: “He came looking for his little European market. For him, what Africans liked wasn’t art.” (14)

With respect to traditional arts too, especially in the transformation of “tribal arts” into “tourist arts,” a similar judgement—which was already proclaimed by the dealer Paul Guillaume in 1926, for example—is critically addressed in Christopher Steiner’s analysis of the West African art market (1994), presenting the views of its African suppliers in contrast to the Europeans’ nostalgia for what they deem “authentic” when judging contemporary “traditional” art to be “fake.” Europeans’ desire for art from pre-colonial or even pre-contact times offers a curious inversion of the very colonial conditions of and for collection in the early twentieth century. It also refuses to recognise that these works were already part of complex African cultural dialogues, especially with Islam, beyond the Eurocentric point of view.

Amongst many voices typically ignored in writing Eurocentric art histories, it is worth noting that a modern-traditional hybridity was explicitly advocated by Alain Locke in 1925. Albeit re-inscribing the traditional-modern framework—in the name of both the contemporary experience of the diaspora (in the 1920s) and of “ancestral arts”—Locke appealed to African-American artists to learn as much from African as from European examples, just as Picasso, Matisse, and others, had (261). Citing Roger Fry (1920), Locke celebrates the dynamic of “experiment” amongst African-inspired European artists, as a way to escape the “prejudice and caricature” (264) that informed the institutionalised conventions prescribed for Black subjects in painting and sculpture, even for Black artists of the time.

The judgment of the hybrid as derivative rather than experimental is founded on modernism’s disavowal of its own evaluation of the authentic—associated, for instance, with the “primitive,” as distinct from a sense of the traditional associated with kitsch. The celebration of “primitivism”—that is, a cultural movement of historical Eurocentric “discontents” (Freud); or “predicaments” (Clifford)—attests, paradoxically, to a possible European future in the name of African art, which can be seen emerging in its changing past. This idea was at the heart of the *Neolithic Childhood* exhibition (referred to previously), in which art historical examples of European sceptical—or even transgressive—responses to the narrative of modernity were explored. After all, a key aspect of the contemporaneity of the modern and traditional—as (if) between the European and the African—is that African art often already encodes an anti-colonial message within the European museum spaces from which such a politics was ostensibly excluded in the name of “traditional” art.

As Hein Vanhee observes, concerning perhaps the most challenging “African art” presence in European museums, the *nkonde* form of *minkisi* (that is, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figures encrusted with nails): “The documentary value of *minkisi* lies perhaps herein: rather than illustrating a traditional past, they document by their dislocation the gradual establishment of colonial rule and African responses to these developments. They are not just discarded relics, but they actively participated in the transformation of Kongo society” (100). Furthermore, pre-colonial images of Europeans—and, indeed, images made for Europeans, in the luxury trade of ivory objects—are a significant part, for example, of the heritage of Benin art, also contributing to the African cultural presence in Europe already since the sixteenth century.

A famous testimony to the potentially transformative “presence” of African art at the heart of Europe, understood in a decolonising context, is Chris Marker and Alain Resnais’ 1953 film, *Les statues meurent aussi*, commissioned by the major cultural project whose anglicised name appears throughout this discussion, *Présence Africaine*. Despite its tendency to an affirmative essentialism, eschewing the hybrid modernity of much of the “traditional” African art being celebrated, *Présence Africaine* has played a vital “role as an agent for change” (Luce 5) concerning the inherited Eurocentric problem of cultural memory. In the museum context, the enduring interest of Marker and Resnais’ film, with its expressly anti-colonial poetics, can be seen in reverse in a more recent, fictionalised description of “Europe’s vision” of “clichés about Africa.” In her short story collection, *Coloured Lights*, Leila Aboulela offers a description of these, in the name of a Sudanese student visiting a Scottish museum, as “cold and old” (115). The sense of transformation that the film invokes, in its own imaginary museum, contrasts with this continuing sense of alienation evoked by Aboulela. It also offers a profound counter-point to the motives informing Gaba’s “alternative” museum.

As if it Were Post-Colonial

The institutional space of and for Gaba's intervention appears itself "problematic" in terms of the conceptual understanding of the "Eurocentric" relation to "African art" that it identifies. For the idea of the "museum" in this case cannot be isolated from the institutional investments which it seeks to address and by which it is itself addressed. Established framing distinctions continue to weave through the disciplinary conditions of knowledge in the "curatorial episteme," where Susan Vogel (citing Sidney Kasfir), in a survey article in 2005, could still distinguish between the institutional interests of exhibiting "traditional" and "contemporary" arts as between "Africanists" and "modernists" (15). Although, as Vogel suggests, the twentieth century association between the "modern" and the "primitive," in both private collections and public exhibitions, seems to be historically past (not least, following the controversies engaged by the *Magiciens de la Terre* show in Paris 1989, and New York's MoMA *Primitivism* show in 1984); nonetheless, this paradigm—implying a distinction between the regional ("Africanist") and the international ("modernist")—remains an enduring part of historicising modern art in (and for) the West. It is this history—as a "Eurocentric problem"—which Gaba's project is both inscribed in and which it seeks to interrupt in the name of "African art" by offering a conceptual model (or "question" [16]) of its own.

Contrasted with major exhibitions that seemed already "historical" in their curatorial ambitions in the last century, Gaba's "museum" exposes the simple fact that (as Wyatt MacGaffey notes, citing Arthur Danto): "Neither 'art' nor 'primitive art' is a class of objects existing in the world, to be identified and circumscribed. Both are categories of our thought and practice; they are related as subcategories as part of the history of the west" (218). Appropriately enough, MacGaffey's specific example of this is the changing status of Congolese *minkisi* in Western hands, transformed from their identification with the idea of "fetish" to that of "art," as if these were opposed terms rather than (at least, for Western collectors) correlates (223-24).

In recognition of the Eurocentric condition of, precisely, a "provincialism as universalism" (Quijano 177), the history of the "history" of modern art is undergoing a profound process of revision, now faced with a global marketization of the contemporary as if it were post-colonial. Indeed, the constitutive juxtaposition of African and European, as (if) between traditional and modern, continues to occlude the relational, or syncretic, reality of canonical art on *both* sides of that divide. If the formation of canons in terms of this division has produced an art history that can be viewed (in a critical sense) as itself historical, how might one now situate an appeal to African art such as that named, conceptually, by Gaba's museum?

Besides the contemporary conditions identified by Oguibe in the "cultural game" for "those who come to it with a background from outside Europe" (33)—which Gaba clearly articulates—one might also consider the traditional conditions of this game with respect to the art accessioned (or appropriated) during the colonial past, not just in the neo-colonial present. Concerning enduring questions of provenance, for example, when addressing African art in Western collections (especially in erstwhile ethnographic museums), this could be viewed as another refraction of Ambalavaner Sivanandan's famous observation—concerning the basic reality (even as it is largely disavowed) of institutional racism in European societies—that "we are here because you were over there."

The Eurocentric question to which Sivanandan's "we" replies, "why are you here?"—invariably followed up by another question, making its premise more explicit, "why don't you go back to where you came from?"—is rarely applied to the presence of African artefacts in European museums. Here the modern culture game is veiled by the aggrandising sense of ownership that these collections represent (itself part of the "Eurocentric African problem") where, despite recent shifts in the politics of returns and reparations, the question of "going back to where you came from" has been more or less taboo, in so far as it strikes at the claims of and for these institutions' cultural legitimacy. That these concerns start to become fundamental to questions about the African art presence in European museums presents another sense of what is "contemporary" when addressing, precisely, the past and its possible futures—with respect to the Benin plaques, for example.

Although there has long been a debate about the conditions of artefacts' being spoken for—whether by curators, anthropologists, or representatives of "source" communities—artefacts are not usually supposed to speak for themselves. This version of the traditional-modern dichotomy—as between what is original

(or authentic) and what is derivative (or inauthentic); or between what is “animate” and “inanimate”—displaces reflection on such objects’ varied affordances, as these change in changing contexts. (As Mamadou Diawara astutely notes of these museums’ displays, “the object is more complex than what meets the eye” 179.) Here “traditional” collections contrast with the contemporary, where living artists—like Gaba—can, at least, speak for their art by themselves (despite the competing interests of dealers, curators, and collectors to define the “value” of the work). As is often noted, the African art that made its European presence felt during the (pre-independence) colonial-modern decades was collected in the absence of the oral testimony by which it was originally narrativised. This concerns what Diawara calls the Western museum’s “idolatry of the object” in denial of its “native context” (174), not least with respect to contrasting conceptions of authorship in the definition of art and of its comparative modernity.

Indeed, as Diawara observes, “all too often we forget the oral dimension of sculpture” (179), a concern echoed by Gaba, for whom: “In Africa, I think art and words always go together” (14). In his own case: “All the pieces I’ve made have had a story” (15); at least, as this accompanies their conceptual interests. Unrecognised by the formalist aesthetics that embraced African art in Europe (conceived of as sculpture) from at least the first decade of the twentieth century, many of the objects exhibited by museums (valued as traditional rather than as contemporary) were not necessarily intended for universal display but, on the contrary, were defined by degrees of “presence” through forms of initiation. The rituals of the Western museum, however, aim to make all objects comparable—even those that it elevates to the status of being “incomparable.”

Here, the initiation of Western connoisseurship, or art knowledge, is also reproduced by institutions with formal conditions of membership, such as a degree from the Courtauld or SOAS, not to mention the “value” of prices organised by the rituals of auction houses or dealers’ galleries. Objects are conserved in the cults of European museums without, however, participating in the originating knowledge systems necessary to address them—or, in the case of contemporary work, such as Gaba’s, without necessarily sharing the “propitiatory” knowledge that is related to the art market. As I discovered in researching this article, for instance, there may be restrictions placed on access to the Tate’s archive in order to protect “market confidentiality” concerning the acquisition of contemporary African art, even when that art is engaged in questioning the concept of the museum and its curatorial policies. Here market realities trump the post-colonial investigation of the Eurocentric, where the “problem” in question is identified with the art and not with the museum.

On the Formation of Canonical Art Histories

That Gaba’s work is now part of Tate Modern’s collections illustrates, paradoxically, the “Eurocentric problem” that it thematises concerning who speaks to—and, even, for—whom about the African art presence in European museums. Not the least aspect of this problem remains institutional racism, the legacies of which provide a register of demands for change within these spaces that have themselves been part of the legacies’ reproduction. How does the existing African art presence in Europe engage, then, with another of Sivanandan’s suggestions—that (as Stephen Small cites it) Black Europeans are conscious of “wear[ing] our passports on our faces; which, in turn, reflects our status in the eyes of non-Black people as permanent strangers”? (34) The museum’s role in creating (and not simply curating) the past in the present has first to dis-articulate the colonial-modern tradition, where the question of African art concerns not only the understanding of “strangers” but also of “permanence” within these privileged European cultural spaces.

By contrast to the traditionally valued African arts in European museums, it is a paradox of Gaba’s “museum” that it can be addressed without ostensible content, questioning in its very concept the supposition of a canon—in this case “of African art.” It is, as Gaba says, “an empty museum, but rich in philosophy” (17). Such a supposition is the paradigm of the change from the cabinet of curiosity to the modern museum of disciplinary knowledge, where the latter continues to provide a source of legitimacy even for museums of contemporary art. As Sylvester Ogbechie notes: “Canons arise precisely because of the structure of knowledge production in art history, in which museum collections are valued higher than

the cultural processes that bring them into being.” (62) This includes the concept of the museum itself, of course, as Gaba observes in the limiting function of a purely Africanist claim in regard to his own work, which he relates to the example of Marcel Broodthaers’ “museum” projects:

I use Broodthaers’ idea without adopting his approach. I hate people telling me that what I do is European art. It’s mainly Africans who tell me that, not Europeans. What I do is react to an African situation which is linked to a Eurocentric problem. I think that attentive African artists who don’t allow themselves to be limited by ethnography can identify with my work. (16)

The contemporary—to cite the title of Gaba’s project—has become a signifier by which even the exhibition space dedicated to a traditional African presence in Europe has attempted to transform the seemingly historical signifier “ethnography” by renaming collections as art. It is paradoxical that this change, already signalled in the early twentieth century, has only been institutionally realised as the sense of the contemporary has displaced that of the modern—nearly a century later. It was only in 2000, for instance, that the Louvre consecrated the Pavillon des Sessions to the display of non-Western “masterpieces,” realising a suggestion made by Apollinaire in 1909.

This manoeuvre is not, however, without its problems. We have already noted Hassan’s rejection of the displacement of the modern in favour of the contemporary, and it is, again, paradoxically the very reproduction of these distinctions that provide for their possible dis-articulation in Gaba’s example. In the institutional self-representation (or self-promotion) of museums of universal (that is, “modern”) art and world (that is, “traditional”) cultures, the contemporary becomes a term for dehistoricising the present, as if overcoming the distinction between the modernist work of decontextualisation (“art”) and the traditionalist work of (re-) contextualisation (“ethnography”). This recalls Vogel’s note about “modernists” and “Africanists” in museum culture, even as the latter occasionally succumb to the allure of the former’s concept of art (while still wanting to avoid conceptualising the “same” artefacts as examples of art history, rather than ethnography).

The resonance of the terms global vs world and art vs cultures in making claims for canons is deep and complex, albeit often subsumed in the new monotone of reference to the contemporary. The space of and for African art in Europe, associated with the formation of canonical art history (mediated especially by the publication of decontextualizing catalogue photographs of “masterpieces”), is framed and articulated, in large part, to the exclusion of reflexive interest in its own Eurocentric construction. As already indicated, such an interest would be most obviously demanded by consideration of modes of “indigenous knowledge systems about beliefs and behaviours related to their cultural history” (Ogbechie 65), addressing what the West knows as “art”; not least, in reconsidering ascriptions of the traditional and the modern in its examples. The cataloguing of works by indexes and inventories—and the familiar notes on “provenance, publication history, exhibition history” that inform any catalogue of “traditional” African art—are clearly not neutral with respect to the enduring epistemic violence of de- and re-contextualisation, which is hardly challenged in the move to the contemporary.

Here again, we confront the conditions of knowledge concerning the “we” and the “you,” the “here” and the “there” (*pace* Sivanadan), that the African presence has long attested to within the space of European museums, even when unacknowledged. Indeed, it has often been thought that this presence requires the supplement of “artists’ initiatives” to make it palpable—such as Fred Wilson’s famous “Other Museum” (not to mention, for instance, the series of interventions at the World Cultures Museum in Frankfurt, under Clémentine Deliss). It is as if a contemporary artist was needed to transform the traditional collection into art—if only, like a fairy tale, for the time of a temporary exhibition. The museum space thereby makes believe that the “problem” of African art can be separated from that of the Eurocentric, reinforcing the latter’s hegemonic power to deny even the paradoxes of its own history.

The use of the term contemporary, then, as if it were descriptive (a “neutral reference” [Hassan]) and not critical (which, for Hassan, the term modern remains), occludes the fact that the African art in these European museums’ collections was always already contemporary, even as it was cast as traditional in order to frame a canonical (Western) modern art. In a sense, its very exclusion—attested to by Gaba’s own

question as to what “role” he might have “if this museum existed” (15)—holds the promise of the African presence (or “problem”) in Eurocentric art history. After all, as noted previously, much of this presence was already engaged in the war of images in colonialism (Quijano 169; also Grudzinski 2001), even before this became politically articulated in the modern sense of institutions (such as museums) promoting “post-colonial” identities.

On the Museum as “No Longer a Euro-American Preserve”

It is a further paradox of Gaba’s project—addressing the museum as a privileged space of and for an African and diaspora art presence in Europe—that its original intention (echoing Malraux) was to be “without walls” (16). Now that the work has been recognised amongst the very institutions that it aimed to question (or at least to engage in dialogue with), it is enclosed, literally, within the walls of Tate Modern’s storage space. When Enwezor, for example, celebrates the project’s mode of assemblage “in the style of a West African market,” it is perhaps inevitable that it is precisely the contrasting “rationalist episteme of the museum, where the display of knowledge takes on an antiseptic, clinical pallor” (133) that comes to characterise the “museum’s” appearance under the aegis of Tate. When I began to write this article only one of its twelve rooms was on public display—the *Marriage Room*—and then in association with the Tate’s collection of performance art rather than of conceptual art. Since June 2018 even this one room has been consigned to the storage, demonstrating that the whole project is now the private property of the gallery rather than a public space of and for critical enquiry concerning the “Eurocentric” (in the name of “African art”), except in its conceptual articulation still.

Perhaps this was already indicated by the way that the project was re-oriented by its Tate context in 2018—not presenting the *Library Room* or the *Gift Shop Room*, for example, which might have invited more critical engagement by the visitor. Such engagement was, after all, the project’s explicit intention, articulated, for instance, with respect to the *Drafts Room*, where, in Gaba’s own account: “I take cut-up banknotes, Dutch ones among them [when the room was installed in Amsterdam], that people will buy as *objets d’art*. So, I revalue these cut-up banknotes and give them value as works of art. Devaluation destroys money. The cut-up notes I sell [for] more than their face value” (15). The paradox here is that the Tate Gallery has now usurped this formerly artistic operation and instrumentalised it in its own commercial positioning within the global art market. *The Marriage Room* represented the curator’s choice of “role” for Gaba’s work in its new institutional context—the effect of which was to recognise the “museum” in terms of the artist’s exposure to the interest of Western galleries, rather than his exposure of those galleries’ own institutional interests concerning “African art.”

Expanding the sense of the “contemporary” here, all this is curiously echoed in similar issues concerning “traditional” African art, as this distinction remains operative in popular (as well as curatorial) culture. In the parallel universe of Hollywood, for example, many of these concerns are enacted in a much discussed scene from the film *Black Panther* (2018). Between the space of the museum and that of the cinema, we find ourselves engaged with a whole new set of paradoxes concerning the “Eurocentric African problem.” That the film’s narrative does not really touch on questions of decolonisation is hardly a surprise, given that it is itself part of a triumphalist post-’89 American world view. Here, Black autonomy—the historical “Panthers” (nineteen of whom remain in American gaols in 2018)—can be celebrated when located in a fantasy world, for example, rather than a world in which “Black Lives Matter.”

Set within the African galleries of “The Museum of Great Britain,” the film shows an image of returns or restitution as direct action, as objects in the collection are violently re-appropriated. The value of the “liberated” object re-inscribes, however, precisely the extractive-capitalist conjunction between raw materials and cultural artefacts that—arguably—the film’s broader fiction of the African polity of Wakanda seeks to resist. This historical conjunction—between what Walter D. Mignolo notes as “the accumulation of money” and “the accumulation of meaning” (274)—underlies the global sense of “world” cultures, epitomised by Hollywood itself. Freed from the rituals of conservation in the museum, the object offers a traditional (indeed, as we hear in the film’s dialogue, “tribal”) surrogate image for the modern realities

of, for example, coltan in mobile phones and the all-too-real African polity of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Imagining this same scene, for instance, with a new iPhone being “liberated” from a display case of modern ethnographica (otherwise known as a shop window), we might find ourselves reflecting on a rather different kind of “contemporary” museum politics.

As the following citation from George Stocking reminds us, concerning the ethnographic museum, at least:

No longer is it possible for museum anthropologists to treat the objects of others without serious consideration of the matter of their rightful ownership or the circumstances of their acquisition—which in the colonial past were often questionable. It is not, however, simply a question of the ownership of “cultural property,” but also of who should control the representation of the meaning of the objects in the Western category, “material culture.” Although it may appropriately be regarded as an “invention” of modern Western culture, the museum is no longer exclusively a Euro-American preserve... (11-12)

This “no longer” (in 1988) indicates a future that already belongs to the past of the “Eurocentric African problem”; one that has, nonetheless, yet to engage with the implications of its transformation—at least, conceptually—into an Afrocentric European problem, whether within or without the museum walls. As Gaba’s work proposes, the museum offers an enduring, but changing, cultural space for the African presence in Europe—challenging what is “contemporary” within a Eurocentric problem concerning “African art.”

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Research Article

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Engaging Black European Spaces and Postcolonial Dialogues through Public Art: Yinka Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0031>

Received July 31, 2018; accepted December 9, 2018

Abstract: Yinka Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, installed on the Fourth Plinth of London's Trafalgar Square from May 24, 2010, to January 30, 2012, temporarily transformed a space dominated by the 19th-century monumental sculpture of Lord Horatio Nelson, Britain's most famous naval hero. When installed in Trafalgar Square, Shonibare's model ship in a bottle, with its sails made of factory-printed textiles associated with West African and African-European identities, contrasted dramatically with the bronze and stone that otherwise demarcate traditional sculpture. Shonibare's sculpture served to activate public space by way of its references to global identities and African diasporic culture. Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship*, this paper argues, inserted a black diasporic perspective into Trafalgar Square, offering a conspicuous challenge to the normative power that defines social and political space in Great Britain. The installation in Trafalgar Square was only temporary, however, and the work was later moved to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, where it is on permanent display. This paper provides an investigation of the deeper historical references Shonibare made to the emergence of transnational identities in the 19th century and the continued negotiation of these identities today by considering the installation of *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* in relation to both sites.

Keywords: Yinka Shonibare, Trafalgar Square, Fourth Plinth, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, public sculpture, black British history

Between May 24, 2010, and January 30, 2012, Yinka Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* was installed on the Fourth Plinth of London's Trafalgar Square. Shonibare's sculpture consists of a giant scale model of the HMS Victory, Lord Horatio Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar. While Shonibare's rendition of the HMS Victory is detailed and accurate, as would be expected from a model ship, the artist deviated from tradition by constructing its thirty-seven sails from factory-printed textiles frequently associated with West African identity. He then situated the model inside of an oversized translucent bottle placed on a wooden platform. This entire sculpture was, in turn, placed on the existing stone plinth in Trafalgar Square. When installed in this manner, the work contrasted dramatically with the bronze and stone that otherwise demarcate traditional sculpture. While positioned on the Fourth Plinth, the sculpture forced a reconsideration of the meaning of Trafalgar Square as a site of historical memory, specifically relating to the development of London's African Diaspora identity in a post-colonial context. Specifically, Shonibare playfully paired opposing signifiers representing African and British identity, exchange and domination, high art and hobby, so as to engage with a critical analysis of colonial and post-colonial identities.

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Figure 1. Yinka Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* installed in Trafalgar Square, 2010. QuintinUK photograph, licensed by Creative Commons. Sculpture © Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS / ARS, NY 2019

For just short of two years, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* was actively engaged in a visual dialogue with a 19th-century monumental sculpture of Lord Horatio Nelson that towers over the square, and, through this dialogue, Shonibare's sculpture challenged the dominant nationalist discourse celebrating British imperialism. It is quite clear, even at first glance, that *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* served effectively as a site-specific work by complicating the normative whiteness of Trafalgar Square, a location associated with power.¹ Oriented toward this site, the sculpture commanded viewers to reevaluate the historical memory of Britain's imperialist past in the context of a multicultural metropolis. In an era when those passing through a city's public spaces tend to dismiss as irrelevant or simply ignore monumental public art on a plinth, Shonibare was successful in using *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* to engage in a complex reflection on the meaning of Trafalgar Square that took into consideration the ways that diverse audiences would read the work given the historical context of its location.

After its temporary installation in Trafalgar Square, however, the sculpture was relocated to a new, permanent home outside the Royal Maritime Museum in Greenwich, a site that the artist had not foreseen at the time of the sculpture's creation. What, we must ask, happens when a site-specific sculpture is removed from its intended location and placed permanently in a new space? Certainly, the specific meaning that developed in relation to Trafalgar Square was lost upon relocation. Yet, as Renée Green explored in the 1993 work *World Tour*, the meaning of public sculpture is always potentially fluid, shifting in relation to installation sites, and thus receptive to new readings over the course of time (Kwon 52).

Public sculpture is open to continuous reinterpretation, and this case study demonstrates that when the work was redeployed at the National Maritime Museum, curatorial and artistic interventions continued to activate *Nelson's Ship*, allowing for equally significant readings to emerge. A framework for understanding

¹ Here I consider what Miwon Kwon's description of traditional site-specific works of art, which "focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion" (Kwon 39).

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle in these two contexts comes from Stuart Hall's destabilization of fixed meaning and cultural identity with the assertion that "meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional, or supplementary meanings" (Hall 26). Focusing on Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship*, this research considers the interrelationship of site-oriented art and place, allowing for fluidity in meaning as the sculpture is reoriented and reinterpreted in the context of its permanent position at the National Maritime Museum.

Nelson and HMS Victory: From Monumental to Miniature

The 1805 Battle of Trafalgar, led by Admiral Horatio Nelson, was a decisive moment in Britain's history. The British Royal Navy faced the joint forces of the French and Spanish during the Napoleonic Wars, and victory at Trafalgar established Britain's supremacy at sea, largely unchallenged until World War II. Great Britain's rise as a power at sea fueled the British Empire's colonial expansion, and, according to the conventional narrative, this made Nelson a foundational character in the story of Britain's imperial dominance.

The desire to memorialize Horatio Nelson began almost immediately after his death in the aftermath of the Battle of Trafalgar, October 21st, 1805, and, in a general sense, monuments glorifying Nelson's individual accomplishments may be read not only as a celebration of Nelson himself, but also, by extension, as a celebration of British maritime dominance and the emergence of a culture of imperialism. The earliest monuments dedicated to Nelson represented this concept of dominance at sea in a non-figurative manner. Architect David Hamilton's Nelson Monument at Glasgow Green, Glasgow, Scotland, an obelisk installed just one year after Nelson's death, did not include an image of Nelson, but rather incorporated names and dates of his most famous battles. The Nelson Monument in Edinburgh, constructed between 1807-1816, took the form of a tower, and the 1809 monument in Montreal—a column—was also non-figurative. Richard Westmacott's bronze sculpture of Nelson in Birmingham, installed on a marble plinth in 1809, was an early figurative representation in monumental form. In this work, Nelson stands in his military uniform, cape flowing in the wind, a miniaturised (at least in relation to the figure of Nelson) version of the HMS Victory. Similar works, whether columns or figurative statues are found throughout Great Britain, and they are also more widely distributed through the British Empire where they also stand as symbolic indicators of imperial might. These include Richard Westmacott's figurative sculpture in Bridgetown, Barbados (erected in 1813), and, more recently, a 2005 sculpture designed by John Doubleday and installed outside of Trafalgar Cemetery in Gibraltar.

Artistic engagement with the legacy of Nelson has happened not only on the monumental scale and in public spaces, however, but also through the tradition of model shipbuilding, the HMS Victory being a perennially popular subject since the nineteenth century. Traditions of building miniature models of ships are both ancient and global. Model ships have been used for religious purposes, as in ancient Egyptian tombs and Medieval Christian churches. Creating model ships has also served as a way to commemorate ships of historical significance, and to advertise the work of a shipwright; and, of course, beautifully crafted models have been admired as works of art in and of themselves (Lavery 9, 10-16).

The practice of building model ships amongst amateur hobbyists gained popularity in the 19th century, following the Napoleonic wars and during the growth of imperialism (Lavery 142), and models of the HMS Victory have always been especially popular. Since most ships are not preserved after their usefulness has expired, model ships are recognized as important historical sources, and accuracy and detail are therefore highly valued (Lavery 17).

Whereas fine quality model ships were frequently made by highly trained professional model-builders, ships in bottles were almost always created by amateurs, and most often the artists were probably men who had experience at sea but little to no formal artistic training. The practice of building miniature ships in bottles was popularised in the late 19th century, at which time inexpensive, clear, glass bottles became widely available (Stammers 93). While scale models were prized amongst collectors and scholars, ships in bottles had a more popular appeal and were usually sold or traded in pubs (Stammers 94).

The monumental sculptures attest to the importance of the Battle of Trafalgar as a decisive naval battle

and one that ushered in an era of British dominance at sea and with it the political and cultural dominance of the Empire. Miniatures, likewise, allowed a broader audience to connect with historical figures and famous ships in a very direct manner. Although it is not a figurative representation of Nelson himself, by bringing his version of the HMS Victory to Trafalgar Square, Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* engages with and complicates this continuous tradition of representing the legacy of Lord Horatio Nelson on a global and monumental scale. By situating his monumental model ship in a bottle, Shonibare chose to reference a popular traditional rather than a fine art tradition, and one that is typically not valued for its artistic qualities nor for the accuracy of the rendition. Ships in bottles were (and are), rather, admired for the perceived "trick" of constructing a ship inside of a bottle. With *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, Yinka Shonibare brought together the monumental and the miniature, commemoration and kitsch, creating site-specific public art that critiques the intersections of white male power and problematizes fixed notions of British identity, while also challenging the value of historical methods of memorialization and activating Trafalgar Square for contemporary audiences.



Figure 2: Yinka Shonibare, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, London's Trafalgar Square. Photograph by Philip Sayer/ Alamy Stock Photo. Sculpture © Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS / ARS, NY 2019

Shonibare, Humor, and History

A consistent aspect of Shonibare's artistic practice is the probing investigation of issues of cross-cultural identity and the contradictions of imperialism. The combination of humour and biting critique evident in *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* is consistent with Shonibare's mode of addressing transnational identities in a post-colonial context (Enwezor 11).² Ultimately, two defining characteristics of Shonibare's work are especially important to the success of *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*: 1) the ironic and humorous use of wax cloth to signify the complexity of identity in Europe's African Diaspora, and 2) a deep engagement with an installation site that relies on location to augment the significance of the work (Chambers; Cheetham; Enwezor; Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu; Hassan and Dadi; Harper and Moyer; Kent et al.).

The printed textiles used to construct the sails in *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* have a transcultural history that is masked by the fact that these textiles are strongly identified with Africa today. Additionally, the history of the textiles is tied up in the European quest for political, social, and economic domination during the colonial era. As the history of wax cloth is often recounted, Dutch traders originally experimented with the mechanised production of resist-dyed textiles with the intention of selling them to the Indonesian market in the nineteenth century. This attempt to displace control of textile production in Indonesia was not successful, as the patterns were considered to be substandard, resulting in their rejection. However, traders found a market for the textiles in Africa's Gold Coast, and patterns were developed and adapted to meet local tastes (Hobbs; Gott; Picton).

Shonibare initially began working with cloth purchased at Brixton Market, keenly aware of its meaning in relation to the complex global circulation of imagery and cultural hybridity and harnessing its ability to complicate our understanding of colonial history and contemporary identity. The use of wax cloth is familiar from Shonibare's early work, in which he stretched the cloth like a canvas and used it as a ground for his paintings. As he discovered the fabric's potential as a sculptural medium, he began reconstructing famous European paintings in three dimensions using headless mannequins clothed in wax cloth. *The Swing (after Fragonard)* (2001, Tate Modern, London), for example, restages the central figure and part of the composition from French Rococo artist Jean Honoré Fragonard's 1767 painting of an aristocratic woman in her garden. The use of such textiles has continued as a key element of his work in more recent years, as seen in individual figures such as *Refugee Astronaut II* and *David (After Michelangelo)* (2016), in his series of *Wind Sculptures*, as well as in film and photographic work.

A second defining characteristic of Shonibare's work is his inclination to probe at the construction of identity through site-specific works and engagement with history, often using humour and viewed through a revisionist lens, leading viewers to challenge conventional knowledge and examine unexplored histories. Installations in museum period rooms and historic houses such as *Party Time: Re-image America* at the Newark Museum's historic Ballentine House in 2009, for example, derived meaning from the history of its installation site. A 2016-2017 installation at the Royal Academy in London, *RA Family Album*, involved wrapping the exterior façade of Burlington House with 160 photographs representing the institution's 240-year history, topped with a rendition of a melting textile, necessitating that the viewer become deeply engaged with the legacy of an institution and its space in order to read the work's critical perspective. Both of these pieces demonstrated that creative installations with site-specific meanings and the critique of institutional structures from within is another defining signature of Shonibare's work, and certainly that was made evident in his installation of *Nelson's Ship* on the Fourth Plinth of Trafalgar Square.

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle and Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth

The Fourth Plinth is located in the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square, a key site for articulating military might and global domination in London. Shonibare's work shifts the conventional interpretation of the Battle of Trafalgar. With *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, Shonibare conceptualises the Battle of Trafalgar as a

² Importantly, Okwui Enwezor discusses the importance of the playful and also intellectual dimensions of Shonibare's artistic practice, particularly significant in relation to *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*.

moment when present-day notions of multiculturalism emerged. The ship's crew, in fact, was diverse in terms of nationality as well as race and ethnicity, and one might argue that this decisive victory was dependent on the contributions of not just one man, but of many diverse bodies. David Olusoga noted that the crew at the Battle of Trafalgar included eighteen men who were identified as being born in African and a hundred and twenty-three who were born in the West Indies, likely of African descent (Olusoga 20). A member of the crew of African descent is memorialised on one of the relief scenes at the base of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square.

This issue was certainly on Shonibare's mind. As he explained in an interview with Hannah Duguid in June 2008, at which time the work was still in progress:

I was thinking about the history of Nelson and Trafalgar. That battle gave Britain control over the seas and with that they were able to build the Empire. I thought about contemporary Britain, multicultural Britain, and how we now have this very diverse society and how it is a result of Empire. The history of Trafalgar does have a relationship with current society. Using African textiles for the sails is a way of celebrating the multiculturalism of Britain today, celebrating it under the banner of a national hero. (Shonibare qtd. in Duguid 12)

Even for a contemporary visitor who is not familiar with or not inclined to critique the history of the Napoleonic Wars and the rise of British Imperialism, the site still projects established ideas of authority and power as it was conceived in the 19th century when the concept and design for Trafalgar Square emerged. John Nash led the early charge to design a public space and plans to create a space with a monumental presence in the city evolved under William Wilkins. The present-day square, designed by Charles Barry, was opened to the public in 1844, featuring as its centerpiece the sculpture of Admiral Horatio Nelson on top of a Corinthian column, the entire work reaching a height of 169'3" (Malvern 132-133). The 18'1" standing figure Horatio Nelson was sculpted by E. H. Baily based on designs by architect William Railton. Bronze relief sculptures on the pedestals depict famous battle scenes, including Nelson's death at the Battle of Trafalgar, a scene that includes a seaman of African descent at Nelson's side at the moment of his death. The idea for the sculpture emerged in 1839, and Railton's design was the winner of a public competition in that year. Support for Nelson's legacy was high at that moment in time, and the sculpture ultimately came to fruition through public subscriptions financing the work (Ward-Jackson 98-113).

Barry's original plans for the square did not include Nelson's column; Barry, in fact, also only originally designed two plinths on the north side of the square. However, within two decades, monumental portrait sculptures were situated at three of the four corners of the square. These include military generals Henry Havelock (installed 1861) and Charles James Napier (installed 1855) on the southern plinths and George IV on horseback on the northeast plinth (installed in 1844, and part of Barry's original plan). A planned equestrian sculpture of King William IV (reigned 1830-1837) on the northwest plinth was never completed due to a lack of funding, and so what is now known as the Fourth Plinth remained empty.

Although certainly less recognisable than Nelson, both Napier (1782-1853) and Havelock (1795-1857) are associated with British imperial campaigns. Napier most infamously served as Commander-in-Chief in India during the capture of Sindh (1843) and Havelock's legacy focuses on his role in the recapture of Kanpur during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. While both men were celebrated military leaders in the nineteenth century, their legacy is certainly contested today. In 2000, Ken Livingstone, then Mayor of London, called for the removal of the sculptures of Havelock and Napier, although this was not because of their contentious actions, but rather because of their obscurity. Livingstone stated:

I think that the people on the plinths in the main square in our capital city should be identifiable to the generality of the population. I have not a clue who two of the generals there are or what they did...I imagine that not one person in 10,000 going through Trafalgar Square knows any details about the lives of those two generals. It might be that it is time to look at moving them and having figures on those plinths that ordinary Londoners would know. (Livingstone quoted in Kelso)



Figure 3: View of Trafalgar Square showing *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* on the Fourth Plinth. Photograph by PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo. Sculpture © Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS / ARS, NY 2019

Mayor Livingstone was not alone in his desire for public sculpture in Trafalgar Square that would address contemporary audiences, and his comment is indicative of a tendency to disengage and dismiss sculptures placed on plinths as irrelevant to contemporary concerns. Just prior to Livingstone's statement about the plinths, in 1999 the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) had initiated the Fourth Plinth Project in order to infuse this vibrant urban space with contemporary art that would speak to modern concerns and issues. After the program had been initiated, the square was remodelled beginning in 2001, and since 2005 the project has been led by the Mayor of London's Culture Team, working under the guidance of the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group (Malvern 131, 138-139; Vasconcellos and Perry 13-14). At various points in time, there has been a discussion of the possibility of creating a traditional memorial, celebrating the contributions of one individual, represented in a "heroic" manner using traditionally valued materials. Another possibility was to create a counter-memorial that could stand as a critique of the historical legacy of imperialism celebrated in the square (Malvern 138-139). Ultimately, the idea of creating a commemorative work was rejected, and the concept of a rotating display of works by contemporary artists was embraced as an approach that has great potential to activate public interest (Vasconcellos and Perry 15).

Shonibare's *Ship in a Bottle* was the fourth sculpture installed since the project came under the authority of the Mayor of the City of London's office. Other Fourth Plinth artists such as Mark Wallinger, Rachel Whiteread, Marc Quinn, Thomas Schutte, and Antony Gormley have used the opportunity to create a critique of the power structures that are traditionally celebrated and reinforced in public spaces, Trafalgar Square most prominently. Many of the works, and David Shrigley's more recent *Really Good* (2016) also falls in this category, are purposefully ambiguous and use humour to engage audiences. This openness to multiple readings, I would argue, makes these works successful as public art in a context in which viewers have grown accustomed to ignoring art on plinths.

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle is a 1:30 scale reproduction of the ship with its 37 sails set as they were at the Battle of Trafalgar. In keeping with the tradition of model shipbuilding, Shonibare maintained

precision in the detailed rendering of the ship, the brightly coloured sails being the most radical departure from the original. Rather than create a free-standing model, Shonibare made the decision to situate his ship within a transparent, fibreglass bottle. The ship appears to float on an artificial ocean inside the bottle, and the bottle, in turn, is situated on its own wooden pedestal as if on display, corked and sealed with the artist's signature in "wax."

Ultimately the work communicates with viewers because of Shonibare's playful but also serious engagement with opposing signifiers. The factory-printed cloth used to render the ship's sails functions not only as a stand-in for African identity in the diaspora but also as a reference to complicated trade networks in the 20th and 21st centuries. This, then, is juxtaposed with Nelson's HMS Victory, a signifier of British naval prowess and with it the age of colonialism and the resulting movement of not only goods but also people that makes possible a 21st-century multicultural metropolis.

In addition, the ship in a bottle, typically received as small-scale popular art and the work a hobbyist, is contrasted with monumental sculpture in the space dedicated to epic history. That the hobby of constructing model ships inside of bottles was popularised in the second half of the nineteenth century, at the height of British naval power and colonial activity, and around the time that Trafalgar Square was conceived and constructed, certainly strengthens the power of Shonibare's contrast. In relation to the scale of Nelson's column (169 feet tall), the monumental ship in a bottle (18 feet high) is perfectly proportioned—the ratio of ship to Nelson (on the column) is 1:8, about the equivalent of an average-sized person next to a ship in a bottle that is a little over a half a foot high. In this way, Nelson atop his column is forced into a relationship with the ship. While supersized, Shonibare's *Ship* is still miniaturised in relation to the monumentally enlarged presence of Nelson himself. The viewer may then also consider how Nelson himself is "inflated," or supersized through monumental sculpture.

Nelson's Ship in a Botte at the National Maritime Museum

In spite of the emphasis on site-specificity, works situated on the Fourth Plinth are always intended to be temporary. In 2011, towards the completion of the sculpture's tenure on the Fourth Plinth of Trafalgar Square, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich working in conjunction with Art Fund (a non-governmental, non-profit organization) launched a fundraising campaign to transfer ownership of the work to the National Maritime Museum, allowing it to remain on public view (Art Fund). As is always the case, the Fourth Plinth commission pays for the production costs for the sculpture, but the commission does not actually pay to acquire the work. Thus, a public campaign took place in order to support the purchase of the sculpture for the National Maritime Museum. The campaign, echoing the original subscription campaign to raise funds to construct the sculpture of Horatio Nelson in Trafalgar Square, took a strangely nationalist tone as word got out that a wealthy Korean buyer had expressed interest in the work. This news was used to rally public support to keep the work in Britain, and the campaign reached a successful conclusion in April of 2012 (Kennedy).

The sculpture is now located just outside the Sammy Ofer wing, the newest section of the National Maritime Museum. It is a bit too large for its space, and also appears a lower plinth than in Trafalgar Square, making it seem overly monumental for the site. In the new location, specific references to Trafalgar Square, the legacy of colonialism and trade, and the complicated spaces in which multicultural identity is negotiated were lost when the work moved from Trafalgar Square. But that said, the work now takes on new, site-specific meanings that will unravel over time. This has been quite fortuitous, as when Shonibare created *Nelson's Ship* he did so with the temporary installation in Trafalgar Square in mind and without knowing that the work would ultimately reside at Greenwich. The ability of the work to take on new meaning at the National Maritime Museum speaks to the successful fluidity of Shonibare's work.



Figure 4: Yinka Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* installed at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Photograph by the author. Sculpture © Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS / ARS, NY 2019

Greenwich has clear significance in relation to naval history that contributes to the reading of *Nelson's Ship* in its current location. Queen Mary II founded the naval hospital in 1692, and Nelson had convalesced there previously. His body was laid in state in the hospital's Painted Hall in 1806 before it was transported upriver to St. Paul's for his funeral and burial. Greenwich has a long history in relation to the visual arts as well. King Charles I housed many of his greatest works of art there, and Thornhill's *Painted Hall* made Greenwich a destination. The museum also has a significant history in relation to model ships and holds one of the world's largest collections.³

At Greenwich, located at the back side of the museum in relation to the high road, Shonibare's sculpture is most often seen casually by visitors to the park, as well as viewers visiting the museum, who presumably arrive with some interest in maritime history. From the high road, one must either walk through or around the museum to see the sculpture. If walking through the museum, it is impossible not to connect the work with models of the HMS Victory (the museum has several examples), which are among the highlights of the museum, and hundreds of other ship models that are displayed and also sold in the gift shop, which stocks an abundance of ships in bottles. Alternatively, one may walk around the museum to arrive at the sculpture. Doing so would only add an additional layer of meaning, for here one would encounter a sculpture of William IV, the king originally intended to be positioned on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth, located on an axis with *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*.

One might also argue that the National Maritime Museum itself functions as a memorial site dedicated to Nelson. The coat Nelson wore at the Battle of Trafalgar, the bullet-hole visible in the chest, is enshrined in the museum. J. M. W. Turner's *Battle of Trafalgar* (1822-24), the artist's largest painting, is also a highlight, presenting various moments in the battle in a non-sequential format. Even Nelson's undergarments from that day are displayed. In this way, the entire museum, in a sense, functions like a shrine, a place of reverence dedicated to the memory of Nelson. In this context, Shonibare's ship in a bottle is juxtaposed with the countless objects and artworks dedicated to celebrating the memory of a national hero and in some

³ See Littlewood, Kevin, and Beverley Butler. *Of Ships and Stars: Maritime Heritage and The Founding of the National Maritime Museum Greenwich*. The Athlone Press and National Maritime Museum, 1998, for a detailed history of the National Maritime Museum, as well as Lavery and Stephens for a discussion of the museum's collection of model ships. My appreciation to Melanie Vandenbrouck, Curator of Art at Royal Museums Greenwich, for an enlightening conversation about *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* as it relates to Greenwich, January 2016.

sections of the museum, a largely celebratory consumption of imperialism, for while there are important and critical curatorial interventions in other sections of the museum, the space dedicated to Nelson remains very traditional in its approach and does little to complicate a normatively white, nationalist discourse that frames the cult of Nelson. *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, then, has the potential to expand the narrative by way of its transnational references which insert a diasporic presence interwoven in this construction of the past.

Since the late 1990s, the National Maritime Museum has been recognised for the creation of exhibitions and interventions that critique the dominant narrative. Under the directorship of Richard Ormond, curatorial interventions challenged the dominance of a single narrative celebrating great heroes and historic battles (Ezard). Most specifically, curator Nigel Rigby's redesign of the Trade and Empire gallery (opened in 1999, replaced by the Atlantic Worlds gallery in 2007) provoked controversy as a result of its unflinching investigation of the complicated narratives surrounding Britain and the transatlantic slave trade. In this context, a provocative contemporary artwork ready to engage in a complex reading of history is, in many ways, perfectly suited to this site.

In the context of a museum that contains so many excellent model ships and ships in bottles, the piece risks being read not as monumental sculpture engaged with public space, but as what it appears to be at first sight—simply a big ship in a bottle. The museum's press releases, in fact, celebrate the work for being the “largest ship in a bottle in the world.” As such, it risks disappointing its audience, for the key prized elements of an excellent ship in a bottle are 1) accuracy and detail when working in miniature and 2) the trick of fitting a ship in a bottle. When blown up to a 1:30 scale, the skill required to make such a model seems less astounding. Although Shonibare joked in interviews that he would not give away his trick to fitting the ship in the bottle, the secret is, in fact, already revealed: not only is there a visible seam showing how the bottle was pieced together, and the mouth of the bottle is clearly large enough to allow one to climb inside to work on the construction of the piece.

Since *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* moved to the museum, Shonibare has continued to be engaged with the meaning of Greenwich in relation to Black European identity and history. From September 2013–February 2014 Shonibare infiltrated the Royal Museums of Greenwich with installations at the Queen's House and the Royal Observatory. Confronting the public image and memory of Horatio Nelson, the installation at the Queen's House explored the Vice-Admiral's fraught relationship with his wife, Fanny, and therefore served to reconstruct the monolithic image of a great national hero. A new version of Nelson's famous jacket was positioned in a stand-off with Fanny's dress; both are rendered in wax cloth. (*Nelson's Jacket and Fanny's Dress*, 2011). The *Fake Death Picture* series was a photographic recreation of famous paintings depicting death with a rendition of Nelson, dead and clothed dressed in wax cloth, placed at the centre. The act of curating and creating new works that would amplify the meaning of *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* in its permanent site.

Ultimately, when positioned on the Fourth Plinth, it was impossible not to make something the contrasting signifiers that shape our reading of *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*. Standing in Trafalgar Square, one can gaze through the bottle to see the monumental Lord Nelson. The experience of Trafalgar Square is so dominated by traditional memorial sculpture (dedicated to Anglo, conventionally heroic men), that it is, in fact, difficult to find a way to view the Fourth Plinth without also including such traditional sculptures in the line of sight. Thus, in Trafalgar Square, *Nelson's Ship* must be read as a challenge to the space dedicated to “serious” history—read as bronze and marble—and a critique of the mythologising of imperial history. This is site-specific monumental sculpture at its best. But let us keep in mind that the temporary rather than permanent nature of the Fourth Plinth installation allows for engagement with the space that is bold, humorous, confrontational and fun all at once.

Now its permanent home at the National Maritime Museum its impact is less immediate, but it has the opportunity to grow and build layers of meaning, perhaps guiding its audience to consume the legacy of Lord Nelson with a more critical eye. In fact, the sculpture ultimately works so perfectly at its current site in Greenwich; it is hard to imagine that Shonibare did not originally have this installation in mind. Drawing meaning from the site, Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* blows a hole in the dominant narrative centred on the legacy of Nelson as the solitary hero who ushered in an age of global domination. Playful and fun, the work quite seriously creates space for diasporic history not simply for the sake of celebrating multi-

culturalism, but also in order to challenge received and seemingly fixed versions of history. Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* proposes a reading of the past (and present) that is more complex and complicated than that conveyed through traditional celebrations of heroism, successfully expanding the boundaries of what traditional monumental sculpture can accomplish.

Acknowledgements: I wish to express my appreciation to two anonymous reviewers who provided thoughtful and incisive comments and to the editors of this volume. Additionally, earlier versions of this research were at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of the African Diaspora (2015), the Midwest Art History Society Annual Conference (2017), and at the Colonial/Post-Colonial New Researchers' Seminar, Institute of Historical Research (2017). I am grateful for feedback from my co-presenters and attendees of these sessions.

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Research Article

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Silence as an Interlocutor in the Diaspora: Olumide Popoola's *this is not about sadness*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0023>

Received August 21, 2018; accepted December 14, 2018

Abstract: This article analyzes silences in the novella *this is not about sadness*. Using theories of community building by Fatima El-Tayeb, opacity from Édouard Glissant, and theories by Popoola herself, my work argues for the generative way silences function. Silence interweaves the text in community of women and PoCs who create healing and community in shared trauma. Further, the novella articulates diasporic space through language. The use of language is complimented by multiple silences; silences occur when recalling trauma. Violence against Black women looms as trauma occurs in and around the piece, but the novella rejects a narrative of trauma (considering even the title). The narrator continues to exert agency as she continues to narrate the story after her death; just because her life is over, the story is not over. In a novella centering around women, Popoola's diasporic story also allows for silence; the novella rejects the notion that words are necessary. Featuring multiple narrators, this novella embodies the struggle of and for language as well its emergence in a relational community.

Keywords: diaspora, rape, Black Britain, relational community

Audre Lorde famously said “Your silence will not protect you” (41). These words have propelled Black women across the world to speak truth, and I agree; her words are inspiring. My intervention shows the generative nature of silence before speech is possible. This article examines the various ways silence exists in Olumide Popoola's novella *this is not about sadness*. Within it, a new understanding of silence emerges. Silence facilitates conversation between characters to hold space for the unspeakable. The novella also destabilizes the importance of language through silence. This silencing exists on multiple levels: on the page through space, within the novella as pauses, and through the use of patois which silences the English language. This novella transcends linguistic and national boundaries; it incorporates English and Creole and takes place in England and South Africa. Popoola includes Jamaican Creole and South African English.¹ English and creole work as hybrid voices, as well do the multiple narrators within the story. Mrs. Thompson speaks patois, which also disrupts the novella and serves as a clear fissure as a narrator to the reader. In so doing, Popoola challenges dominant paradigms of language and diaspora. In this article, I argue that silence plays two different roles; silence mediates relationships as characters work through trauma, and silence takes a metaphorical role through destabilizing dominant language. Throughout the novella silences fill space that allow the depth of trauma to be felt.

Olumide Popoola is a Black German author and spoken word performer based in London. Publishing essays, a drama and poems, Popoola has been an influential author over a decade. She also wrote and edited (along with Beldan Sezan) a poetry collection entitled *Talking Home* in 1996. Recently, Popoola wrote a two-act Afro-German play entitled *Also by Mail* (2013) as part of the Witnessed series for a wider-African

¹ The focus of this article will be on the Caribbean use of language instead of South African forms like Eish, and Izzit because the novella is mostly narrated by the Jamaican women. Therefore, my analysis will focus on patois.

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diaspora readership. Her recent work includes: poetry in the edited collection *Awaiting in the Future* (2015); “Fishing for Naija,” in the journal *Feminist Studies* 41.1 (2015) as a fragment; *breach* (2016), co-authored with Annie Holmes; and novel *When we Speak of Nothing* (2018). For me, her English language novella, *this is not about sadness* generates an important discussion about feminist community and the Black diaspora.² It was published in 2010 and performed at the Goethe Institute in New York City during the Black German Heritage and Research Association’s conference at Barnard College. Up until this point, little attention has been given to the novella.

this is not about sadness is written in English and Jamaican Creole and takes place in an immigrant neighborhood of London. The novella focuses on the lives of three women: Tebo, a South-African feminist and activist, Mrs. Thompson, an older reclusive Jamaican woman, and Amina, a young white English mother. Mrs. Thompson and Tebo, along with a third person narrator, narrate the novella. The intersection of three lives is examined through various community constellations. Popoola illustrates this primarily through giving space for silence and allowing language to slowly emerge. The relationship Tebo builds provides an opportunity for a community of women. These characters occupy a place of privilege as narrators; the main characters give a voice to women who experienced gendered violence. Featuring multiple narrators, this novella embodies the struggle of and for language as well its emergence in a relational community.

Similar to the hybrid voices of the narrators, the novella also utilizes hybrid form of novella and performance. The novella is a form that is a blend in itself—being blend of novel and short story. Popoola explains the way she envisions the novella as a performance piece: “[*this is not about sadness*] developed as a hybrid text, trying to be a truthful expression of my works as a writer and text-based performance artist. I was searching for a form that would function on the page and on the stage, and which I would perform rather than ‘read’” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 97). Hybrid forms allow a new creation. In her use of orality, Popoola asserts: “I want to extend the term vernacular and include what I call hybrid voices, which I define here as speech, oral or written, which does not at first glance belong to a particular tradition. Something that happens because of the new realities of our lives” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 93). Popoola resists normative boundaries of genre convention to illustrate polyvocality in written form.

The first iteration of this piece exists as a three-page fragment of the same name. Popoola’s “This is not about sadness (a fragment)” won the May Ayim Award in 2004. Shorter than the 104 page novella, the fragment only slightly covers the issues that the novella expounds on. The fragment is narrated mostly by an unnamed Black Jamaican woman in her 50s. While she is described as Jamaican, the Creole present on the page in the novella does not exist on the page in the fragment (but was possibly orally part of the performance). Tebo and Amina do not exist as narrators; instead, the fragment focuses on finding Tebo’s body after the racialized violence. Germanist Claudia Breger published on Popoola’s fragment in her book *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany* (2012). Breger considers narration, marginalized voices and community in her analysis. She argues that the piece creates community both socially and theatrically. Here, Breger does not consider Caribbean collectivity as I do, but she recognizes ways in which Popoola’s community creates “alternative figurations of collectivity” (142). The diasporic community is essential for my reading of the novella, and in the fragment, community is essential in the complaints of Black Brits about racist soccer fans. The fragment silences the trauma, Creole language, and a community.

Community

Community is important to the lives of all three narrators. The non-linear novella focuses on the lives of three women, Tebo, Mrs. Thompson, and Amina. After being raped in her native South Africa, Tebo relocates to England to live with her brother. There, she befriends a neighbor, Mrs. Thompson. Additionally, she forms artistic and feminist activist groups, of which Amina is part. Tebo works as an activist for women: she fundraises for a woman who was raped and killed in her native South Africa; she facilitates two drama

² Although the rules of English grammar dictate that the first letters in every word of a title should be capitalized, I choose to keep the spelling congruent with one the Popoola chooses herself in her article “In Tongues” I will discuss later in the paper.

classes, and she runs a community group and a women's art group (Popoola 41). The art gives the women a voice: "Each of them fleshing out first what initially would not be said, making a picture, then when it was able to fathom that picture, the voice would enter" (97). Most importantly, the women express their own opinions through first creating art and then speaking. These groups illustrate that Tebo seeks change through relationships with women.

Eventually, soccer hooligans kill Tebo in what appears to be racially and gender motivated crime. She narrates her own death: "I died a quick death. It didn't hurt much...I never knew how it happened" (93), but no one knows the details, including Tebo herself. This absence of knowledge points to real life; sometimes family and friends do not have all the answers surrounding someone's death. Conversely, the absence of knowledge also reflects the lack of importance to know how she died. The women of the community group still meets together: "But since they were all already at the centre, there was no reason to not have a session, even if it was without her" (101), they continued to meet and express themselves through art because of Tebo, who "had that gift of unraveling, letting someone unravel their tucked away needs" (97). Tebo's relevance for their lives did not change, even after she passed away.

Silence

Silence continues to play a large role in the relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson and their relationships. Tebo and Mrs. Thompson work in an art form in a different medium, through gardening, which allows for them to bond. The relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson begins in silence, as Tebo watches her garden before words emerge: "The girl can't pull herself away. In the bubble created by the confusion of her internal body clock and the new impressions, she's stuck...The woman's hands are moving, scraping, tugging" (Popoola 10). The act of gardening, like art, permits words to form. Tebo notices her; they look at each other. Tebo eventually compliments her on her garden, "I love your flowers in the back" (13), while the third person narrator scoffs, "How she [Tebo] speaks as if they were friends" (13). While Mrs. Thompson brings some potted plants into the house during a hailstorm, Tebo runs over to help (14). Without words but by using their hands to create something beautiful, their relationship evolves organically: "The woman works on the bed of peonies. The girl watches" (16). However, with the change of the season, the garden needed less attention (16). With the garden out of the forefront of their time together, the two can get to know each other. Silence continues to play a role in their relationship inside the house as Mrs. Thompson recounts her memories of her children, "Always, always just pain. Pause" (41). These written pauses take the place of silence (see also 53, 59). Instead of recounting the trauma of losing both children, Mrs. Thompson refuses to speak of it and instead shows pictures (56).

Popoola is interested in the stumble and process. The muscle of the tongue produces language even when it is not producing sound through the work it achieves. Popoola reflects on the stumble with her work in the article "In Tongues-The Trouble Inside Language." Popoola's novella asks the reader to reconsider what s/he/they has/have always held true. Instead of privileging the voice, Popoola's work calls the reader to consider the process of speech as relevant. The difficult inner dealings and stumbling in order to find the right words are just as relevant as the words themselves. While some value a flow of language, Popoola considers language changing through the work of the tongue; more specifically, she speaks to stumbling through language. Although tongue can flow fluently, occasionally, it does not. Popoola invites the reader to remember the times in which the tongue struggles: "Tongue as a language itself and as muscle producing sound and possibly struggling, enjoying, distorting, forgetting, innovating and altering words while doing so" (Popoola, "In Tongues" 98). The tongue actively works in language to remember and changes words on the basis of remembering. It forgets syntax or grammar and creates something new in its place. The active creation of words empowers; this new creation of the tongue imagines possibilities, as Popoola demonstrates, "Tongue as a muscle can be an instrument and by nature of that invites us to play, to try a different melody, to skip a beat so that the rhythm might compel from another angle (Popoola, "In Tongues" 98). Instead of following grammar rules or specific syntax guidelines, Popoola theorizes a resistance to sticking to rules. Instead she elicits the creation of new words, which comes from the individual and not a

rulebook or grammarians. Popoola demands changing the mindset on the use of the tongue to challenge power:

The notion of in tongues and its call for an active engagement away from polarities like first versus second language, good or bad English—meaning literary or academically suitable – in keeping with tradition or challenging. Its pertinence re-establishes itself still through the allocation of privilege and the belonging or exclusion from places that install and generate those walks of life we might want to participate in (Popoola, “In Tongues” 98).

Popoola's theories of the tongue not only resist rules of language, they privilege certain languages and expressions over others. Popoola disputes the categories of good and bad language because they limit who is involved in the conversation; her theorization permits all people to participate without being forced to follow normative guidelines. Her novella depicts situations of silence and which language is a struggle. I believe Popoola's work presents the process of language, the importance of silence to get there, and the importance of process.

In part of the novella, art exists in the space of silence. Caribbean author and theorist M. NoursbeSe Philip discusses the importance of processing the English language in her article “The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy.” Much of her discussion is transferable to the struggle of language in Popoola's novella as the characters struggle to find words. For Philip, the image is essential (272). She describes how the image comes before the word: “At the heart of all creative writing therefore is the image, the basis for which the word or word symbol as I prefer to describe it” (Philip 273). This changes the power of the word instead of making it primary; it is secondary, and possibly even less important than the image. Philip recognizes a tension in the creation and recreation of the image-word as cyclic, not ending once the word emerges: “Tension is created by the interplay of image and word-image-creating word, word giving rise to further image and so on” (Philip 274). This destabilizes the importance of the word. The creation of new images leads to collective consciousness. The artist generates images that speak to the public to change society (273). In the case of the novella, everyone works collaboratively, instead of privileging one artist and one piece. Instead, everyone conceives art in silence and share this art with each other and support each other to deal with the world outside the walls of the community center.

Art and Activism

In the novella, communication emerges through art and activism, allowing feminist community to emerge. Tebo's activism centers around women: fundraising and leading drama groups. The characters in her group create language from art, instead of language being the gateway to creating art. In this way, art necessitates the production of language; art renders speech possible. Instead there is silence. The moment of silence in the community center allows for a space of contemplation and without being rushed. Further, there is no interruption while the artist tries to create her story. The space allows time and silence without interjection, question, or doubt. The space empowers women to process their experiences. The movement from art to speech is important, because the speech absent due to trauma. Throughout the book, absent language gives way for an image to release language to come into being in relational community. Tebo changes the community she is involved in. Because of her, the women meet together and her art discussions enable women to discuss past trauma where there were no words before.

Popoola describes her artistic work in relationship with language and those who do not have the chance to express themselves: “I have always been drawn to that which cannot be spoken, is uncomfortable or considered unsuitable to speak about” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 91). Popoola stimulates the unspeakable in art. The women create art, but the specifics remain unclear to the reader. One of the narrators details one piece by one woman: “It has one single pattern of henna colour applied to it; a small decoration, exquisitely beautiful and tender, and one shoot only with a few braches that curl and re-twist, sometimes closing in on themselves, sometimes reaching, reaching and remaining open, but always repeating themselves” (Popoola 43). The narrator describes and interprets the fabric without describing the outcome. Not all of the art is decoded to the reader. More unanswered questions than answered ones linger. This secretive aspect

echoes in the storyline. The emphasis lies on the necessity of a space to stumble through to explain and come into language. Not all information is given, nor is it necessary.

Silence facilitates the feminist bonds among the characters. Tebo and Mrs. Thompson meet in England, but their origins exist in diaspora: South Africa³ and Jamaica, respectively. Tebo considers Mrs. Thompson her home: “The hideaway where we never quite wrote our stories into tales of womanhood, but hovered around, like moths encircling the flame” (Popoola 37). This hovering highlights the silences; not all things are said. Mrs. Thompson does not speak directly to Tebo and instead provides an inner monologue. Only the reader knows Mrs. Thompson’s thoughts and opinions. Popoola analyzes her claim to space in the novella “[Mrs. Thompson] becomes a sort of narrator/commentator and takes over the novella temporarily, exercising her urge to be heard and claim space. This is a pivotal moment, as her withdrawal from the world due to losing both her children in an accident, has left her engaging with hardly anyone” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 92). Despite Mrs. Thompson’s trauma and Tebo’s death, they remain strong narrators in the novella: “their voices drive the narrative” (Popoola “In Tongues” 92). Mrs. Thompson’s patois exerts agency and disrupts: “She [Mrs. Thompson] talks herself into the action, ‘messing up’ what otherwise could’ve been a ‘straightforward’ novel” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 92). In this disorder, there is rebellion: “Her [Mrs. Thompson’s] interjections are her personal acts of opposing self-and superimposed voicelessness” (Popoola “In Tongues” 92). Together, these marginalized characters unsettle the narrative and portray language in non-standard ways.

Amina’s whiteness contributes a different version of silence. A white mother, Amina does not take up space in the novel as narrator or as a character. The third person narrator begins telling Amina’s story well into half way of the novella. (61). She rejects societal norms by choosing to co-parent with her friend. Amina’s silence exists in her sense of purpose and feelings for Tebo. Her silence operates around her lack of career beyond motherhood (73). The last thing Amina writes is “But what are we going to tell our daughters?” (107). Amina doesn’t tell her friends about her feelings for Tebo (75, 92). Silence also works as an interlocutor in the relationship between Tebo and Amina; their friendship grows into a romantic relationship. Their encounters are filled with various moments of silence: “Amina hadn’t been able to say anything at all” (100). Because of Tebo, Amina is able to impact the community and take over leading the group once she has gone. In this way, Tebo has linked Amina and Mrs. Thompson to the communities that they have lived in but not been part of.

The image is an important way in which silence serves to facilitate conversation and understanding. In a similar way, Tebo, Mrs. Thompson and the women at the community center cannot use their current language to express their experiences and had to first use the image. Mrs. Thompson cannot tell Tebo about the death of her children, and instead, she shows her a photo album: “I sey me waan show her sumting. She look tired herself. De photo album pon de table so...Me waan show her, waan her to know, to see me own dem.” (51). Although this seems as if it could be a conversation starter, Mrs. Thompson does not speak about them and can only nod when Tebo asks her about them. While this seems as if it could be read as weakness and lack of agency, I imagine it otherwise. This serves as an act of empowerment being the master of your experience in the refusing to share. It rejects the necessity to share all pieces of yourself. Creating language to combat silencing women’s voices is powerful. The creation of image and language allows for a space for women to speak in whichever way speech emerges. They create with their hands to generate words: “They do crafts and talk. The girl wants them to tell their stories in fabric” (Popoola 41). The art creation was “their voice, their breath, their choosing” (97). These elements amplify the importance of deciding what to share and how. In this sense, language is not privileged over the process. The silence in process acts as an interlocutor to bring clarity to the characters, but this clarity is not extended to the reader as a moment of opacity for the reader.

Opacity lacks clarity, which is another way to describe silence. Much is left unsaid; however, this silent information is nonessential. The specific images the women create remain unknown to the reader in a moment of opacity. Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant describes the relationship between Western

³ There are debates about whether or not African countries factor into the diaspora, but here, I do count South Africa as part of the African diaspora.

thought and transparency: “If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is the requirement for transparency” (190). If the opposite of transparency is opacity, the novella argues for an understanding of people from a mode of opacity. Glissant urges readers to get beyond transparency, and he rejects the idea that someone has to grasp someone in order to empathize with them. He advocates beyond the desire to “grasp” someone (193). Think about it—Western culture requires the telling and retelling of trauma in courts, universities, to law enforcement and family members. This rejection of dominant forms is how Popoola approaches the novella. All of the information, and the retelling of trauma is vulnerable, hard, scary, and in the end the retelling of trauma benefits the other person, and not themselves. Therefore, opacity provides safety for the characters of the novella.

Creole

Creolization silences dominant language. The use of Jamaican Creole is subversive. Joan Anim-Addo researches patois in her book on Black women's voices in the UK, *Touching the Body* (2007). In the book, Anim-Addo argues that Caribbean English is non-standard and a sign of the unwillingness to let go of the original African language (180).⁴ In fact, she calls diasporic texts “communal” and happening in a “creative space” (154). Polyphony is a feature in creole texts (Anim-Addo 185). We see these communal aspects in Popoola's novella. Anim-Addo also discusses NourbeSe Philip and her relationship to language. Anim-Addo explains Philip's work: “A connectedness with silence, sexuality, gender and race are central to Philip's poetics and she returns to the genesis and functioning of African-Caribbean women's silence.” (Anim-Addo 187). NourbeSe Philip calls creolization of English standard language radical: “The formal standard language was subverted, turned upside down, inside out and sometimes even erased. Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at times; rhythms held sway” (Philip 275). For example in the novella, Mrs. Thompson asks Tebo, “Yuh come here fi stay? Fi work?” (Popoola 16). The variety provides awkwardness and jolts a listener used to standard forms. Creole is not just deviant English, but instead “because the Creole signals intimacy even as writing implies distance, written Creole embodies contradiction. Because of the association of ‘real language’ with a standard written form and this with uniformity and homogeneity, written Creole conveys a contention with homogeneity” (Lalla 74). Using this form, Popoola draws the reader in to create intimacy but at the same time, the reader cannot know all of Mrs. Thompson. Further, Creole is unorthodox: “Not only is Creole dialogue deviant text but deviant text is Creole dialogue” (Lalla 62). Popoola constructs a force against standard language rules. I believe that Popoola does not simply change the standard in order to reflect Creole to indicate exoticism or to other Mrs. Thompson (Lalla 69). Instead, she manipulates reader expectation and gives her space to be vulnerable and honest. Creole allows for an air of intimacy with distance.

Creolization offers not a seamless whole but to create something with the pieces. This ability is beneficial because it rejects language norms while also challenge dominant forms. Creolization shows “how difference can be powerful” (El-Tayeb Keynote). The use of Creole as “multiple and dissonant dimensions of Caribbean identity” (Lalla 79), is mirrored in multiple narration. Popoola uses first person narration for the main characters: Amina, Tebo, and Mrs. Thompson. First person vernacular voices and multiple narrators are “typical of Caribbean and postmodern literature” (Forbes 12). In her article “In Tongues,” Popoola clarifies her use of multiple narrators as twofold: “plural writing as an opportunity for both inclusiveness and literary innovation” (95). Popoola uses many voices, including that of a spirit. Despite her death, Tebo continues to play an important role as narrator in the novel: “She [Tebo] calls for an appropriate evocation since although she's now dead, she keeps being called (witnessed)” (Popoola, “In Tongues” 99). More importantly, Tebo persists in telling her story. For El-Tayeb, creolization is useful to question of authenticity.

Through the characters of Tebo, Amina, and Mrs. Thompson, Popoola shows how a community can form based on relational affinity instead of a familial one. Fatima El-Tayeb's book *European Others* unpacks ways

⁴ For information on Creole suppression, please see Jan Voorhoeve and Ursy Litchveld, *Creole Drum*, trans. Vernie A. February NewHaven: Yale, 1975.

in which a queering of relational communities is possible. It demonstrates the importance of ideology in making connections, instead of race and homeland. El-Tayeb argues for a relational diaspora, which could include People of Color across various national boundaries. For this analysis, she utilizes theories from Edouard Glissant. El-Tayeb adopts Glissant's theory of the poetics of relation in examining the connection between women in Popoola's edited poetry volume *Talking Home: Writing Home from our own Quills* (1996).⁵ The poetry collection includes women of various ethnicities, who are linked based on feminist ideology. A similar claim can be made for Popoola's *this is not about sadness*. This poetics is congruous to Popoola's text in that "calls forth disorder" (Glissant 138). For Glissant, identity should not be dependent on roots and family trees, nor should they be dependent on legitimizing, or "projected" onto others, but instead, the focus should be on connection (143-144, 153). The focus in *this is not about sadness* exists in the connection between the women based on a chosen family.

Feminist Revision

Popoola insists on focusing on women, making and remaking history. Tebo describes this as "histories are the futures in the making" (41). Tebo's statement brings the past and the future together in fluidity. With this interpretation of history, it can be written and rewritten and therefore changed. Particularly, the liminal figures stand at the forefront of this change as they meet together. Popoola explains, "[*this is not about sadness*] is about people who matter," (Popoola "In Tongues" 96). Mrs. Thompson further explains Tebo's saying: "[History] needs to breathe so it can know where it is and what it's supposed to do." (41). Like the silence, history needs breath-a moment, a silence to make sense of it all. These marginal figures matter to each other and build community. Amina, the white English character in the novella, is also a mother; she, too, finds community amongst these women as she falls in love with Tebo. Mrs. Thompson feels validated and accepted in her neighborhood for the first time thanks to Tebo: "My garden is full. I cannot remember de last time so many people are friendly to me...They are here for her but for me also" (52). The relationship between Tebo and Mrs. Thompson begins and ends in the garden. As I pointed out earlier in the essay, Tebo's observation of the garden propelled their relationship. Tebo compliments Mrs. Thompson on her flowers and helps her garden, and in Mrs. Thompson's garden, the garden Tebo helped with, the community celebrates Tebo's life. Because of Tebo's death, Mrs. Thompson became part of a relational community.

Popoola also intercedes in feminist discourse. While I would call this a feminist project, it is also important to note that the main character dies and is raped in the story. For many feminists, this type of story is incongruent with feminism because of the violence against a Black woman's body. However, I believe the novella rejects a narrative of trauma. Tebo is involved in activism to support a South African woman who was raped because she is lesbian (29). Further, side characters in the community work to make documentary about rape survivors world wide, and the characters discuss the anti-rape condom created originally in South African (83). Tebo is a survivor herself, and incorporates this activism within the community group she coordinates.

Tebo embodies a powerful position in the novel as narrator before and after death; her death is known already in the first few pages, so it comes to no surprise to the reader. Even her death is unclear; the reader only knows that she dies. Describing the details is unimportant; instead Popoola shifts the focus back to the fact that she was in the town to create a feminist community. These stylistic choices make it less traumatic for the reader because Tebo narrates most of the events, and most of the details of traumatic events are absent. This distancing in the novella requires the reader to make the vague connections more lucid. In an email exchange, Popoola offered me an alternative title to her novella: "This is not so much about sadness but about the love (friendship), about healing and connecting beyond the experience of trauma and pain" (Popoola). It is Tebo who narrates the last lines of the novella. Doing so, she reminds the reader who she is and her name. This is a sad story, but the protagonist's death is not the end of the story. Instead, the novella tells the story of healing and community building. The characters reclaim their identities through community and artistic expression.

⁵ Original Title: *Talking Home: Heimat aus unseren eignen Federn*.

Conclusion

Popoola resists dominant structural systems to give space for innovative creation. *this is not about sadness* challenges dominant paradigms of language and silence. Choosing to write in English and Creole, Popoola upsets dominant paradigms through the use of a hybrid language form. Popoola extends the hybrid form of novella (both novel and short story) further to create her own hybrid form—a performed novella. In the hybrid genre of novella and performance, Popoola tells the story of silence and working through silence to allow words come. The women of the novella find community together and create art in silence so that language can emerge. Language remains a constant negotiation. Popoola resists tradition through language and the performance of the novella demonstrates how Popoola resists boundaries. The space of silence fills the novel through showing the difficulty in sharing trauma, and art becomes the space of negotiation for language to come. In this sense, she dis-orders language so that the speaker occupies a position of power to be the creator of rules for her/him/themself. Further, the narrators are creators of their own stories. Silence marks the transition between characters and they allow silence to fill space. In this sense, silence works as a co-author or collaborator in these communal spaces and conversations. Demanding silences empowers the narrators as they meet together and choose to share part, but not all of themselves. Setting a space for silence in the diaspora, Popoola chooses language as she sees fit, giving silence space for language/s to emerge.

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Research Article

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African Nightclubs of Lisbon and Madrid as Spaces of Cultural Resistance

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0024>

Received July 30, 2018; accepted November 9, 2018

Abstract: The main objective of this article involves describing how *African* nightclubs of Lisbon have become spaces for cultural resistance against certain representations of African-ness, taking Madrid as a contrasting case. Since the 1970s, the so-called *African* nightclubs of Lisbon have constituted spaces for gathering and nurturing a sense of community for immigrants from Portuguese-speaking Africa. Commonly regarded suspiciously by most *Portuguese* citizens, commodification of the couple dance labelled *kizomba* during the 1990s helped changed their status. However, most *African* research participants do not recognise their beloved dance in the commodified version of *kizomba*. In this context, I analyse the commodification process as a form of symbolic violence that disguises postcolonial structural inequalities and unsolved conflicts through a discourse of neutral “approaching of cultures” on the dance floor. Moreover, from the point of view of a meritocratic symbolism, this discourse portrays the performances displayed at *African discos* as “basic” and unworthy. After exploring several ways of resistance to commodified *kizomba* displayed by *African discos* clientele, I conclude reflecting on the increasing symbolic power of global industries for naming social groups, structuring practices and exercising symbolic violence in late modernity.

Keywords: African-ness, *kizomba*, resistance, commodification, symbolic violence

Introduction

Since the late sixties, a series of nightclubs have been opened in Lisbon devoted to music and dance popular in Portuguese-speaking Africa. From what Dwyer and Jones call a “White socio-spatial epistemology” (Dwyer and Jones, *White Socio-spatial Epistemology*), these spaces were ethnically marked as *African discos* in the urban imaginary of citizens. The objective of this article is to analyse how these nightclubs have turned into spaces for cultural resistance against postcolonial misrepresentations of African-ness. Taking Madrid as a contrasting case, the article explores the collective agency of people attending these clubs throughout the recent history since the independence of the former colonies in 1975.

This work stems from my postdoctoral project “Dancing ethnicities in a transnational world,”¹ which contains the general objective of exploring the diverse ways in which ethnicity is constructed out of social dance contexts. Between 2013 and 2015, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in *kizomba* dancing contexts in Spain and Portugal: mainly participant observation in the so-called *African*² *discos*, *kizomba* dance schools and *kizomba* international festivals. It involved taking lessons, socializing with aficionados and party-goers, dancing with informants, having a good deal of informal conversations, combining strategies of

1 This postdoctoral project was funded by the FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Government of Portugal).

2 Ethnic and ethnonational categories are considered objects of analysis and not scientific categories (cf. Wimmer 2013, Brubaker 2002, Díaz de Rada 2014, Jiménez 2018). For this reason, they appear in italics.

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more (i.e., intensive dancing nights) or less (i.e., observing from the DJ's place or behind the bar) participant observation and writing down dense fieldwork diaries throughout three years. This was complemented by 33 in-depth interviews with DJs, musicians, dance teachers, dance students, nightclub owners and promoters behind *kizomba* events as well as their public relations contents.

The article's structure is as follows: in the next section, I propose to look at the history of the so-called *African discos* of Lisbon as spaces of cultural resistance, stressing how music and dance symbols were charged with connotations of pride, distinction and positive self-definition in a hostile environment of unsolved interethnic conflicts. In section three, I continue developing this historical context to look at the processes of *kizomba* commodification and globalisation, proposing the concept of symbolic violence as an inherent dimension to them. In the following two sections, I focus on strategies of cultural resistance to *kizomba* commodification found on the dance floors of Madrid and Lisbon in which social actors labelled *Africans* display their collective agency. First, I explore the practices of avoiding the commodified *kizomba* environment in each city, as well as mocking practices of the dance school style that take place in Lisbon. In section five, I analyse the gender dimension, briefly setting out examples of female partygoers labelled *African* refusing to dance with *kizomba* school aficionados. In the concluding section, I stress how relevant transnational industries have become in late modernity in two related aspects: their capacity to define ethnic groups, structure the fields of practices and to exercise symbolic violence at the global level.

Nightclubs as Spaces of Resistance: A Brief History of *African Discos* in Lisbon

Lisbon became the European city with the highest proportion of *African* immigrants during the 1990s according to official statistics (Machado, "Profile and specificities of immigration in Portugal") as a result of the deep historic connections that date back to fifteenth-century colonisation. After independence in 1975, the colonial transoceanic social structure based upon a hierarchy of racial categories gave way to a new society, apparently more equalitarian but actually still ethnically segregated at least to a certain degree. In Portugal, prejudice against people labelled *African*, and their associated stereotypes still apply in general society (Machado, *Contexts and perceptions of racism in everyday life*; Almeida, *A Land Coloured Sea. Race, Politics and Identity Culture*; Batalha, *The Cape-Verdean Diaspora in Portugal. Colonial Subjects in a Postcolonial World*, Hoffman, *Diasporic Networks, Political Change and the Growth of Cabo-Zouk Music*) coupled with social rules that condition or hinder the kind of acceptable interactions between subjects labelled *African* and *Portuguese*. All these social dynamics have since progressively changed but without ever altering some basic underlying patterns such as labour market segregation and residential segregation that impact on large numbers of *African* citizens and their descendants (Machado, "Immigrations and immigrants in Portugal: regulation parameters and contexts of exclusion"; Machado and Abranches, "Limited social integration dynamics. Cape-Verdeans and Hindus' socio-professional paths in Portugal"; Almeida, *A Land Coloured Sea. Race, Politics and Identity Culture*; Cardoso and Perista, "The forgotten city: poverty in marginal areas of Lisbon"; Bordonaro, "Ghetto Six. Anthropology occupies the space"). In this postcolonial context, the *African* nightlife of Lisbon has developed as a cultural response to the politics of segregation, economic vulnerability and cultural misrepresentation that social actors racialised as "African" suffer in their everyday lives.

A series of nightlife spaces devoted to music popular in Portuguese-speaking Africa became popular from the late 1970s onwards (Jiménez, "Ritual Roles of 'African Nights' DJs in Lisbon"). In the early years after the colonial independence wars, musicians and leisure entrepreneurs from Portuguese-speaking Africa arrived in Lisbon and started opening music clubs to make a living (Cidra, "Cape Verde in Portugal, Music of"). One iconic example is Bana, a prestigious artist from Cape Verde who opened one of the first music clubs in the city center in 1976: Novo Mundo, which would later change its name to Monte Cara (Cidra, "Bana") and then Enclave, although most people would just refer to the venue as "Bana." The well-known musician Tito Paris used to play in the crowded house he owned, Casa da Morna, while Dinah and José Correia, two returnees from Angola who used to own nightclubs in Luanda, opened the emblematic disco

A Lontra in the heart of Lisbon in 1976. During the 1980s and 1990s, the rates of immigration from Africa rose dramatically, driven by the ongoing expansion of the Portuguese economy (Machado, “Profile and specificities of immigration in Portugal”), and accordingly experienced an enormous rise in the number of nightclubs. Some of the most popular discos of those times were Mussulo, Sussussú, Sarabanda and Nells, owned and/or managed by people from diverse Portuguese-speaking African countries involved in the leisure or music industry.

Since the first clubs opened in the 1970s, these spaces turned into ethnically marked *African discos* in the imaginary of citizens resulting from a combination of factors. Firstly, many clients with an experience of life in Africa gathered in those clubs because they sought to activate their kinetic memories of past life experiences with other people suffering from the same homesickness. In this sense, they together built an “Africa made in Lisbon” through sharing music and dance symbols. In a hostile context, this need of expression through music and dance became much stronger than it used to be in the homeland and this kind of space correspondingly proliferated. Secondly, the politics of not allowing people labelled *Black* into the many non-ethnically marked clubs of the city (cf. Machado, “Contexts and perceptions of racism in everyday life”) often led party goers to concentrate in those clubs owned and managed by other actors racialised as *Africans*, where they hoped to find a friendlier ambience. According to Fernando, an experienced nightclub manager who arrived in Portugal in the aftermath of Mozambique’s independence, the fear of being denied access to the non-ethnically marked clubs of the city still affects weekend plans nowadays:

(People) were often stopped at the door, it happened very often. They reached the door, they were not allowed in, they were told that the house had the right of admission reserved [...] It happened, and it still happens nowadays, it happened to me on several occasions. It is a politics of not wanting Black people in the house, and it still happens nowadays. [...] For example, once a year I organise the “White Party” when people have to come dressed in white. There are people who think that only White people are allowed into this event, and we have to explain to them that it’s not the case, it’s just a thematic party. (Interview with Fernando, 1st April 2014)

Nevertheless, we should not conclude that these spaces displayed any *African* solidarity regardless of principles such as social class and nationality of origin, which also governed the politics of access. Since the 1990s, the social patterns of immigration became widely varied in terms of nationality of origin, gender, social class and rural/urban origins (Machado, Profile and specificities of immigration in Portugal). Correspondingly, the landscape of *African discos* also evolved into a more varied range traversed by the same principles of stratification that ruled daily life. While doing fieldwork in Sabura Club, Rolando Semedo, a musician from Cape Verde, told me that he found the recent changes associated to the globalisation of *kizomba* astonishing, and they brought back memories from his past:

I tell Rolando that some people have told me Black people were not allowed into many discos of Portugal, and he says that it’s true: “they looked at you at the entrance and they didn’t let you in, it happened to me! Even in some African discos, they wouldn’t let you in, Africans themselves ... and look now, everything has changed so much, it’s incredible how everything has changed. (Fieldwork diary, 5th May 2014)

In any case, we should not conclude that only individuals racialised as *Black* visited (and visit) these spaces. Frequent attendants with an experience of life in Africa include returnees labelled *White*, their offspring who had never set foot in Portugal before 1975, the descendants of mixed families with a wide variety of skin colours, and *White* war veterans who had become passionate about Africa. Moreover, certain clubs such as B.leza always attracted an audience composed of intellectuals and artists who may not have experience of life in Africa but who felt attracted to these spaces that brought fresh new cultural trends into the post-dictatorship city. In the case of A Lontra, a club located close to the national parliament, *Portuguese* politicians went to the venue after work and even held secret meetings in rooms reserved for them by the owners. In the case of Mussulo, considered a high-status place, the club became fashionable for football stars and other celebrities in the 1990s. In addition, colleagues, friends and relatives of all the aforementioned kinds of visitors, who are not labelled *Black* or *African* in their everyday lives, were invited and have since become members of these nightclub societies formed in *African clubs*. *Kizomba* teacher

Tomás Keita, who arrived in Lisbon from Guinea Bissau in the 1990s, remembered his first years in Lisbon as follows:

In Portugal, in the past, the only way to socialize with ... because it was work, home, the only way to socialize was going to *African discos*. There you could find people from other countries and I always had many connections with former Angolan dancers that used to visit these places [...] The African ambience was never closed. There were not many White people because they thought that in the African ambience they would find just problems [...]. The ones who did use to go are those who socialize with Africans in the neighbourhood, at school, those were the ones who used to go. (Interview with Tomás Keita, 23rd April 2014)

Summing up, in a postcolonial scenario of unsolved conflicts, houses devoted to music popular in Portuguese-speaking Africa opened in Lisbon and turned into ethnically marked spaces that served as shelters where visitors could find cultural comfort and/or engage in an ambience they felt attracted by. The popular music and dance symbols displayed in them acquired the specific meaning of collective resistance to a hostile society that looks down on people labelled *Black* and/or *African*. The popular music and dance for having fun displayed in these spaces, which includes global pop music from non-African countries such as Brazil and the USA, metamorphosed into *African music* and *African dance*, turning them into powerful symbols of cultural resistance and unity in this postcolonial context.

The Commodification of *Kizomba* as Symbolic Violence

Since the 1990s, certain social dances popular in Portuguese-speaking African states and their diasporas in Europe became commodified in Portugal with the most successful example being the partner dance labelled *kizomba*, which has since spread along global salsa circuits to become a dance craze among middle class consumers all over the world (Soares, “Between Luanda, Lisbon, Milan and Cairo. Diffusion and practice of kizomba”; Jiménez, “From Angola to the World”, From the World to Lisbon and Paris: how structural inequalities shaped the global kizomba industry”; Kabir, “Oceans, Cities, Islands: Sites and Routes of Afro-Diasporic Rhythm Cultures”). Even though this movement has contributed towards improving the image of African-ness in Europe by associating it with modernity and cosmopolitanism, and thus helping move beyond the previous stereotype of poverty and backwardness, most of the *African* research participants living in Lisbon expressed rather ambivalent feelings towards this phenomenon. On the one hand, they felt pride in seeing what they consider their culture rendered visible and highly valued at the international level. On the other hand, they deemed that it was only poorly represented on stage, on dance floors and in dance schools to the point that they did not recognise their beloved dance in the commodified version. Instead of constituting just a cold and rational critical statement expressed from the position of an external observer, they seemed to feel pain, anger or some kind of disturbance when looking at and talking about performances by aficionados. Even though social dance is usually regarded as merely a form of relaxing and having fun, and correspondingly distant from the hard issues social sciences are interested in (Farnell, “It Goes Without Saying-but Not Always”), these heated reactions made evident how kinetic symbols are charged with strong political meanings (Giurchescu, “The Power of Dance and its Social and Political Uses”). Although among its explicit objectives the *kizomba* movement has “giving value to Africa” and “bringing cultures together” on the dance floor, it has ironically backfired, at least to some extent, by triggering conflicting tensions that did not exist before (at least, as expressed in these terms) and a corresponding reaction of cultural defence among *African* partygoers who feel misrepresented by the dance style.

In this context, I propose to analyse the commodification of *kizomba* as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power”). First, because it spreads a discourse of the commodified dance floor as a democratic and neutral space that fosters the “approaching of cultures.” This multicultural discourse turns asymmetry into neutral difference, ignoring the ongoing processes of labour and residential segregation that place the most vulnerable social groups coming from the former African colonies in the worst positions in postcolonial Portugal (Cardoso and Perista, “The forgotten city: poverty in marginal areas of Lisbon”; Almeida, *A Land Coloured Sea. Race, Politics and Identity Culture*; Batalha, *The Cape-Verdean*

Diaspora in Portugal. Colonial Subjects in a Postcolonial World; Bordonaro, “Ghetto Six. Anthropology occupies the space”) and the corresponding nightlife segregation that led to the racialization of *African clubs*. However, this idealised discourse shapes the imagination of *kizomba* aficionados all over the world, and hence it succeeded in “imposing meanings and in imposing them as legitimate in disguising the relations of power which are at the root of its force” (Bourdieu and Passeron, *The reproduction*:18). Indeed, what I actually found during fieldwork was a general avoidance of nightclubs racialised as *African* by middle-class *White* consumers, who did not wish to experience postcolonial racial tensions in their leisure time. Had the postcolonial social dynamics been more balanced, harmonic and neutral, most middle-class people interested in the dancing culture would just learn through socialising in those clubs. In other words, the very existence of the *kizomba* industry is based on the social distances that turn the dance into a “hard-to-reach” experience for middle-class *White* consumers and hence a potential commodity. Second, it transforms the ethos of an informal and relaxed social dance into a standardised performance based on a hierarchy of defined levels (basic, medium, advanced, professional). In the context of this “meritocratic symbolism” (Wacquant 71), *African* dancing crowds alien to the industry are portrayed as having a “basic” level, and correspondingly their practices are deemed unworthy. In this way, a dance that had acquired the symbolic meaning of cultural resistance and collective pride in a hostile context of immigration turns into the symbolic means through which *African* inferiority is claimed once again.

As a result, members of *African club* nightlife societies of Lisbon (whether labelled as *Black* or *White*) do not recognise their cultures in the commodified performances displayed by (whether labelled *Black* or *White*) aficionados and teachers. It is important to note that in this process of misrepresentation, actors labelled *African* have played (and still play) a key role. Even though the first *kizomba* teachers (such as Carlos Vieira Dias alias Petchú, Zé Barbosa, Tomás Keita or Kwenda Lima) came from African countries (mainly Cape Verde, Angola and Guinea Bissau), they made a series of changes to the dance to make it understandable, teachable, acceptable and marketable (Jiménez, “From Angola to the World”, From the World to Lisbon and Paris: how structural inequalities shaped the global *kizomba* industry”). Unwittingly, they established the basis for a process of cultural appropriation, first by their students in Portugal, and later by aficionados all over the world. As *kizomba* spread along the global salsa circuits, dancers from Portuguese-speaking Africa living in European cities other than Lisbon entered into the scene. For example, Morenasso (from Angola) and Tony Pirata (from Cape Verde) in Paris, Eddy Vents (from Guinea Bissau) in London and Miami, José Rui (from Cape Verde) in Denmark, José N’dongala (from Angola) in Brussels or Dino Da Cruz (from Angola) in Amsterdam joined the global *kizomba* industry. In this way, new actors throughout Europe and the USA capitalised on their embodied dancing knowledge, sometimes contesting the practices of non-*African* labelled colleagues as unauthentic. Nevertheless, the goal of these new participants was not delegitimising the process of commodification or the global industry in itself but rather participating from a comparatively better position through a discourse of symbolic authenticity.

In the following lines, I attempt to disentangle the processes that have transformed a dance of cultural resistance into a dance for purchase, in order to analyse in more depth the specific logic that underpins this form of symbolic violence. These are well-known processes that other performances, packaged and sold as “Latin dances” such as ragtime, tango or salsa, have also undergone in order to become marketable (Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*; Goertzen and Azzi, “Globalization and the Tango”; Hutchinson, “Dancing in Place. An Introduction”; McMains, “‘Hot’ Latin Dance: Ethnic Identity and Stereotype”). The first necessary process is what Weber (1958) termed rationalisation. In order to make the dance understandable for people whose kinetic cultures were rather different, the first teachers introduced principles that were alien to the native practice, such as geometric concepts for moving on the floor (back, forth, right, left) and the practice of counting steps (one, two, one, two three). Thus, the dance also underwent simplification (cf. Hutchinson, “Dancing in Place. An Introduction”).

In the world of *African clubs*, the wide diversity of dance styles and social rules made providing a single description, valid for all cases, impossible. Nevertheless, for didactic reasons, the first teachers standardised the steps, and correspondingly reducing all this diversity into one and only one legitimate version (or, at least, one version per teacher). Moreover, the logic of “right” and “wrong,” which made no sense in those contexts, was necessarily introduced.

Another important aspect was the hygienization of the dance (cf. Hutchinson 2014). In the case of logic of movements regarded as overly sexual from the point of view of middle-class consumers, these had to be transformed to be acceptable and marketable. For example, *kizomba* proxemics have been a problem since the very first workshops. As students considered that partners danced too close according to their couple dance standards, they felt embarrassed and many therefore decided to quit. Therefore, teachers found a balanced distance between partners, wide enough to be acceptable but close enough to fulfil consumer expectations of an exotic “hot African culture.” This relates to the process of cultural stereotyping: Stereotyped representations of a “hot” and macho *African* culture (cf. McMains, “‘Hot’ Latin Dance: Ethnic Identity and Stereotype” for salsa) are disseminated through the global *kizomba* industry circuits in such a way that aficionados allow themselves to interact in a way they would never do outside of the dance floor. For example, women’s agency is generally reduced to a strict “follower” and passive attitude, something I hardly ever witnessed in *African discos*.

Variation proves another trait common to dance commodification processes (Robinson 2010). From this perspective, the common practice of “fusion” with other dance styles, appears as a “taylorist” intermixing of decontextualised elements (Robinson 2010). In the context of the global *kizomba* industry, these practices are depicted as evolutionary, which leads us to the most evident example of postcolonial symbolic violence: an evolutionist representation of the dance practices I could find among most aficionados in Spain and Portugal. According to this widespread discourse, *African* people have remained on the “basic step” and “it is thanks to us, European *kizomba* lovers, that the dance has evolved.” Instead of establishing the performances of people labelled *African* as an example to follow or an ideal to reach, they are represented as “too basic.” In this way, they create an emic hierarchy of value in which *kizombeiros* appear at the top. Interestingly, most of the teachers labelled *African* interviewed agree with this view. On the contrary, most members of *African club* night societies, irrespective of how they are labelled in ethnic terms, strongly disagree with this idea.

One important consequence of the aforementioned processes encapsulates how the dance has been depoliticised, detached from its original meaning (cf. Robinson 2010, Kabir 2018) through commodification. The connotations of cultural resistance that social dance had once acquired in *African clubs* of Lisbon, which constituted an essential ingredient of its ethos, were automatically erased. In this way, *kizomba* could be sold as a friendly, innocent and conflict-free exotic product. In other words, dance symbols were neutralised for the sake of the market.

“White People Dance Like Robots.” Practices of Cultural Resistance to Commodified *Kizomba* in *African* Nightclubs of Madrid and Lisbon.

When I started doing fieldwork in Madrid in 2012, *kizomba* aficionados followed a weekly ritual of night venues that included the following clubs: Ramdall on Tuesdays, La Sal on Wednesdays, But on Thursdays, Tropical House on Fridays and Bisú Lounge Club on Sundays. The most important day for this dancing community, mostly composed of middle-class men and women of Spanish nationality, proved Sunday night at Bisú Lounge Club, a venue organised by the event promotor Kevin and DJ Pappy’s, both from Guinea Bissau. The house used to be crowded and, unlike what happened during the rest of the week, the attendants involved people labelled *African*, who had no many options of houses playing music popular in Portuguese-speaking Africa in Madrid. Almost half of the audience was composed of immigrants from Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde in their twenties and thirties. Another important feature of this Bisú venue was the type of music played by the DJ, who included not only the genres most appreciated by aficionados (*kizomba* and *semba*) but also other styles popular among clients labelled *African* (*soukous*, *kompas*, and others).

Interestingly, the venue’s flyer depicted a black hand shaking a white hand symbolising peaceful interethnic relations. When looking at the dance floor, it looked like everybody chose dance partners irrespective of any ethnic labelling process to the extent that ethnicity had become irrelevant as a structuring principle in this specific venue.

The general ambience of relaxed conviviality gave the impression of a space in which African-ness played the role of a valuable symbol for all party-goers and did not structure the dance floor. Interestingly, it would change a few months afterwards. One of the strongest complaints among *kizombeiros* was the lack of venues for dancing on Saturday nights. The fact that they usually drank just water and juice during the night made it uninteresting for disco owners to invest in such a low consumption audience on weekends. Nevertheless, Kevin and DJ Pappy's succeeded in establishing a new reference for *kizomba* lovers in Madrid: Kizomba Paradise disco, a new *kizomba* venue for Fridays and Saturdays, a project they would run in a former salsa disco in the city centre. The community members I met were very excited about this good news. The inaugural party took place in August 2013 and was a great success. It seemed that a stable meeting point for the weekend gathering of Bisú's dancing society had finally been found.

Unfortunately, I could not immediately follow the development of this experiment as I had to move to Lisbon in September to officially start my postdoctoral fellowship. When I returned to Madrid for the Christmas holidays, I asked some *Spanish kizombeiros* about developments at the Kizomba Paradise club. Everyone I asked gave the same answer: "it's nice but you should come on Fridays because this is the only night you can dance. If you go on Saturdays, you will see that there are only African people who do not dance kizomba." As I was able to observe, the Bisú dancing community had split into two sections according to what appeared to be an ethnically structuring principle. I wondered whether I would encounter something similar in Lisbon. The different colonial pasts and contemporary migratory landscapes of the two cities would probably condition parallel nightlife stories around the idea of African-ness.

Once in Lisbon, I found it clearly differed from Madrid across at least two dimensions: the first arises from the greater number of nightclubs devoted to *African* music. This meant that it was impossible to reproduce the methodological strategy deployed in Madrid, where it was feasible to visit all the clubs and acquire a relatively good knowledge of a village-sized dancing community. In Lisbon, discos and parties around *African* music were so numerous that I had to make choices and focus on a rather reduced selection of the wide variety of clubs existing. The second difference relates to the structuring politics. Unlike the Bisú previous experience, in Lisbon, there was apparently a sharp distinction between two types of clubs and target audiences: *kizomba* venues for *Portuguese* dance aficionados and *African discos* for *African* people. In the beginning, it seemed that the split into two dancing communities that took place in Madrid after the opening of Kizomba Paradise already had a long tradition in Lisbon, indeed, as long as the history of *kizomba* commodification itself. Moreover, many clubs were oriented, but not limited, to a specific nationality, which differed from the Madrid case, where having the Portuguese language in common became relevant enough to create a sense of community. For this reason, the fieldwork strategy combined venues targeted at *kizomba* aficionados (Sabura on Tuesdays, Barrio Latino on Thursdays and River Parties or similar venues on Fridays) with those oriented to a specific national audience (the more *Angolan*-oriented Mwangolé on Mondays, the more *Cape Verdean*-oriented B.leza on Saturdays and the more *Guinean*-oriented Kora Club on Sundays). I combined these with sporadic visits to other houses to get a wider perspective, such as Ondeando club (oriented to the youth of diverse African nationalities), Futungo (*Angolan*-oriented), Sabura on Saturdays (oriented to *Cape Verdean* youth), The Dock's (focused on electronic dance music and targeted at youth of diverse nationalities) or Djumbai (*Guinean*-oriented), among others. However, the social dynamics of the night proved far more complex than following a simple structuring based on passport criteria.

One night in September 2014, before a *kizomba* concert, MC Gasolina (an artist from Angola) introduced the singer through trying to make an audience composed of mostly *African* people laugh and get into the party mood. He challenged the public by asking about their dancing skills: "I hope you are able to dance kizomba, otherwise you will have to go to the dance school. Do you know that kizomba dance schools do exist in the city? Do you know what you can learn there? One, two, three, one, two three, and again, do you think you can do that?" The audience broke out into laughter as he was touching upon a conventional source of mockery: the absurdity perceived in a formal teaching process applied to a social dance they used to learn rather informally. The most repeated trope during interviews and the informal conversation was: "White people dance like robots." This widespread discourse among party-goers labelled *African* consisting of mocking the *kizomba* dance school style reflected on the night structure by making them avoid

commodified dance floors. This phenomenon became even more apparent during the harshest years of the financial crisis when many *African* people living in Lisbon moved to other European countries, such as France or Germany, seeking jobs and better living conditions. Consequently, some clubs lost their clientele and had to close or reorient their marketing strategy towards the city's growing numbers of *kizomba* aficionados. In this context, some *African* party-goers faced the surprise of finding their clubs of reference with an unexpectedly different ambience. For example, once I witnessed the reaction of a man from Cape Verde who arrived in B.leza on Sunday night and found a *kizomba* party. Looking at the dance floor, he shook his head and said to the barman: “what is this circus?” before he finished his beer in one gulp and left. DJ Turbo, an experienced DJ from Angola, well-known in the so-called *African discos*, told this story in an interview:

They (African people) when they enter the disco and they find those schools, those things ... they turn back and go out, they say they cannot stand it [...] they hate it, they don't even want to hear about it [...]. They say it destroys the essence of the African ambience [...] because, for example, when they get there (to the disco), it has already happened to me in Kalema club where I was, once...I don't think it's bad...there is no problem in them going to schools, the problem is often the timetable. [...] When people arrive early and they find that thing, they turn back, they go out, they go somewhere else, ok, it's like this, in that register, one, two, one, two, one, two, and the people sitting looking at that thing, it's difficult to look at, isn't it? (laughter). (Interview with DJ Turbo, 22nd May 2015).

Nevertheless, this is not to draw a simple scenario of *White* people displaying the commodified *kizomba* world in festivals versus *Black* people dancing authentic *kizomba* in *African discos*. As seen in previous sections, actors that self-label themselves as *White* and *Portuguese* have constituted members of the *African club* societies of Lisbon since their earliest days. As such, many also dislike the process of *kizomba* commodification, laugh at dance school practices and refuse commodified environments. On the other hand, people that label themselves *Black* and *African* have taken part in the process of establishing a commodified *kizomba* scene from the very beginning of the phenomenon, acting as teachers, promoters, and event organisers. Correspondingly, the general conclusion in this respect is that commodification seems the strongest structuring principle of the night, even though ethnicity may appear as more salient from an external perspective.

“I Never Danced with an African Girl.” Postcolonial Conflicts and Gender on the Dance Floor.

Interestingly enough, the resistance to commodified dance floors seemed to have a gender. In Madrid, as I could observe and check in informal conversations, virtually every woman labelled *Spanish kizombero*³ used to dance with men labelled *African* and *Spanish*, but the opposite situation proved rather uncommon. Most *kizomba* aficionados reported that they had never danced with an *African* girl, and some of these men had never even considered the possibility of inviting them to dance. When asking them about the reasons for this situation, most informants talked about fear of breaking unknown cultural rules and they often compared this situation with their previous experience in fields of salsa discos and ambiances labelled *Latin American*. Among those who had invited these labelled *African* women to dance, most of them stated that they had been systematically rejected. In the following fieldwork diary excerpt, we may encounter several examples of these widespread discourses.

I ask Juan⁴ whether he has invited any African girls to dance, and he says that he has only very rarely done so. He says that he does not dare to invite them because they never come alone, they come in a group with men, and he ignores their social rules. “If you take a look, you will see that they never come alone, or in female groups, they always come in groups

³ *Kizombero* (male), and *kizombero* (female) are the names *kizomba* aficionados attribute themselves in the Madrid context.

⁴ I have changed the real names of research participants to pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The only persons who attributed their real names are reflected are those holding a public name and reputation in the scene, such as dance teachers, musicians, DJs, owners and club managers.

in which there are African men.” He tells me that ‘among Latin Americans, mostly from Central America if there is a group of boys and girls, even if it is composed of two boys and ten girls, they consider it a lack of respect someone coming from outside and inviting a girl in the group’. Then, he says, “I prefer being cautious because I don’t know if I am violating some rules if they will take it as an offence, or how they will take it, and so I prefer not to invite them.” [...] When leaving the disco with Ruben [...] he says goodbye to an African boy sitting by the door and says to him: “hey man, there’s no way to dance with girls from your country, they all refuse to dance with me, what’s going on?” He laughs and answers ‘after so many centuries of slavery, what do you want, man?’ They laugh. [...] It makes me remember that Daniel told me last Tuesday that he didn’t feel like inviting African girls to dance because “some of them have the queen attitude, like those Latinas that you find in salsa places and who look down on you as if you were some insect.” (Fieldwork diary, 19th April 2013)

In Lisbon, gender and ethnicity seemed to cross in a rather similar way. For example, in Barrio Latino, I could find the same pattern of *White kizomba* aficionadas dancing with *African* men who did not belong to the dance school world. As regards women labelled *African*, they were rather rarely present in *kizomba* venues in Lisbon. Unlike Madrid, they had many spaces to choose, and *kizomba* parties did not seem attractive places for them. When talking to male aficionados, it was hard to find anyone who had experience of dancing with those *African* women. The few individuals and groups of male *kizomba* aficionados that I could find who had the habit of visiting *African discos* and trying to invite female party-goers in those houses reported the same situation of rejection I described above for the case of Madrid. Nevertheless, this bitter feeling of rejection did not seem to be exclusive to men labelled *White*. Interestingly, whenever commenting with *African* male informants about these complaints, they expressed a solidarity discourse, blaming *African* women for what they considered a narcissistic attitude that harmed men irrespective of ethnic labels. In contrast with the implicit rule of accepting every invitation in order to practice dance steps that *kizomba* aficionadas displayed, this common practice of refusing male invitations to dance was so generalised that it had a particular emic category in the field: *tampa*. In the following fieldwork diary excerpt, there is a description of these *tampa* practices and the way they were perceived by one of my informants, Zé, a party-goer in his thirties born to a *Guinean* father and a *Cape Verdean* mother.

Zé tells me that he is going to search for girls to dance with. [...] He tells me that African girls often go out not for dancing but for exhibiting themselves and getting many *tampas*. According to him, they do it on purpose. “They make themselves extremely beautiful, they choose a place in which they can be easily seen, and they wait for men to come just to say ‘no’, shaking their heads energetically in contempt, without even opening their mouths to say ‘no, thank you.’” He says that they spend the whole night like this and they compete among themselves to get the highest number of *tampas*, but they don’t dance. Zé goes to invite a girl who is sitting on a chair, but she says no. He explains to me: “I got a *tampa*.” He tries again with another girl. When he is on his fourth *tampa*, he comes back and says to me “this is because they don’t know me here, they won’t dance with you if they don’t know you” (Fieldwork diary, 21st October 2013).

However, *kizomba* aficionados still generally perceived that their whiteness played an important role in the refusal of *African* females to dance with them. In summary, a common feature of Madrid and Lisbon *African* dance floors emerged out of the apparent ethnic structuring of the night based on a gendered avoidance of the commodified spaces and actors.

Even though this gendered issue deserves in-depth research that goes beyond the purposes of this article and the scope of this project, I can at least propose a line of interpretation coherent with the main statements thus far made. Taking into account how *kizomba* is a couple dance in which the male partner is supposed to lead, and the female partner is supposed to follow, we may conclude that a male aficionado is able to impose the aforementioned symbolic violence while a female aficionada would just have to adapt to the non-commodified kinetic discourse. Consequently, a couple composed of an *African* man and a *European* woman produces a symbolic inversion of the power relations prevalent in general society. From this perspective, the attraction that many *African* male party-goers feel towards dancing with *White* aficionadas and the repulse of *African* women towards dancing with *White* aficionados makes sense in a political dimension as a form of resistance. In this way, the collective agency of social actors that embody *African-ness* in their daily lives experiences a subconscious way of rejecting cultural dominance in their regular night lives. In other words, the imbalance of power relations between gendered subjects implicit in the logic of social couple dance is inverted symbolically by party-goers labelled *African* to represent resistance to a postcolonial imbalance of power relations between racialised subjects.

I would like to conclude with a self-critique of the methodological problems underlying this research. Throughout this text, the reader is probably missing the voices of a specific kind of social actor which is often referred to but not in the first person: women labelled *African*. In spite of this essential shortcoming, reflexive analysis may lead us to return a constructive outcome. My position in the field was interpreted as that of a *White kizomba* aficionada and, therefore, it was hard to coincide in any socialisation process with these women during the night. In general terms, in Madrid and in Lisbon, the only girls labelled *White* who socialised with those labelled *Black* were those belonging to their group of friends or relatives who were alien to the commodified *kizomba* world. In other words, the methodological problem does not lie so much in the researcher's gender and skin but rather in the strategy of accessing the field through *kizomba* schools. In the end, this serves to reinforce the view of the positioning of the *kizomba* industry as the main structuring principle in this field. In terms of the power structures that rule the night, my materials represent a clear result of the underrepresentation of women in roles whether as club owners, managers or as independent dance teachers. In any case, this constitutes a rather important methodological limitation, and therefore the conclusions of this research must be interpreted by taking this imbalance of voices into account. Hopefully, future fieldwork will offset this shortcoming, and we will obtain a more complete polyphony to grasp this problem better.

Conclusions: on the Symbolic Power of Global Markets

Throughout this article, I have explored several ways of cultural resistance developed by the nightclub societies that gather at spaces labelled *African discos* in Lisbon, taking Madrid as a contrasting example. Since the seventies, these spaces became shelters where people who felt identified with or attracted by Portuguese-speaking Africa could find cultural comfort from the hostile world outside and develop their own music and dance cultures. Since the late nineties, certain traits of this culture were commodified, and people belonging to *African nightclub* societies generally choose between two options. A few individuals capitalise on their dancing skills and turn into *kizomba* dance teachers or promoters, thus making “individual efforts to assimilate that only reiterate the dominant values” (Schwarz, “The Symbolic Economy of Authenticity As a Form of Symbolic Violence: the Case of Middle-Class Ethnic Minorities:6-7). In the meanwhile, most party-goers show open resistance through making fun of commodified *kizomba* style, avoiding commodified *kizomba* places and/or refusing to dance with “congress style”⁵ aficionados. In other words, they adopt a strategy of maintaining “loyalty to the self and the group” (Schwarz, “The Symbolic Economy of Authenticity As a Form of Symbolic Violence: the Case of Middle-Class Ethnic Minorities”:7), condemning as ridiculous the dancing culture of the commodified world and portraying it as dancing “white” (cf. Fordham and Ogbu, “Black students’ school success: Coping with the “burden of ‘acting white’”). The metaphor of the “white dancing robot” proved revealing in this sense.

Nevertheless, these practices of othering should not lead us to conclude that the field is ethnically structured. As we have seen so far, certain people labelled *African* have participated actively in the constitution of the commodified *kizomba* world, and certain people labelled *Portuguese* belong to nightclubs societies that resist this movement. When we look deeper into it, we find that the position in the global *kizomba* industry actually proves the main structuring principle of the night so that African-ness is constructed in multiple and contradictory ways.

Finally, the global industry proves relevant in the last dimension. When Bourdieu elaborated his theory of symbolic power, he pointed at the state as the agent who exercises the monopoly over symbolic violence (Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power”). However, in late modernity, transnational markets have often come to play this role, imposing their discourses at the global level, and correspondingly increasing their “performative power of designation.” (Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power”: 23) In this context, many social groups self-commodify making of ethnicity a tool for attracting capital in the global economy (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*). In the case exposed

⁵ By using this category, I follow the term “congress style salsa” proposed by McMains (“‘Hot’ Latin Dance: Ethnic Identity and Stereotype”:490).

here, the agents of the global dance industry, i.e., teachers, promoters, festival organisers, DJs, dance school managers, nightclub owners make their profit through projecting an attractive idea of African-ness that hides the conflictual aspects and structural inequalities that cross the postcolonial societies in which *kizomba* actually developed. For this reason, in this article, I proposed considering *kizomba* commodification as a form of symbolic violence.

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Research Article

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Dancing an Open Africanity: Playing with “Tradition” and Identity in the Spreading of Sabar in Europe

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0030>

Received July 27, 2018; accepted December 9, 2018

Abstract: This paper describes one of the constructions of African identity that occur through the spreading of sabar in European cities. Basing on a multi-sited fieldwork between Dakar, France and Switzerland, this paper traces the local roots and transnational routes of this Senegalese dance and music performance and presents the “transnational social field” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller) that sabar musicians and dancers have created in Europe. It analyses the representations of Africanity, Senegality and Blackness that are shared in Sabar dances classes, and describes how diasporic artists contribute to (re)invent “traditions” in migration. In this transnational dance world, “blackness” and Africanity are not homogenous and convertible categories of identification, on the contrary, they are made of many tensions and arrangements, which allow individuals to include or exclude otherness, depending on situations and contexts.

Keywords: Sabar, migration, tradition, identity, Africanity.

In a recent paper discussing the concept of blackness in Ghana, the anthropologist Pierre Jemima noticed that a large majority of studies that dealt with the idea of blackness in the diaspora were based on a systemic isolation of the African continent itself, and were rarely taking into account the process of racialization during colonialism and postcolonialism in Africa in order to understand current constructions of race and racialization in diasporic societies¹ (Jemima). In the same sense, several recent studies have highlighted how modern constructions of blackness (as well as other racialized categories) often were built through global exchanges and interconnections between Africa and the diaspora (Matory; Sansone, Barry, and Soumonni; Aterianus-Owanga and Guedj), and how, even if they could take different meanings, Africanity and blackness have been in many ways interdependent.

Thanks to the transnational turn in social sciences (Clifford, *Traveling cultures*; Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc; Appadurai), new multi-sited studies have traced these transatlantic constructions of cultures and identities occurring between Africa, Europe and the Americas. The domain of anthropology of religions has been a pioneer in this perspective and has provided many conceptual tools for taking Afro-diasporic connections and circulations into account (Bastide; Matory; Capone; Guedj; Argyriadis et al.). But the anthropology of music and dance has also produced, in recent years, a series of innovative studies to understand these identity constructions occurring through transatlantic circulations (Martin, “Filiation of Innovation?”; Shain; Martin, “The Musical Heritage of Slavery”; Kelley). Thanks to their intrinsic circulatory power, music and dance have always contributed to the migration of people, ideas, cultural movements and ideologies (Pacini Hernandez; Aterianus-Owanga and Guedj), allowing individuals to resist, remember and recompose their identities in diasporic contexts. While a lot of studies in ethnomusicology

¹ These critics have been particularly prominent about Paul Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy; Chrisman).

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or anthropology of dance have paid attention to migration and mobility pathways taking place between Africa and the Americas, a few emerging ethnographic researches deal with the experience of African dancers and musicians in Europe (Kiwani and Meinhof; Despres, *Se faire contemporain*). They have unveiled undocumented ways to experience migration and integration for Africans in Europe (Sieveking; Sawyer; Kiwani and Meinhof; Aterianus-Owanga; Rastas and Seye), and they have confirmed the importance of the anthropology of music and dance to understand diverse constructions of Africanity in the diaspora.

In this article, my aim is to highlight one of these many constructions of African identity that occur in African artists' worlds in Europe, by describing the case of Sabar dance and music movement in European cities, more precisely in France and Switzerland. Sabar is a Senegalese dance and music performance which was originally executed in women's dance circles in the streets (Penna-Diaw; Tang; Dessertine; Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance circles*; Seye). It has become very popular among Dakar's youth, and it has spread in last years to Europe and the United States (Ross; Bizas), among others, through the migration of Senegalese dancers and musicians. I will describe here how this transnational world of dance now is for some artists a space where they gain recognition and integration in Europe and where they reconstruct ideas of identity and tradition. Rather than isolating the analysis of migrants' practices in Europe from their initial context in Dakar, my aim in this article is to understand how the identity constructions and power negotiations of Senegalese dancers occur in a transnational field that permanently connects Europe to Senegal. Continuing on a tradition of research on migration, I consider that these experiences of migration should not be considered in terms of a dichotomy between two disconnected spaces, but as a circuit where different sorts of economic, cultural and affective flows travel (Cole and Groes).

What representations of Africanity, blackness and whiteness are spread through sabar teachings and performances in Europe? How are sabar artists playing between different identity categories to develop their agency and get recognition—as individuals and as dancers—in the many universes that they are crossing and connecting, between Europe and Senegal? Finally, how do these artists' travels between Senegal and Europe contribute to transform some representations of “tradition” and sabar dance itself?

In order to discuss these issues, my article is based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork between Dakar,² France and Switzerland.³ Still in progress, this research has consisted of the observation of several pathways of artists between Senegal and Europe, on a participant observation of dance classes and workshops (more than 250 hours until now) and on interviews with musicians, dancers, students, or administrators of African dances associations, i.e. the different actors of this dance world. In a first part of this article, I will trace briefly the local roots and transnational routes of sabar, and present the “transnational social field” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller) that sabar musicians and dancers have created in Europe. I will then pay attention to the representations of Africanity, Senegality and Blackness that are shared in sabar dance classes, and observe how diasporic artists contribute to (re)invent “traditions” in migration (Howbsbawm and Ranger). We will thus observe that “blackness” and Africanity are not homogenous and convertible categories of identification, and that, on the contrary, they are made of many “folds” (Deleuze), tensions and arrangements, to include or exclude otherness, depending on situations and contexts. The combination of a transnational perspective and an interactional methodology (Barth; Wimmer; Brubaker and Cooper) will prove how the transformation, negotiation and redefinition of tradition and Africanity boundaries occur through negotiations and connections between the many spaces and identities that these artists mobilise in their practices and interactions in Europe.

² In addition to my fieldwork in France and Switzerland, I have done a ten weeks' ethnographic fieldwork in Dakar between January and March 2018. I was following the daily activities of several sabar companies, and I have observed a two 'weeks' workshop organised for “Western” students by Senegalese dancers.

³ My ethnographic research has mainly been anchored in these two countries, but I have also tried to “follow the people” in their activities and pathways (Marcus), which has led me to do short fieldworks in other European cities.

Sabar Dance Worlds: Local Roots, Global Routes

In Senegal, the word *sabar* refers to a music instrument, a dance and a moment of performance, that has been described by several ethnomusicologists and anthropologists in the field of dance (Penna-Diaw; Tang; Dessertine; Neveu Kringelbach. *Dance circles*; Seye). Coming from Wolof and Lebou ethnic groups, *sabar* was originally a dance organised by women's association at the occasion of meetings, baptisms, or weddings, and also during night dance ceremonies called *tannëbers*. *Sabar* was seen as a "women's affair" (Seye 37) and *sabar* events were "dominated by girls and women" (Neveu Kringelbach 79), even if men used to participate in these dance events, as drummers, young boys, audience or professional dancers. Dancers and drummers who participated in these events used to belong to the griot (*gewël*) caste, considered as inferior by noble and middle-class citizens. *Sabar* events represented moments of transgression of respectability codes, provocative gestures, hip breaks and opening of wraps which suspended momentarily the norms of prudishness in this Muslim society (Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance circles*).

Therefore, since a few decades, *sabar* worlds have been affected by a series of transformation, and it has become the crucible of expression for other class, gender and ethnic identities. The first transformation is the consequence of the development of a professional network of dancers (in ballets and companies) and of a music industry around *mbalax*⁴ music. Coming from griot families or not, several young people from the Dakar suburbs who engage in *sabar* dancing have appropriated this tradition in their performance, and male have become new "stars of this female tradition" (Seye). They have imposed a new dance style, made of virtuosity, fastness, acrobatics and demonstration of strength (Tholon; Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance circles* 84; Seye).⁵ Whereas some dances of the *sabar* repertoire such as *farwudjar* and *lëmbel* are conceived as more feminine, other dances are considered as more gender-neutral, such as *baara mbaye*, and preferred by male dancers for their choreographies. They have also introduced new dances in *sabar* events, such as *fass*, a rhythm played at local wrestling matches, and *musicale*, an adaptation of *mbalax* music rhythms. As a consequence of the recent masculinization of *sabar* dance, many male dancers also assert a style of dancing called "*goor degg*" (real men) and create a dance style which is infused with Mouride ethos and *baye fall* hexis.⁶ Therefore, in the present day, women who dance in companies also perform on these rhythms, and while paying attention to assert a woman's style at some moments, by playing on hips moves and emotionality (Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance circles*), they also assert their skills through the simultaneous ability to perform the same strength and athleticism as men when they dance on rhythms such as *fass* and *musicale*.

As a consequence, *Tannëbers* have become the arena for performance of and competition between these famous male and female semi-professional dancers, putting amateur dancers into the background. This new generation of dancers have created a subculture of their own, with their own media and television channels, and thanks to their video-clips, tours and connections with international spheres, they constitute new figures of success (Banégas and Warnier).

This mediatization of *sabar* events and this development of a semi-professional dance scene has led to another transformation, related to the publicization of this traditional practice which used to be private. Whereas the sexual suggestiveness and transgressive dimension of *sabar* dances used to occur in the realm of private courtyards and women circles, images of *sabar* performances are now spread in local media and on Youtube, and have in recent years been the subject of real scandals, which condemned the behaviour of women dancers as prostitution and perversion. In relation with the increasing influence of Islamic associations, *sabar* is now considered by a part of the Dakar population as a place of obscenity and perversion of women, contrary to the prudishness and respectability expected for women (Briant).

⁴ *Mbalax* is an urban dance music distinct to Senegal, whose main feature is the use of tama and *sabar* instruments. It has become very popular since the 1970s (Mangin), both locally and in world-music markets.

⁵ This male dance style is described more precisely by other authors, for example by Elina Seye.

⁶ The word *Baye Fallism* refers to a marginal religious movement within the Mouride Sufi order, which has gained a growing popularity among the youth of Dakar (Pézeril), especially among male artists. *Baye fall* adepts worship Cheikh Ibrahim Fall, they bear several distinctive signs, such as dreadlocks, big belts, and leather necklaces, and they often assert the strong value of work.

In that sense, sabar events and dances are associated with an ambiguous status, considered on the one side as a local tradition to protect—by dancers and griot people—or as an obscene practice to fight against (Briant). In the same manner, professional dancers who engage in dance careers benefit from the advantages of fame and success, but they often take the risk to be stigmatised by a part of the citizens, who criticise their transgression of gender norms. When men dancers often take the chance to be assimilated to “*goorjiggen*” (homosexuals), stigmatisation is even worse for female dancers, who are very often confused with prostitutes⁷. Due to gender stereotypes and stigmata, their career is much shorter than men’s, as their family often pushes them to give up dance to get married and to have children. Even if related to stigmatisation and to a marginal subculture, the practice of sabar in semi-professional companies remains very attractive among the youth because it provides small incomes, but also because it allows them to connect to the world.

Indeed, the last transformation has been occurring in sabar scenes in the last decades, leading to new channels of connection with transnational networks and markets. Due to tourism and to the diffusion of African dances in global markets, sabar companies and events represent a new kind of “contact zone” (Clifford, *Routes*), allowing young dancers to connect to the world, and to open new gates for migration. In his discussions about colonial encounters and museums, James Clifford defined contact zones as “an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (*Routes*, 192). Beyond colonial context, his concept is very useful to understand how some spaces create “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical power relations” (Clifford, *Routes* 191), especially in the ephemeral and mobile dance scenes that emerge around sabar performances.

In Dakar and in other touristic cities in Senegal, a “dance tourism” (Simoni; Canova and Chatelain) has emerged in last decades around the practice of sabar. Each year, from December to February mainly, hundreds of European, Japanese and American tourists come to Dakar and other coastal cities in Senegal to participate in intensive dance workshops. Often organised by sabar dancers themselves—mainly the ones who have migrated and lived in the West—these workshops are strong platforms for encounters between the local dance scene and foreigners. The latter (more often women) come to learn dance, but also to experience a cultural discovery of Senegalese cultures, through the frequentation of Dakar markets, beaches, night-clubs and popular street dance performances.⁸ The encounters occurring in these “contact zones” between Senegalese artists and their Western students lead, sometimes, to romantic relationships, to bi-national marriages and to the migration of local dancers and musicians from Senegal to Europe or the Americas. Due to the gendered dimension of this dance tourism, it is mainly male artists who have access to these possibilities of migration by marriage, and who fulfil the aspirations to the West that many young Senegalese have (Fouquet).

Through this mobility, an important number of sabar dancers and musicians have settled and recomposed their artistic activities in European cities, among others in France and French-speaking Switzerland. As we will see in a second part, these contact zones are reinvented in Europe, where the ideas of tradition and Africanity take new meanings.

Sabar Contact Zones in Europe: Performing an “African” and “Traditional” Blackness

Sabar dancers who settle in Europe develop their artistic practices in a context marked by a long history of representation and consummation of Black music and dance, which has evolved from the period of exotic performances in colonial exhibitions (Décoret-Ahiha), to the postcolonial market of “African dances” which

⁷ Some women who don’t belong to griot families have also confided me that they have been strongly criticized and rejected by their own families because of their dance activities.

⁸ For more elements about the encounters and transactions occurring through this dance tourism, see Aterianus-Owanga, *Kaay fecc*.

has emerged in the 1970s (Lefevre Mercier; Lassibille; Lefevre). In the 1980s, there was no specific class of sabar within the nebulous category of “African dances” taught in Europe. As a consequence, Senegalese dancers who arrived in Europe at that time were often pushed to teach mandingue dances and other Guinean repertoires, that were more popular among European audiences.⁹ With the help of local associations and Europeans students, they involved in weekly classes, participated in local animations such as carnivals, and animated the parties organised by Senegalese associations in Europe.

A shift occurred in the end of 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. At that time, a growing number of sabar dancers and musicians started to reach Europe, and African dances students became keener to discover cultural specificities hidden under the label “African dances.” A specific market has then developed for sabar in European cities; it manifests in festivals, sabar festivities such as *tannëbers*, or in dance workshops and classes.¹⁰ In France for example, weekly classes of sabar are organised in most part of big and medium-sized towns. During these moments, dancers, musicians and their students experience bodily, musical, and discursive interactions through which they perform and set identity categories transcending nation, race and ethnicity in motion.

Negotiating Ethnicity, Asserting the Nation

Amsterdam, May 2018, in a sport hall in the city-centre, several dozens of women are gathered to learn sabar dance moves with famous sabar dancers, who come from other European cities or from Dakar, especially for this festival. Even if many other events organised in Europe intend to promote Senegalese dances through festivities and workshops, “Sabar challenge” is the only European festival which includes dance classes, a night party inspired by Senegalese *tannëber* performances, and a competition where several teams of sabar students compete. Most of them are deep fans of this dance repertoire, and they travel all over Europe or in Senegal to improve their skills.

During their classes, each Senegalese dancer invited is in charge of teaching one of the many rhythms that compose the broad repertoire of sabar. Coming from different ethnic groups, different towns of Senegal and different generations of migration in Europe, they all insist nevertheless on the brotherhood they share as sabar dancers in Europe, and on the importance of supporting the initiative that one of their colleague has created to enhance their national heritage—“*sunu cosaan*” (our tradition)—in Europe. During their speeches to their student audience, or in front of the journalist sent by the National Senegalese Television to cover the weekend, they highlight the value of their work as “ambassadors” of Senegalese tradition and identity abroad.

Fieldwork notes, *Sabar Challenge festival*. May 2018, Amsterdam.

As in this event, sabar is most part of the time identified in Europe as a Senegalese “national” heritage and tradition. As here, the denomination of dance classes is “sabar dance,” and no association is made between the content of the dance or the rhythm taught (*farwudjar*, *yaaba*, *ceep bu djen*, *baara mbaye*, *yangaap*, *niari gorong*, *gumbe*), and an ethnic origin. Sabar musicians and dancers present themselves as ambassadors of a national culture during dance classes and workshops, but also during performances that they lead. Indeed, they are often invited to perform during “Senegalese nights” in night-clubs in big cities (such as *le Titan* in Paris), or during diasporic events organised by associations created by Senegalese migrants, for independence festivities or religious ceremonies. In these events, they praise the power of sabar to arouse national feelings and memories, and they perform the different rhythms of ethnic groups from Senegal, sereres, diola, peuls and of course, wolof.

This importance of the nationalist ethos that sabar artists use in their showcase in Europe reproduce in some ways the politics of identity and belonging created by cultural policies since the Senegal’s independence. Indeed, ever since the independence, the construction of the nation and of common ties between different ethnic groups and regions in Senegal has occurred not only through national politics but also through language, media and art, including music and dance (Castaldi; Mangin; Neveu Kringelbach,

⁹ These information stem from personal interviews with several sabar dancers and instructors who have settled in Europe in the 1990s.

¹⁰ Some dancers and musicians also gather around religious events, for Muslim celebrations (*korité* and *tabaski*) or for the coming of Mouride marabouts.

Dance circles). This national culture is strongly based on different elements of wolof culture while at the same time incorporating different elements of other ethnic groups from Senegal (Sarr and Thiaw), leading to a so-called process of “wolofisation” of national culture. In the domain of dance, this cultural nationalism has on the one side fetishised ethnic differences, by the creation and fixation in ballets of choreographies from each ethnic group in Senegal (Castaldi; Neveu Kringelbach). On the other side, the popularisation of *mbalax* and sabar dance performances in Dakar’s popular classes has created a national dance culture common to the youth in the capital. This popular dance culture which is performed in current *tannëbers* and sabar events is based strongly on wolof and lebou dance repertoires, but it is at the same time nourished by the consummation of global movements and flows.¹¹ Today, in sabar dance groups in Dakar and abroad, most part of the dancers and musicians—whatever their ethnic belonging—speak wolof, and have a knowledge of sabar rhythms and moves. As in other African countries where popular dances have strongly encapsulated national constructions (Askew; Djebbari), performances of sabar thrive on this complex Senegalese national culture which is infused both with a wolof ethos and with multiple ethnicities.

When they travel and meet in Europe, sabar dancers still assert this multiplicity and this balance between ethnic and national elements. Most of the time, sabar is transmitted as an original Senegalese “tradition.” Besides, depending on their ethnic belonging, and also on their familiarity with ethnologic theories, some dance teachers explain that dance rhythms are initially related to lebou or wolof ethnic groups. Others take the opportunity of sabar workshops and classes to teach dance repertoires from their ethnic group which are less famous than sabar, such as Serere or Diola dances. Through this multiplicity of meanings and repertoires, Senegalese dancers assert in Europe flexible national identities, depending on contexts and dances, and they highlight the many identities that they combine.

Furthermore, in Europe, this strong attachment to a national identification is often considered as part of a broader “Africa” or “African identity,” that Senegalese dancers would be representatives of. Since the 1990s, Senegalese dancers and musicians have developed their activities within the broad market of “African dances and music,” and they have collaborated with artists from other West African countries, for example for African festivals¹², and Africans days (“Journées africaines”). In addition to their activities in Senegalese diasporas for national ceremonies, sabar artists perform with artists from other African countries, whether it be in “traditional,” “African contemporary” or “Afro-fusion” style. Depending on what countries and towns they settle in, many dancers explain the importance of engaging collaborations with other African artists, and to assert a kind of Pan-Africanism from below, in order to give value and visibility to an African culture that is too often marginalised or invisibilized in European cities.

As so, even if Senegalese dancers and musicians have created their own networks and markets, they are part of this broad market of Africanity which is structured by the work of associations and festivals which promote “African cultures” in Europe, and which tend to organise encounters and events between artists and repertoires from Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina-Faso, etc... In Lyon (France) for example, one of the main associations promoting African dances is named *Afromundo*, and its aim is to “shed the light on the diversity and legacy of African musicians and dancers, to struggle against a stereotyped and reductive vision of these aesthetics,” and to “connect all the dances that have African roots.”¹³ In that perspective, they organise classes in Kizomba, afro-hip-hop, sabar or Congolese dances, and they try to create dance circle parties (“afro-circles”) where all these repertoires meet and mix. At the same time, while promoting hybridity and Afro-diasporic hybrid genres, this association gives advantage in their sabar classes to instructors considered as experts in the “tradition” and whose pedagogy relies more on “traditional” rhythms and moves than on new dance genres. A few Senegalese dancers interact with these global markets of Africanity and blackness to create their representation of tradition, even if most part of their connections and collaborations develop in their diasporic milieu. They use the African dance market to create new

¹¹ For example, one famous woman dancer from Dakar explained to me once that many dance steps that she has invented have been inspired by Bollywood movies and Indian dances that she has discovered on DVDs and on Youtube. Interview with Ndeye Gueye, March 2018, Guediawaye.

¹² In France, we can mention the festival *Africolor* in Paris or *Africa Fête* in Marseilles, and in Switzerland the *LAFF* (Lausanne Afro Fusion Festival), *Festival Couleur Café* (Geneva) or *Afro-Pfingsten Festival* (Winterthur).

¹³ See the website of this association: <http://afromundo.fr/a-propos/>

opportunities for economic income, for recognition and for integration within European cities, where they become cultural ambassadors of Senegal and Africa.

In that way, Senegalese dancers in Europe reinvent their dance performances between ethnicity, nationalism and Africanity. As I will describe now, even if this category of Africanity is partly racialised and assimilated to an idea of blackness, it becomes above all in sabar classes an opened and accessible resource that sabar students would acquire, learn and embody through learning dance.

Beyond Blackness? Africanity as an Open Resource

Apparently, dance workshops and classes can look like scenes of assertion of essentialized frontiers dividing African dancers and their Western audience. Indeed, sabar classes are often conceived as “intercultural” moments, which create an encounter between two different “cultures,” Africa and Europe, conceived as two blocks. The learning process of sabar is seen as a process of parting with Western or European ways of being and body techniques, in order to learn and embody an “African” or Senegalese way of moving. Observations of dance classes and interviews with dancers and students confirm the existence of racialized¹⁴ or essentialized speeches that tend to present the existence of an intrinsic difference between how African and Western people dance:

Western people, they have a problem with time and rhythm. Their body is on the wrong time. Each time I see a Western person dancing, it is rare that he has the right timing. [...] Of course, I have seen European women who dance very well: Y., she dances very well, S. also that I know; but there is still something missing. It is something that is inside us, I don't know why it is inside us. It is the style... I have not yet seen a foreigner who dances sabar with the style that is required.

Interview with H., Dancer, Lyon, March 2017 (my translation from French).

As in this conversation, some dancers consider that there are intrinsic body competences which distinguish Senegalese dancers from their European students (and also sometimes from other African dancers), and they reproduce an essentialist discourse which partly relies on racial distinctions between Africans and Western people. Beyond stereotypes appearing in interviews, this racial distinction is also visible in interactions and explanations occurring in dance classes, which often tend to interpret students' behaviour and their way of thinking, dancing and moving in relation with their belonging to the category of “toubab” in other words as “white.” In Senegal, as described by other studies, the word “toubab” doesn't only refer to phenotypic features, but to “a set of attitudes that reveals the ignorance of the local meanings and social codes” (Quashie). As so, these dance classes reproduce a distinction between “toubabs” and Senegalese people that partly relies on racial categorisation, but also on cultural and social characteristics.

But simultaneously the observation of a number of dance classes and of some pathways of European students reveal that these borders between whiteness and blackness are also porous and that the whole process of teaching sabar is to subvert them momentarily, to make the other (European) become the same (African). In their speeches during sabar parties and events, sabar musicians and dancers often insist on the fact that sabar “belongs to everybody,” and they assert that French, Swiss, German or other European women who have trained well are as skilled as Senegalese people to dance sabar, which is a “universal language.” In a same dynamic, this network of sabar musicians, dancers and students is often presented as a large “family,” who shares a common passion for this dance tradition, beyond racial borders:

“We have the heart open to share it with Europeans. Because we are all the same, there are no differences. There is not anything like “I am white, you are Black.” There are no differences, I don't see any difference. We are all human beings, we are brothers, we are sisters, you see?”

Interview with Khalifa Fall, dancer, October 2017, Lausanne (my translation from French).

¹⁴ Continuing on contemporary researches, I consider the notion of race as one of the many sorts of construction of alterity and difference, which—depending on cases—relies on somatic, historical, cultural and/or genealogical characteristics (Wimmer; Brubaker and Cooper).

In a way, the attempt to universalise this national heritage answers to market constraints, and the representation of the universal cohesion of “sabarists” is one of the many manifestations of a business of emotions, sociabilities and friendship that goes with the commerce of music and dance (Ericksen).

But beyond this sort of universalist discourses, the porosity of borders in Africanity is also manifested when we observe the pathways of “conversions” to Africanity (Raout and Chabloz) that some European women experience through sabar and through their interactions with Senegalese musicians and dancers. This phenomenon first appears in dance classes themselves, where students are called by their teachers to adopt as much as possible a Senegalese way of being and moving, by wearing wraps, and displaying attitudes which would make them look like real Senegalese, or real *gewël* (griots)¹⁵. During a dance workshop observed in Paris, a male dance teacher encouraged, for example, his thirty students to sing in *wolof* a song where they claimed to be as real *gewël* and to adopt gestures and positions that made their dance identifiable as griot’s.

Furthermore, within the field of sabar students, a number of women share a long history of relationships with Senegal and sabar dance, and they travel to Dakar at least once a year. Some of them are married with Senegalese musicians or dancers and organise workshops for them in their home city in Europe, contributing largely to the promotion of sabar and Senegal in European contexts, by making their economic and cultural capitals available for their husbands’ or friends’ activities¹⁶. In discussions collected with these women, the practice of sabar appears often as part of a broader experience of self-development through the embodiment of non-western activities, and through travels in Africa. In some cases, it can lead to deeper identity conversions, where these women engage into a “quest for themselves through the practice of the others” (Raout and Chabloz): they not only involve in the practice of sabar but also enrol in the learning of *wolof*, undertake changes in their social spheres or transform their clothing. Questioned about their feelings of belonging to Africanity, two women engaged in these deep relationships with sabar and Senegal gave me some interesting views about this process of identification:

Some people tell me “you are better African than the Africans.” But I don’t plan to do it, it’s just coming. I don’t know, it’s a part of me. I can’t explain it.

Interview with S., sabar student, Dakar, January 2018.

Me, I really don’t feel Senegalese, but my boyfriend and all Africans that I know tell me that I am a real African. Not only because of dance, but also because of how I am. My colleague at work, who is not an African but has a sister married to a Congolese, always tells me that “you are a real African, you speak loud as African people, you have a way to be and to move, that’s it.” But I don’t feel it. I am so much... I am not all the time in this milieu. Yes, I dress up with African clothes that I have made done by a sewer, but I am not all the time... like some women who want to transform themselves. But people often tell me that. You know, in Senegal, people call me the “white griot”!

Interview with M., sabar student, Geneva, June 2018 (my translation from French).

As we see here, these identifications with Africanity are not unequivocal, and they are much more related to an assignation of Africanity by the others than to a simple self-identification by these women. Africanity represents an opened and flexible resource that dancers and musicians transmit to their students through their teachings, and through an interactional process of identity assignations. As proved by this observation of interactions and pathways in the conversion of sabar students, the Africanity displayed and invented on the sabar scene is not exclusive and reduced to a blackness enclosed in racial borders. On the contrary, its borders are porous, and musicians and dancer’s main role is to include foreigners into the global world of “sabarists” that they are creating.

Another interesting aspect in order to understand the meaning of Africanity in this field is to observe the experience of the few European students with African origins who also attend to these classes. It reveals that the belonging to the Sabar Senegalese world doesn’t mainly rely on a racial categorisation based on skin colour and ancestry, but much more on distinctions between Africa and the West, a category which also includes people identified as “black.”

¹⁵ Griots are considered to be the original possessors and experts of sabar tradition (Tang).

¹⁶ Altair Despres has well analysed this involvement of European women in African dancers’ careers (Despres, *Se faire contemporain*).

In February 2016, during a sabar class close to Lyon, the dance teacher Yelly Thioune expressed his enthusiasm towards the original thing happening in his class that day: for the first time for more than ten years that he had given sabar workshops and classes in Europe, two of his “African sisters” were attending the class. As demonstrated by Yelly’s surprise, the presence of dancers and musicians who assert African origins is not customary in sabar classes and workshops in Europe, contrary to other countries such as the United States, where sabar classes are a place of encounters between African Americans and the new generations of West African migrants (Bizas). Nevertheless, a few exceptions of people connected to Africa by family origins exist, particularly in big cities in France that comprise an important immigrant population, such as Paris, Marseille, and to a lesser extent Lyon. Some of these students from a migrant background have Senegalese origins and have grown up in Europe, and they learn sabar to get closer to their origins. Just as the teaching of the wolof language, sabar allows them to feel recognised as “real Senegalese” when they go back to Senegal for holidays. Others have no specific ties with Senegal, and they consider sabar as a “traditional” repertoire that can get them get closer to their African roots. I met, for example, a young Franco-Ivorian woman at the occasion of several sabar workshops, who explained that during her childhood in Lyon, she often attended sabar ceremonies organised by her Senegalese neighbours and that she was always fascinated by the spectacle of these powerful women dances. Now a dancer and comedian, she is following sabar classes because from her point of view this dance has remained purely “traditional.” For her as for several dancers that I encountered, sabar is indeed often presented as an original African performance, which in contrast to other modern dance styles (such as afrobeat, coupé décalé or African contemporary styles) is not mixing with other dance repertoires—a perception which is actually erroneous, as sabar creations keep incorporating elements from other repertoires, inspired for example by Bollywood movies or by contemporary hip-hop music videos.

Whether they have African origins or not, interviews and observations reveal that social borders and definitions of Africanity do not rely on a racial border, but rather on a set of experiences, knowledge and attitudes that compose the border between Africa and the West. For example, one student who has West-African origins has explained to me that in her experiences with sabar artists in Dakar or in Europe, she often had the feeling to be treated differently than other “white” European students, but that she was still considered as a “toubab,” for example in terms of economic expectations. Likewise, belonging to Senegalese sabar worlds does not only rely on skin colour or on African origins, but much more on the knowledge of different types of cultural codes that allows one to interact with sabar musicians and dancers. This includes dance itself, but also the knowledge of the wolof language, the experience of travelling in Senegal, the ability to understand a set of implicit codes, the knowledge of the Mouride religious customs, and a series of other attitudes which mark the competence to behave as a Senegalese. This is particularly striking in discussions that I had with one sabar teacher (who is now settled in Germany) about the arrival of North American dance students in Senegal for dance workshops, who this dancer considered to be more “difficult” than European women:

With these (African American) women, it is more difficult. Let’s say they are impolite! When they say no, it’s no. It’s hard to work with them, they insult you sometimes. They say “I don’t want to eat this, I don’t want to eat that.” They are like Africans, but they don’t want to live as Africans; they want to live as in Europe and in the United States. While for me, if you come to Africa, it is to see what we are living, to live as African people. If they want to live as they live in Europe, it is not worth coming here. On the contrary, Europeans, when they come to Senegal, they live as typical Africans; they wear wraps, they chat with the people, they dance, they ask questions, they don’t bother you. They eat everything that we eat.

Interview with H., Dancer, Lyon, March 2017 (my translation from French).

As expressed here, the issue in this dance world is not to assert a global blackness that would connect all people from African descent, but really to invent a Senegalese and African identity that would be opened and reachable all over the world, including for Europeans and White people. Musicians and dancers play an important part in this conversion to Africanity, as “converters” (Raout and Chabloz) who teach their students different sorts of elements that will make them get closer to the “African way of life,” through dance workshops in Europe, or through bringing them to Senegal.

In the first two parts of this paper, we observed the local roots and transnational routes of sabar, and we started to trace the constructions of Senegalese, Black and African identities occurring in this transnational dance world which is connected by circulations of Senegalese artists and their students between Europe and Africa. By describing how artists play with flexible and opened conceptions of Africanity and Senegality, we have noticed implicitly how the issue of “tradition” is particularly important in discussions, interactions and legitimisation issues of the sabar world. The last part of this paper will focus more precisely on this issue of tradition, to describe how sabar dancers and musicians on the move contribute to reinvent the content of this tradition through their interactions with African dance market and students.

(Re)inventing the “Tradition” of Sabar in Europe

Paris, July 2017, in a sport hall in the popular neighbourhood of La Chapelle, several dozens of dancers are gathered around the sounds of a collection of sabar musicians and instruments, in order to participate in this annual workshop. The organiser of the event, Yama Wade, is one of the most famous sabar instructors in Europe since she has developed a specific technique to teach European students the “pure tradition” of sabar. During these two weeks, students gather from Europe, the United States and Asia; Yama Wade also invites other sabar instructors and musicians to assist her.

This day, the sabar teacher who introduces the class is a famous choreographer and dancer who has grown up between Louga and Dakar, and who has settled in the South of France a few years ago. He has become famous in sabar dance networks in France and Switzerland, and he is often assisting Yama during her workshops in France. To introduce his class, as many other dancers, he praises Yama’s pedagogic qualities, describing her as the one who knows the real “tradition” of sabar and as an elder in terms of generation. For her part, during her sessions of teaching and the “conferences” that she gives during the week, the so-called “Queen of sabar” underlines the major importance of her mission: preserving the real sabar from all contemporary perversions that this tradition is experiencing.

This dance festival is one of the main events which gathers the network of European sabar, a milieu which is united around a common aim to enhance the “tradition” of sabar throughout the world, but which happens to be also penetrated by diverging conceptions of tradition and transmission.

At the early age of anthropology, the concept of tradition was considered as one of the core objects in this discipline, which was devoted to the study of “exotic” and “traditional” societies. The critical turn in our discipline has later allowed a deconstruction of this notion, considered no more as a fix set of cultural features transmitted from generation to generation, but rather as a strategic and constructed resource. Anthropologists such as Jean Pouillon or Gerard Lenclud have demonstrated that what was often presented as “tradition” was actually a way to shape a certain vision of the past in order to make it correspond to present stakes and meanings (Pouillon; Lenclud). Meanwhile, historians have highlighted that many traditions considered as ancient have actually been invented rather recently (Hobsbawm and Ranger), through interactions and exchanges with other societies and social groups, and as an answer to situations of domination, for example during colonisation (Mary). Finally, recent researches dealing with migrations have demonstrated that contrary to some stereotyped visions of “culture” and “place,” tradition was not dependent on locality, but that it was permanently reconstructed through mobilities of people and goods, among others through tourism and migration (Capone; Guedj).

The case of sabar is a strong example of how migrations and movements, contrary to being the place of a break with “tradition,” are the lever of creation of ideologies of “back to the roots” and traditionalism. Yama Wade is one of the most interesting examples of this process. Born in a Lebou family of Dakar where she has learnt sabar since childhood, she arrived in Paris in 1992, after a career in the best ballets of Dakar, and she started by teaching “djembe”¹⁷ dances, which was more popular at that time in Europe, before she engaged in the transmission of sabar. After a few years, she understood that techniques developed by her peers to teach sabar were doomed to fail, as—from her point of view—other sabar instructors were only teaching “toubabs” a minimal knowledge of sabar, reduced to the transmission of choreographies. Contrary to this, she has developed a pedagogy which aims at transmitting sabar as a language, and to

¹⁷ In the discourses of sabar dancers from Dakar, the word “djembe” refers to mandingue dances and repertoires, that are accompanied by this instrument.

make each student understand its “grammar” and “vocabulary” in order to allow him/her to speak and to be autonomous in improvisation solos, rather than only reproducing teachers’ choreographies. Through that attempt, Yama’s aim is to resist contemporary transformations of sabar performance in Dakar and to preserve a “traditional culture” which is “endangered.” Contrary to the current dance fashion among Dakar’s youth, which permanently creates new rhythms and has forgotten many old dances, Yama insists on the importance to safeguard old dance rhythms which are not practised anymore in contemporary tannëbers, such as *yaaba*, *ndëp*, or *dagañ*.

In Yama’s vision, this pedagogy is also presented as a resistance against western paradigms of dance “techniques,” that she conceives as a European way to fix in a rigid frame something that is essentially fluid, and that each person needs to find by himself/herself:

“One cannot learn sabar by basing it on a technical support, and this is what creates a problem with Europeans. Europeans always need a technical support. I have the habit to say that they are skilled to transform anything into a technique. [...] But I don’t want to go in this direction. I am integrated, assimilated, open-minded, I can do everything as Europeans do, but this is the only thing that I don’t want to assimilate from Europeans, this technical aspect.”¹⁸

On the contrary, Yama uses a pedagogy based on the dissection of musical rhythms and body movements and individual “coachings” to encourage her students to create their own sabar, while respecting the grammar and codes of the dance. As so, her traditionalist pedagogy is conceived as a way to preserve sabar’s deep improvisational dimension and its power of expression in individual singularities.

The interesting point regarding Yama’s reinvention of tradition in migration is that in the course of her career and her interactions with African dance students and associations, Yama’s method and her presentation of tradition has intertwined with the influences encountered; her discourse reveals an arrangement between different conceptions that Yama has composed through her interactions with the market of African dances and with her students. This is obvious in the presentation of sabar as a healing practice and as a means for self-development that Yama gives in her classes. At the occasion of an intensive workshop, she described, for example, her teachings as a way for her students to access their “inner truth” and to free themselves:

You are all here for a common aim: to acquire freedom, independence, to develop something that comes from yourself, a freedom that is inside of you, and this is why you’re here. Yes, this is the truth. And you cannot get this if us, as teachers, we come, and we impose our sabar. [...] It doesn’t work like this in Senegal. This is why each person has his own sabar. In sabar, there’s a part where you need to learn to develop your own sabar, to do your choices, to free yourself.

Yama Wade, Lyon, April 2017 (my translation from French).

Even if presented as intrinsically related to a Senegalese conception of sabar dance, Yama’s method appends to a vocabulary and to methods which resemble clearly some contemporary practices of “self-development,” that are present in the practice of spirituality and disciplines such as yoga and meditation (Requillé). Several of Yama’s students consider sabar as a way to heal their inner pains, and Yama herself often explains that “sabar heals,” both physically and psychically.

Actually, this representation of sabar performance as a healing practice both answers to European fantasies about extra-European mystic (Hoyez; Chablotz), and to certain uses of sabar performance in wolof and lebou society. Indeed, several rhythms from the sabar repertoire are known to stem from local rituals, such as the *ndëp* possession ritual (Neveu Kringelbach, *Dance circles* 86). In Dakar neighbourhoods, particularly among the Lebou ethnic group, *ndëp* ceremonies are employed to cure psychological troubles. Yama Wade was one of the first to include *ndëp* movement in her classes for Western people, as a consequence of her project of preservation and transmission of sabar origins. Through the channel of her teachings and interactions with her students, Yama invents in that manner a pedagogy of sabar which combines different conceptions of dance and “tradition,” associating the healing power of sabar observed in Dakar, with the conceptions and expectations of her western audiences.

¹⁸ Extract of the documentary movie, Chiffot, Nadine. “*Sabar, souffle de vie*,” 2015.

In the field of African contemporary dance, Altaïr Despres describes that African artists are pushed to “westernize” themselves in order to gain credibility in a dance field that first emerged in the western hemisphere,” while at the same time retaining a certain degree of Africanity (Despres, *Les figures imposées de la mondialisation*). During their travels in Europe, the experience and identity representation of these African contemporary dancers are partly conditioned by their inscription within a network of European institutions and by their expectations or visions of dance, Africa and the artistic scene. On the contrary, the field of sabar has developed in Europe aside from cultural institutions, and the spreading of sabar in Europe has relied mainly on the action of some individuals such as Yama Wade, who have adapted their transmission of “tradition” basing on interactions with individuals and associations, or on their individual pathway, rather than on the format imposed by Western institutions.

Through her teachings all over Europe and her collaborations with associations which intend to promote sabar, Yama is contributing to create another image of the “tradition” of sabar in Europe, that has inspired a lot of her peers and the young generation of sabar artists in Europe. In order to impose her vision of tradition, she transmits a certain conception of sabar to her students, but she also tries to involve the new generation of sabar instructors settled in Europe. As part of the first generation of sabar dancers who have come to Europe and have spread sabar, she receives respect from the youngest dancers coming to Europe, and many of them request her support to start their activities and to integrate in this dance world.

Surely, her visions and conceptions of the tradition of sabar don’t win unanimous support, and many other dancers and students don’t share her rigorous vision of “tradition.” On the one side, a part of European students criticise the harshness of her pedagogy and her severity with her followers. On the other side, other sabar teachers develop different conceptions of sabar transmission and pedagogy: some dancers insist more during their classes on fun, and inclusion of new dance moves which are popular among Dakar’s youth, such as *musicale* or *fass*, considering that Yama takes the risk of being cut from Dakar’s current sabar life; others who adhere to *bayefall* religion may favour in their teachings the promotion of *bayefall* dances and rhythms, that they include as part of the traditional sabar repertoire. But beyond these distinctions, most part of sabar dancers rely in their teachings to European students on the same discourse about tradition, considered as a main criterion for their legitimacy as teachers and for the value of their knowledge.

Consequently, these artists on the move participate in the reinvention of a Senegalese dance repertoire in Europe and produce different sorts of “roots in reverse” (Shain) of sabar tradition. Contrary to models which tend to locate the “pure tradition” in an original locality, and as proved by many studies about the transnationalisation of music or religions, sabar tradition is now (re)invented out of its initial space, through global mobility, connections and interactions.

Conclusion

In past times, sabar dance circles were considered as a transgressive scene within Dakar’s society, where women could subvert social norms of respectability and resolve different types of tensions. But since a few decades, it has become a new sort of “contact zone” where different individuals and social groups recompose subjectivities, power relations and identity categories. Dakar’s new subculture of sabar dancers meet up there with European people and engage in interactions, transactions and circulations which allow them to accomplish social mobility, and sometimes to achieve their dreams of migration to Europe.

While maintaining connections with their dance groups, neighbourhoods, families and towns of origin, through digital connections and travels back to Africa, sabar dancers and musicians recompose, in Europe, opportunities to maintain their activity, through dance classes and performances. Around the transmission of sabar in migration, the “contact zones” (Clifford, *Routes*) that they recompose become a place where ideas of Africanity, Senegality, and tradition are debated and redefined. Far from being fix and rigid categories, these identity categories are porous, fluid and flexible, and allow social actors to play with social frontiers, depending on the situations and markets that they are encountering. In order to pursue their strategies of integration and success within African dance markets, these artists finally contribute to set “tradition” in motion and to transform Africanity into an open resource, by playing the role of “converters” for their students and by displaying their reinvention of national, ethnic and African identities.

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Research Article

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Music at the Black Baltic Sea

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0032>

Received August 31, 2018; accepted December 9, 2018

Abstract: Music is intimately implicated in racialising discourses. This is particularly pronounced in the case of so-called black music, i.e. the types of music that are commonly associated with African-American identity, most notably jazz and various forms of popular music. Genres of popular music are furthermore constructed continuously on the basis of a notion of their “black roots.” The idea of the “black roots” of jazz and popular music is an essential ingredient of Paul Gilroy’s (1993) analysis of a specific authenticity of blackness. To stress the history and consequences of the pre-twentieth century slave trade and institutionalised racism, Gilroy has coined the concept “Black Atlantic” that builds on the idea of a distinct double consciousness inherent in blackness as simultaneously a fundamental constituent and the ultimate other of the West. In the article, I aim at rethinking the notion of the Black Atlantic in relation to North-Eastern Europe. By way of marine analogy I ask, and building on the notions of the Black Pacific and the Black Mediterranean, how to formulate an analytical design “the Black Baltic Sea.” In addition to addressing the impact of global racialising tendencies in music, this entails considering the cultural dynamics at issue in relation to the dynamics of postsocialism in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and Northern European indigeneity. On the basis of such a consideration, I argue that the styles of “black music” have been appropriated and adopted throughout the BSR, albeit in clearly different national manifestations which for their part imply variegated intersections between postcolonial and postsocialist processes. These intersections become manifest in the discourses over “new Europeanness” in music and the construction of national musical traditions, particularly when juxtaposed with the prevailing Islamophobia as regards treatments of Muslim music in mainstream media.

Keywords: postcolonialism, postsocialism, racism, authenticity, Northern Europe

In early 2014, in a magazine article focussing on “the voice of the Afro-Finnish generation,” rapper Kani Kullervo (a.k.a. Abdikani Hussein) was interviewed and introduced as the first rapper in Finland of Somali background and the only Finnish Muslim rapper so far. In the article, the emergence of also other “Afro-Finnish” rappers is mentioned and discussed especially in relation to the choice of language. While the others rap all but exclusively in English, Kani Kullervo performs in Finnish. “Who’s going to listen to me in English?” he asks and continues: “Finnish is my mother tongue that I speak every day and all the time. I can communicate much better in Finnish. ... If I rapped in English, people would come and say to me that why do you try to be so black...” (qtd. Kolu 13).

The example serves to point towards different axes of meaning that surround the notion of blackness in the north-eastern corner of Europe. One axis is constituted by language, while other dimensions in this grid involve ethnicity, nationality, “race,” religion and generations of migration. One can also bring in gender dynamics, as all the rappers mentioned in the article are male. Moreover, if “voice” is considered as something else than oscillation of eardrums, caused by conducting air from the lungs through the vocal cords, political dimensions are evident. And of course, when one is talking about meaning-making and communication, the notion of culture is exploited.

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In more precise terms, my aim is to interrogate the idea of blackness as a category of cultural identity through considering its variable dimensions as they manifest themselves in Finland and in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) in more general. This aim is furthermore linked to an objective to broaden the scope of postcolonial theorisation and studies by paying attention to the particularities of the BSR, most notably with respect to the Baltic Sea as a geopolitical boundary area between the (old) East and West. As racialisation is a crucial topic of postcolonial studies, the above goals are summed up in the term “Black Baltic Sea.” More recent debates over global migration and the so-called refugee crisis of 2016 have in turn fuelled discussion about the role of the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden—in the global processes of postcoloniality. These issues have become topical not only because of the increased numbers of migrants from outside the region and the European Union but also due to the ascendancy of openly anti-immigrant right-wing populism in party politics during the 2010s, particularly in Finland and Sweden but manifested most violently in the anti-multiculturalist mass murder on Utøya, Norway, in 2011.

Such questions are profound cultural and societal ones, and music provides a propitious prospect to examine them in detail due to its multiple facets and modes of communication. In a single musical utterance, one has verbal, timbral, aesthetic and bodily expressions with their technological, gendered, sexual, cultural, political, social and religious implications. In this sense, it is wise to posit that music is “soundly organised humanity” (Blacking). An additional impetus here is the fact that while there has been ample attention paid to the dynamics surrounding the notion of blackness in the Nordic countries, very little has been written about its musical dimensions (see however Brown et al.; Rastas & Seye). Regarding blackness, one should also note the pervasiveness of the notion of “black music” that encapsulates blues, jazz, rhythm ‘n’ blues, soul, funk, reggae and rap, and is deeply associated with African-American identity. In the BSR, such cultural politics of classification become further complicated when juxtaposed with dynamics of postsocialism, indigeneity and the continuously shifting phases of racism.

Countercultures of Modernity

The moniker “Black Baltic Sea” is based on a redevelopment of cultural scholar Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic, by which he refers to a particular counterculture of modernity that hinges on a peculiar double consciousness inherent in blackness as a form of cultural categorisation that is simultaneously irrevocably modern and antithetical to the idea of the West. On the opening pages of *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy maintains that “all blacks in the West ... stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages,” namely those of nationality and ethnicity (1). These, in turn, are inextricably tied to ideas about authenticity and cultural integrity, to an extent it is possible to talk about cultural nationalism based on “the overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of ‘black’ and ‘white’ people” (2).

Crucially, the Black Atlantic is a form of critical analysis of modernity that interrogates the centrality of racism and the whole notion of race in it by offering a theorisation of creolisation, hybridity and cultural mutation that “provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory” (16), and stems from a “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (19). What is pivotal in such an analysis is a refusal of “the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution,” supported by a recognition of hybridity and intermixture as “not the fusion of two purified essences but rather a meeting of two heterogeneous multiplicities that in yielding themselves up to each other create something durable and entirely appropriate to troubled anti-colonial times” (144). As a result, in the end, the Black Atlantic becomes constituted as “a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding” (198), signalling “the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture en route to better theories of racism” (223).

In his summary of Gilroy’s work in general and *The Black Atlantic* in particular, Paul Williams emphasises the inextricability of such theorisation from “a political project to end racism’s influence on

human life” (3), a project that is not the property of the primary victims of racism but something in which everyone is implicated. Furthermore, instead of simplistic dogmas about being more tolerant and less prejudiced, at issue is a critical reflection into the worldwide political and social structures whose formation has been decidedly influenced by race-thinking and direct racism (3-4). Indeed, while Gilroy’s work has received criticism on the basis of concentrating on the African-American experience and the associated “slave sublime” (Williams 99-100, 134-136), there is a need to consider the ways in which these historical forms of racism have informed the later forms of racial(ised) social relations. Gilroy himself suggests that “the concentrated intensity of the slave experience is something that marked out blacks as the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later” (221).

The dilemmas in question manifest themselves also within the BSR in the twenty-first century, albeit conditioned by their different national frameworks, musically and otherwise. Regardless of national—and nationalist—peculiarities in relation to migration, indigeneity and processes of postsocialism, certain master narratives prevail when it comes to blackness. In the words of Obi Phrase, a Sierra-Leonean reggae musician-activist with whom I collaborated in Finland in 2014-15 within a documentary film project, as he was reflecting upon his activities as the primus motor of an anti-Ebola campaign and the symbolic significance of having the ambassador of South Africa to Finland participate in the campaign:

We can never talk about Africa’s liberation without going into the transatlantic slave trade. We can never talk about Africa’s liberation without mentioning the apartheid system in South Africa, and ... thinking about exactly how they overcome or overcame that system; you know that South Africa is like, still licking wounds from brutality.

It is indeed arguable that the New World plantation slavery and the institutionalised racial segregation in South Africa constitute two master narratives associated with blackness, and that their legacy has been conspicuously resilient after their formal abolition. Gilroy does not dwell on the South African situation in detail, but he does refer to the name of Nelson Mandela as “a paternal talisman” that has the capability to alleviate intraracial differences, as “a black hero whose global significance lies beyond the limits of his partial South African citizenship and the impossible national identity which goes with it” (*The Black Atlantic* 95). What makes this assertion of particular relevance to my purposes is the explicitly musical context in which it is introduced; at issue is a new version of the 1960s hit *I’m So Proud*, made famous originally by the Chicagoan proto-reggae vocal trio the Impressions, retitled *Proud of Mandela* and topping the UK reggae charts in 1990. In Gilroy’s estimation, the song “is a useful example in that it brings Africa, America, Europe, and the Caribbean seamlessly together” and offers “an analogy for comprehending the lines of affiliation and association which take the idea of the diaspora beyond its symbolic status as the fragmentary opposite of some imputed racial essence” (95).

The Roars of the Black Atlantic

Music does hold a specific place in the theorisation of the Black Atlantic, to the extent some are willing to deem it overemphasised, at the expense of visual arts and religious life especially (King 9-12). To be sure, there is a lot to be learned from the latter spheres, yet one should remember that when discussing music, it is the importance of bodily performance—as opposed to less immediately accessible literary or visual media—for the Black Atlantic cultural expression that is at issue. According to Williams, there are three distinct forms of social and cultural critique that so-called black music represents. First, there is the critique of capitalist labour, expressed most commonly through the metaphor of the slave experience; second, the critique of injustice, replete with references to “law as an unjust tool of state power”; and third, the critique of racist historiography that deprives the black Atlantic populations of any historical agency, for instance by reworking older songs and recounting major black musical innovators (90-92). What is important to note here is the non-verbal forms of expression that come into play, not only as stylistic references but also as platforms for phatic and ineffable meaning-making in more general. Gilroy himself emphasises here the significance of forms of racial terror in particular and maintains that while they were unspeakable, they

were not inexpressible. Thus one of his main aims “is to explore how residual traces of their necessarily painful expression still contribute to historical memories inscribed and incorporated into the volatile core of Afro-Atlantic cultural creation” (73).

This is further linked to Gilroy’s notion of the slave sublime, by which he refers to the unattainability of the slave experience and its “unsayable claims to truth” (37), as well as to “the centrality of terror in stimulating black creativity” (131). This means inevitably that heightened attention must be paid on the phatic and the ineffable, for instance by considering how “the formation of a community of needs and solidarity [is] made audible in the music itself” (37). Williams summarises all this by noting that “[s]inging in a musical tradition that came out of the experience of slavery ... pulls words into new aural shapes because the pain ... resists being conveyed in spoken language” (100). A crucial aspect of the slave sublime is, however, that even the most radical experiments with expressive techniques are bound to fail as the slave experience defies them. The residual traces of the ineffable terror audible in forms of black music, then, offer no redemption but rather a confirmation that the redemption is not possible (see Gilroy, *Against Race* 260).

Gilroy’s ideas about the Black Atlantic are well-known within (popular) music studies but rather often utilised as brief and thus necessarily generalising references to “a variegated constellation” of musical styles in the African diaspora (Austerlitz 1) which nevertheless are—well-nigh paradoxically—based on “a very real common aesthetic” or “musical pan-Africanism” (Bilby 284; see also Brown 93), to the importance of kinesics and performance instead of textuality and narrative (Hutchinson 87), and to the politics of authenticity associated with forms of black music in particular (Moore 215-17). There are also those for whom Gilroy’s work constitutes merely incidental footnotes in rather sweeping ruminations over the relationships between Black and White Atlantic music that in the end prove to be tantamount to a juxtaposition between (African American) orality and (European) music notation (Mosley). There are of course important exceptions to this tendency to utilise the notion of the Black Atlantic uncritically, almost as a given; J. Griffith Rollefson, for instance, engages in reworking Gilroy’s ideas in the context of musical Afrofuturism, albeit all but exclusively by concentrating on the notion of “anti-anti-essentialism,” developed by Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*, rather than reassessing the foundations of the Black Atlantic itself (86, 90-92). In a related fashion, Nabeel Zuberi takes his impetus from what he perceives as a risk from Gilroy’s part to come “close to technological determinism in his criticisms of image culture and digitization” (133). Admittedly, the point of Zuberi’s disquisition is geared towards Gilroy’s later, more pessimistic writing about black popular music, but he does ground his discussion on detailed scrutiny of the concept of the diaspora in particular, as it emerges from Gilroy’s earlier work. Such a scrutiny, he maintains, “helps us to understand the emergence of black British diasporic aesthetics” (135) and how a number of black musicians in the UK, associated with the marketing labels trip-hop and jungle, “are in fact translating many of the older techniques into the new digital environment” and “remain in dialogue with previous and current forms of Jamaican and African-American music” (139).

Also Simon Featherstone in his examination of *Postcolonial Cultures* notes how after the initial emphasis on music as a prime site of black cultural politics, there is an element of disillusionment in Gilroy’s work on the basis of the “revolutionary conservatism” of global capitalism and “visual culture of simulation” that grew in the 1990s, signalling the end of the Black Atlantic resistance and change. In Featherstone’s reading, in Gilroy’s writing in the closing years of the twentieth century, the critical potential of Black Atlantic music transforms into “empty rhetorics of marginality” and complacent individualism. (Featherstone 37-8.) Admittedly, for Gilroy himself, it is particularly the US rap of the 1990s, in contrast to earlier “soulful” forms of black music, that represents a dilution of authenticity in favour of commercialism (Gilroy, *Against Race*, 179-82).

Flows from the Atlantic to Other Oceans and Its Inlets

Recognising that the notion of the Black Atlantic has served as one of the most influential theories of diaspora and cultural hybridity, it is hardly a surprise to encounter its localised applications, as it were, in

the form of the Black Pacific and the Black Mediterranean. In relation to the Irish diaspora in North America, also the formulation “Green Atlantic” has been utilised (e.g., O’Neill & Lloyd). In her analysis of the links between social and aesthetic performance and environmental history by setting “a natural disaster in a dialectical relationship with cultural memory,” induced by a volcanic eruption on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, Kathleen M. Gough for example refers to the “Black and Green Atlantic” as a signal of “how the island’s Afro-Irish legacy was set in motion by the green (ecological) crisis” (102-3), yet with no references to Gilroy’s seminal ideas.

The idea of the Black Pacific, in contrast, has been based explicitly on Gilroy’s work by its proponents, even if in a somewhat isolated manner. Bernard Scott Lucious gives direct credit to Gilroy, yet noting how the Black Atlantic “is not synonymous with the African diaspora” and therefore “should be understood as a synecdoche; it represents a part, but not the whole of the black (cultures of the) world,” and how the “coinage and usage of ‘Black Pacific’ ... represents another part” (152n2). This part, then, is effectively “an emergent site of critical inquiry and cultural space at the interstices of three diasporas” that for their part are informed by the experiences of African-American military men in the Asia-Pacific, Asian “military brides” and the Afro-Amerasian children (122-3). What this means is a recognition of the interwovenness of blackness and “yellowness” (Asianness) as general frames of cultural identification in the north-western shores of the Pacific Ocean, but crucially also taking notice of the existence of the “black” indigenous populations in the area. In Lucious’s estimation, it is the experiences and testimonies of Vietnamese Afro-Amerasians which are of particularly revealing nature in relation to the cultural and social dynamics in question (123-4).

For Lucious and other proponents of the Black Pacific, it does remain such, at least in terms of decibel levels. This is to say that while in the reworkings of Gilroy’s ideas a lot of attention has been paid to the different “interdiasporic sites of critical inquiry” (Lucious 125), not much has been said about the significance of music—whether in communicating the residues of the ineffable terror associated with the slave sublime or not—in the Black Pacific, or the Black Mediterranean, or any other Black mass of salty water for that matter. The reasons for this are beyond my scope, yet I cannot resist insinuating such an *oversight*—Gilroy never ceases to stress the importance of musical details—results mainly if not exclusively from disciplinary boundaries. Gilroy is a sociologist, is he not, and thus his remarks should be redeveloped within social sciences, and the musical details are arguably best left to musicologists.

The same goes by and large for the “Black Mediterranean,” which has been introduced as a unit of analysis for investigating the role of the African diaspora in the Francophone and Italian worlds especially. In relation to this, as well as to attempts to identify a “black Indian Ocean,” Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin Kelley note how such scholarship suggests “that large bodies of water are not barriers but avenues for transnational, transoceanic trade, cultural exchange, and transformation” (29). Admittedly, their remarks date back to the time before the so-called immigration crisis in Europe in the mid-2010s, and more recently, the notion of the black Mediterranean has accrued more currency in analyses about borders, hospitality, historical subjectivity and “colonial amnesia” in the relations between Africa and Europe (Proglío; Danewid). These analyses tend to concentrate on ethical issues in pro-refugee activism for instance, and musical activities remain outside their focus.

A case in point is provided by Gabriele Proglío’s reading of the Mediterranean as “an excess space of signification.” By this she suggests moving beyond the conventional dichotomies that have been utilised in conceptualising Africa and Europe, and conceiving the Mediterranean as “a fluid space of connection between different cultures, nations, continents and subjectivities,” a space which “can be used as an empty and meaningless space not only by non-European people in order to rethink their subjectivities and their connections with Africa and Europe” (411). Intriguingly, Proglío relies on Gilroy’s writings and refers to the centrality of black music in representing the said excess, yet does not discuss the reasons for excluding musical phenomena from her investigation in the assemblages of memories of migrants from the Horn of Africa, despite the recognition of the centrality of “identity-making cultural practices (music, dance, food, etc.)” in attempts to “subvert the official Eurocentric creation of knowledge (history, literature, geography, etc.)” (419).

The Subregions of the Baltic Sea Region

Disciplinary cautiousness towards music notwithstanding, the ideas about the Black Pacific and the Black Mediterranean provide useful points of departure for theorising the Black Baltic Sea as an interdiasporic site and an excess space of signification that is implicated in its own dynamics of postcolonial racialisation, prejudices against blackness and histories of migration. Not only does the Black Baltic Sea provide people with possibilities for rethinking their subjectivities and connections with African-ness in particular, but to interrelate these with more nuanced dynamics of North-South relations, as well as of those between the East and the West. This is to state the obvious fact that the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is not uniform societally, politically or culturally, and in its contemporary constellation, comprises six primary geopolitical subregions which all have their particular historical trajectories.

First, as the name of the region suggests, there are the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the eastern shores. After being Soviet republics for five decades, they regained their independence in 1991 during the turmoil that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union; since 2004, they have been members of NATO, which can be taken as an indication of post-Cold-War, or postsocialist, processes at play (see, e.g. Riim). Much of the same can be said and written about Poland on the southern side of BSR, though it never was a Soviet state but merely a member of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (TFCMA) known as the Warsaw Pact, and joined NATO in 1999.

Second, further in the east, there is the “unstable” cause of postsocialist relations, tensions and possible security threats, namely Russia (Riim, 34). To a substantial degree, contemporary Russia represents the surrogate of the Soviet Union in global politics, or what has been labelled by some political commentators as “Cold War II,” referring to the heightened unease in the international relations between the West and Russia (and China) specifically since 2014 (Lind).

Third, moving north counter-clockwise, a particular strand in postsocialist processes is constituted by Finland. While the country has remained neutral in terms of military alliances since World War II, it had its own bilateral TFCMA with the Soviet Union, and because of the friendly, cooperative and assisting relations—or submissive stagnation, depending on one’s stance—the term Finlandisation, or *Finnlandisierung*, was coined in German-speaking Central Europe. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, at issue is a “process or result of becoming obliged for economic reasons to favour (or refrain from opposing) the interests of [a powerful neighbouring state] despite not being formally allied to it politically.”

The fourth geopolitical subregion at issue is constituted by Sápmi (in the North Sámi orthography), the land of the indigenous Saami populations. As the different spellings imply, at issue are several languages and cultural traits within a larger group of indigenous people, and as a consequence, debates abound over the proper criteria for asserting one’s Saami identity. In addition, in recent decades many Saami have moved from the very north to the “southern” cities and generations have already grown up there, constituting a demographic category known as the City-Saami. With respect to the ethnic dynamics in northernmost Europe the Saami hold a pivotal place, not least due to forcible attempts at assimilation in the past and to disputes over cultural appropriation in the present day. It is arguable that especially in Finland the Saami became the targets of fierce racist politics in the 1930s in the attempts of the country’s political and cultural elite to prove the racial position of Finns as one of the Nordic races, or at least not as the much-despised Mongols (see, e.g. Kemiläinen).

Next, on the western side of the Baltic Sea, there is Sweden, also known as the “People’s Home” (*Folkhemmet* in Swedish) due to its egalitarian social democratic politics in the post-World-War-II decades in particular. As a result of an amalgamation of war-time neutrality, experience and flexibility in refugee admission from Norway, Finland and the Baltic countries during the war, and the realisation of the importance of refugees’ contribution to the labour market as well as of the benefits of granting foreigners equal rights and social security, Sweden emerged by the mid-1950s as a country of practically free immigration. Yet it should be noted that until the 1970s, non-European immigration into Sweden was minimal, and thus it may be reasonable to maintain “that Swedish immigration policy has been guided not only by welfare state ambitions, labour policy, economic and humanitarian considerations, or by concerns for the security of the state, but that it was also a product of salient perceptions of ethnicity” (Byström 620).

Afterwards, nevertheless, the country has become “internationally renowned as one of the most prominent representatives of an officially declared multicultural policy,” even if there is ample evidence about the discrimination against Finnish migrants in the 1970s (Borevi 138, 143). The more recent ascension of the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats and the re-introduction of passport control on the intra-Nordic borders after the 2016 “crisis” suggest the People’s Home is creaking.

Finally, to summarise the BSR cultural dynamics in a general fashion, one may note how the south-western bottom of the Baltic Sea constitutes, loosely speaking and writing, the north-eastern corner of Western Europe. In this sense, and particularly during the Cold War (I), the Baltic Sea epitomised for its part the Iron Curtain that separated the East from the West (in the European scale). Proponents of the Cold War II thesis may very well claim that the geopolitical position of the BSR has not changed significantly, even if the East/West boundary has moved some five hundred kilometres eastbound. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Baltic Sea was a major waterway for trade and hence also for cultural exchange—not to mention frequent military conflicts. Yet in contrast to the transatlantic slave trade in the past and the ongoing plight of African refugees on the Mediterranean, the best-known crises associated with the Baltic Sea as a physical maritime environment do not deal with blackness as a socio-cultural category but rather with manoeuvres and pollution. Certainly, the importance of US military troops in Europe during and after World War II as facilitators of African European intercourses, both socially and physically, should not be downplayed. The so-called occupation babies in post-war Germany and the subsequent increase in the public discussion about African Germans attests to this (see Blackshire-Belay 270).

Roots and Routes of Racial Utopia

To continue with punning ambiguities of language, one may note that while the Belts and Sounds between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea have conditioned and directed the waters, the resulting cultural interactions have favoured certain forms of belting and types of musical sound. With respect to the core musical aspects of the Black Atlantic, to examine the issue further entails considering how discourses of authenticity and the ineffable slave sublime feature in the musics of the Black Baltic Sea. Following Gilroy’s original ideas in *The Black Atlantic*, of particular interest in this respect are the dynamics between “roots and routes” (19, 133), or, the emphases laid on assumptions about immutable racialised musical traditions and, alternatively (and less frequently), on transformations and continual reinscriptions that result from musical travels with either displaced groups of people or commercial mass media. According to him, much centres on the notion of authenticity:

The problem of cultural origins and authenticity ... has taken on greater proportions as original, folk, or local expressions of black culture have been identified as authentic and positively evaluated for that reason, while subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms have been dismissed as inauthentic and therefore lacking in cultural or aesthetic value precisely because of their distance (supposed or actual) from a readily identifiable point of origin. ... Authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable items in an expanded pop market. The discourse of authenticity has been a notable presence in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms to white audiences. (*The Black Atlantic* 96, 99.)

In his elaboration on Gilroy’s ideas as a basis for “a methodology for analysing postcolonial music,” Featherstone builds on the possibility to adopt “the model of the Black Atlantic circuit” beyond the United States, Great Britain and the Caribbean (34, 38). In more detail, he argues for a cross-disciplinary approach that surpasses the conventional foci in folklore studies and musicology on lyrics and musical forms, respectively, by stressing “the political power of the performance” in its corporeal and audible form and through that, questions of value in the diverse contexts of the music’s production and reception. This entails defining and conceptualising music “as migrant and hybrid performance rather than as an expression of stable identities, national or personal” and recognising “its political agency as enacted through a complex dialogue of history, body, voice, material contexts and reception” (36-9).

The impact of these ideas is evident in recent cultural analyses that aim at examining how the postcolonial condition manifests itself in Europe. For instance, more than half of the chapters in the collection *Blackening Europe* deal with music and dance, thus indicating the centrality of music in the cultural processes associated with blackness. Relating to the above six subregions of the Black Baltic Sea, in the introduction to the volume Heike Raphael-Hernandez notes the impact of several different factors in the era of postcolonial blackening of Europe, as it were, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century: during the world wars, as well as the cold one, many African American soldiers entered Europe; the socialist bloc, for its part, welcomed Africans as guests or students, either in the spirit of (anti-capitalist) solidarity or “gaining intellectual territory” by educating future leaders, or both; and in the media, blackening sounds and images have increased tremendously, for instance through jazz brought even “to faraway corners such as northern Finland” and especially through the impact of MTV on youth culture (2). Moreover, in the foreword for the collection, Gilroy himself propagates for antiracist “postcolonial culture-building,” or counterhistory, comprising of various confrontations, one of which “would be directed toward understanding the impact of black literature, culture, art, and music on European life, and in particular seeing how during the latter half of the twentieth century an appetite for various African American cultures was part of how Europe recomposed itself in the aftermath of fascism” (xviii).

As is the case with Europe in general, the Nordic region has also been subjected to similar enquiries into its relationship with and role in the postcolonial processes. Yet music has featured rather rarely in such investigations about “latent” or “complicit” colonialism (Raiskio; Keskinen et al.), which again may be an indication of disciplinary cautiousness more than anything else. An exception to this tendency is constituted in *Afro-Nordic Landscapes* by an email conversation about jazz in the Scandinavian countries, or how in Denmark, Norway and Sweden “the music went from being demonized to become a seamless part of national culture,” as editor Michael McEachrane puts it in the introduction to the volume (2). In the conversation itself, it is pointed out by the participants how at issue is the interwovenness of racial, national and class discourses, as well as their relationship to the notion of art. It is mentioned for example how in Sweden in the process of distinguishing bebop and other artistic styles from dance tunes by the 1950s, the ethnic and racial difference associated with jazz was supplanted by a distinct middle- to upper-class status (Brown et al. 76-77).

As indicated by the emergence of “the famed but elusive ‘Nordic sound’ in jazz with influences from European chamber music and Scandinavian folk” in the 1970s (McEachrane 2) as well as by the claims about the very high artistic standards of Finnish jazz with similar emphases on “strongly audible ... African-American roots ... but interpreted perhaps with a more Nordic approach” (Kaarresalo-Kasari & Kasari 8), the significance of jazz as an example of postcolonial musical mutations is paramount also in the BSR. The so-called Nordic sound, or tone, is of course associated with the Western sphere in the region, but jazz is also of historical importance in relation to the cultural dynamics on the Eastern socialist side. As Maxim Matusevich notes in his article with the Beatles-inflected title “Black in the U.S.S.R.,” on a general level a major factor behind certain affinity towards black cultural forms was initially the Marxist ideal of colourblind class solidarity, supported with politically laden disgust against US slavery, even if at the same time the Soviet central administration was segregating Central Asia racially. Thus, in the 1920s, jazz and other black cultural expression were treated more amicably as a form of class struggle than in many other white European societies, and this encouraged many African American and Afro-Caribbean “race travelers” to embark on a journey to the Soviet Union in search of a racial utopia (58-62). One of the most renowned of such travellers was actor and singer Paul Robeson, who became a household name and a cultural icon in the USSR—and, as Matusevich insinuates, “seduced by this adoration” (64).

From Postsocialist Counterculture to New Europeanness

All this changed with Stalin’s “iron rule” based on cynical pragmatism and paranoid xenophobia. By the end of the 1930s and the breakout of World War II, the majority of the black seekers of racial utopia had become disillusioned and left the country, “leaving a smattering of mixed-blood descendants, many of whom would

constitute the core of a small but culturally significant diasporic community of black Russians” (Matusevich 65-66). Only after roughly three decades, the next wave of black migration into the Soviet Union emerged, consisting predominantly of male students from newly independent African nations who were yearning not so much for a racial utopia than an affordable quality education. They also engaged in direct debate with the Soviet system, and thus inadvertently subverted it by carving out “a place of *relative freedom* from the political and cultural constraints” (65-69). Consequently, maintains Matusevich:

Africans of the second wave often acted as the conduits of Westernization, giving their Soviet friends, fellow students, and girlfriends their first taste of things foreign: jazz and rock’n’roll records, blue jeans, popular magazines, books in a variety of European languages, etc. ... With its strong emphasis on improvisation and free spontaneous expression, jazz forged—as rock music did later—a special kind of camaraderie between its listeners, one that knew no borders or ideological divides. Jazz as an art form, then, was bound to run afoul of Soviet authorities ... (69-70).

In later decades, continues Matusevich, Africans in the Soviet Union provided the burgeoning counterculture with inspiration “by dint of their ‘foreignness’ and detachment from the Soviet mainstream” and through the escapism associated with Africa’s “fantasy-land status” (71). As this implies, the facts about Africa were in many cases less essential than its representations and imagined qualities where romanticism blended into politics. In such instances, the cultural and political value of black musicians was paramount, as “the partisans of Soviet counterculture worshipped the likes of Louis Armstrong, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, and others” (71).

What is yet of crucial importance with respect to the inextricability of postcolonial and post-socialist processes in the Black Baltic Sea is “a certain disconnect between the internationalist ideals trumpeted by the Soviet state and Africa’s real place within the Soviet society” that has provided “sadly ironic” grounds for “an epidemic of widespread racism and racially motivated violence” since the late 1980s (Matusevich 72). Matusevich does not link these issues to musical phenomena, and such analyses are indeed hard to find; some guidelines may be nevertheless found in scrutinies about music in other postcolonial post-Soviet contexts, as it were. For instance, one might ask to what extent the developments in Ukraine and the Baltic states are (or were, before 2014 at least) comparable in terms of authenticity, exoticism and nationalism in music (see Wickström). A more direct example regarding blackness in the BSR music is provided by the changes that have taken place in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) since the fall of the Berlin wall; according to Alf Björnberg, what is new in this situation “is the increasing presence of artists of non-European origin”:

As new patterns of migration change the make-up of European populations, even nations wont to think of themselves as ethnically homogenous have been increasingly represented by artists of a “foreign” ethnic background. Caribbean-born Dave Benton, who [co-]represented Estonia in 2001 [with Tanel Padar], was the first black artist ever to win the contest. Another case in point is Sweden: in 2002 the country was represented by three female black singers under the punning name Afro-Dite ... (22).

Philip Bohlman, for his part, accredits the post-Cold-War(-I) ESC with the status of “a domain of New Europeanness.” As such, he maintains, the contest betrays significant paradoxes and contradictions in the attempts of the entries to accommodate local, national, international and European traits, which immediately stand at odds with conventional aesthetics of nationalism. In his estimation, this has often been done through a deliberate choice of black performers and favouring black styles such as dancehall, gospel and soul. Benton provides a case in point, as the song he and Padar performed, titled *Everybody*, indicates to Bohlman how “ideological questions of European unity ... seem at first hearing out of place against the musical choice to employ an amalgam of dancehall and gospel styles” (215-6). Bohlman discusses this further in terms of “a palpable reconfiguration of the center” of the ESC through the emergence of “new blackness in European popular music” when entering the twenty-first century. In effect, this meant that the aesthetic essence of the contest and thus the criteria of its Europeanness shifted from conventional national styles towards juxtapositions of “the national and a different, often distinctive, black musical style.” Regarding Benton’s and Padar’s victorious achievement in particular, Bohlman asks “whether the blackness of the song’s style represented the nation of emigration (Aruba) or the nation of immigration

(Estonia)” and, as an indirect answer, suggests that through borrowing and appropriation the song and its performers expressed “an aesthetic of New Europeanness” that defies the older binary either/or logic of national belonging (234).

Rap and Postsocialist Hybridity

Arguably, another prime site of musical expressions of New Europeanness is constituted by hip hop, or rap music to be more precise. Regarding the notion of the Black Atlantic and the introduction of the Black Baltic Sea on the basis of it, there is a handful of references to it in the recent collection focusing on *Hip-Hop in Europe* (Nitzsche & Grünzweig). In the majority of cases, however, the notion is mentioned rather fleetingly as a shorthand for racialised transnational flows and often in a precipitate and simplifying manner. For instance, in the introductory chapter it is suggested that the Black Atlantic as developed by Gilroy refers to “a continuous movement of black people back and forth across the Atlantic” and “emphasizes the common ground of black music and cultural practices across both sides of the Atlantic Ocean which originated in Africa, moved to the American continent through slavery and the across the Atlantic again ending up being global cultural forms” (Nitzsche 15). While it is the triangular maritime routes of the slave trade that provide the basis of Gilroy’s theorisation, it would be more to the point to emphasise the Black Atlantic as a “web of diaspora identities and concerns” that should not be conflated with projects of “building an ethnically particular or nationalist cultural canon” (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 218). Instead, at issue is a theorisation of “the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture en route to better theories of racism and of black political culture than those so far offered by cultural absolutists of various phenotypical hues” (223). Indeed, even if Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* does write about “all blacks in the West” (1), he nevertheless warns against the lures of crude forms of “pan-Africanism” in the sense that there would be “some African essence that could magically connect all blacks together” (24). In his earlier book *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, he expressed the same idea by noting that it is not any form of shared Africanness that connects black Atlantic people, but rather “a common experience of powerlessness ... experienced in racial categories” (208; original emphasis).

Admittedly, in their article on “Merseybeat,” or hip hop in Liverpool, Brett D. Lashua and Yaw Owusu note in passing “the fluidity and mixity of genres and styles” associated with the idea of the Black Atlantic (196). Similarly, Terence Kumpf in his excision of the transculturating potentials of hip hop in Germany refers to Gilroy’s work as a form of cultural theory that builds on assumptions about abiding forms of intercultural circulation and exchange (208), even if only very briefly. More credit is given to Gilroy by Andrzej Antoszek, who in his treatment of Polish rap lyrics stresses the importance of the Black Atlantic for addressing the “many multicultural and international influences” that form the “monumental background” of rap and hip hop in the United States, and for acknowledging “one of hip-hop’s crucial traits that make it so encompassing and open namely the genre’s hybridity” (259-60).

Importantly for the formulation of the Black Baltic Sea, Antoszek relates hip hop in Poland to both postcolonialism and postsocialism. To begin with, he notes how already in the 1980s and before the transition from socialism to capitalism, hip hop was “a logical continuation and consequence of Poland enchantment with American culture,” even if at that time “the incorporation of the Black into Polish culture was met with many doubts and reservations, indicating that Poland ... was a peculiar mixture of openness, insularity and even racism” (257). His adaptation of postcolonialism is nevertheless somewhat purpose-oriented as he reserves it in the first instance for the discussion on historical partitions of Poland between Prussia, Russia and Habsburg Austria, arguing that these led to a transformation of “one of Europe’s first multicultural states” into distinct regions with their own rules and mentality (261). Moving forth from this, he links the issue also to the post-World-War-II era as part of the Soviet Bloc by stressing that while there was a relative absence of “any external agents or *colonists*,” the central management of the political system from Moscow turned Poland into “a platform of clashing interests, unstable identities and not-always-very-clear divisions into the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ ones, resulting in a typically postcolonial schizophrenia” (262). Finally, with respect to the postsocialist years, Antoszek maintains that in its current

form the Polish postcolonial condition, as it were, is shaped “in addition to all the ‘classical’ postcolonial problems including resistance and representation, power struggle, capital or language ... the more than ever unpredictable turns of [global] economy deciding” (262). What is noteworthy here is that he does not connect the issue explicitly to either ethnicity in general or racism in particular, and thus risks reducing Polish postcoloniality to a (postsocialist) form of class struggle. Intriguingly, he refers to the idea of “post-socialist hybridity” that manifests itself “in a hint of nostalgia for the ‘old, good days,’ distrust towards the new democracy or even the assumption that the state is still secretly infiltrated and sabotaged by the Soviets” (264), and the question remains open as to how to expand the theorisation of this sort of hybridity by addressing issues of xenophobia, racism and extreme nationalism more carefully.

A Mutha(f***a) of All Traditions

Similar questions can be posed concerning the cultural position of other genres associated intimately with blackness, both historically and in the contemporary socio-political setting. For instance, there is plenty of room for cultural analyses about the shifts that have taken place in reggae in the region; in Finland, one of the first hits in the genre was *Reggae OK*, the ESC entry from 1981 and still probably the only reggae tune in the world that includes an accordion solo, while at the moment the blooming roots reggae scene in the country is dominated by white artists performing in the Finnish language (see Järvenpää 59-63). Regarding Sweden, in turn, some attention has been paid on how black genres such as rap and reggae provide the basis of musical expression for white radical nationalists (Teitelbaum). Hints of the same can be found also in Antoszek’s remark about the limited number of contemporary Polish rappers who realise the global nature of current societal problems in the sense that they “should not be treated as international schemes and plots staged by other nations to put us [Poles] down, as many right-wing politicians suggest using a very nationalistic rhetoric” (283).

Historically, between jazz and rap there, of course, have been numerous other genres of so-called black music, which all have been adopted, appropriated, domesticated and indigenised to various degrees in the BSR. Scholarly investigation into the topic is yet again fairly scarce, but on a general level, it appears that while such genres as gospel, calypso, soul and funk have remained rather marginal, rock and rap have found their way into the national identity constructions, not to mention the “Nordicisation” of jazz. Be it as it may, in Finland, for example, major historians of popular music have built their work on the idea of three “parent traditions” of (1) Finno-Slavic, preferably Kalevalan, folk music of mythic historical proportions; (2) central European classical music, in its pre-atonal and pre-serial forms, combined with nineteenth-century “Chekhovian nostalgia” (Jalkanen 227) and many times in simplified or ‘light’ arrangements; and (3) “Afro-American” music with its unsophisticated yet oddly alluring syncopation, blue notes and—to quote music historians Pekka Jalkanen and Vesa Kurkela—“negroid vocal qualities” (459).

There is no denying that the forms of music associated with these alleged traditions have been influential in Finland. But here, one should follow caution in deeming the influence a direct consequence of a tradition. Instead, one may consider the ostensible symptom as the cause and vice versa; in other words, following historian Eric Hobsbawm, the tradition may very well be thought of as invented, wholly or at least partly in most cases, to serve the purposes of justifying and legitimising the practice that supposedly carries the influences. To fit, say, the Somali musical practices in Finland into this model of parent traditions is not straight-forward and raises questions about the possibility and politics of exclusion from what counts as national culture.

To Conclude

The idea—or invention—of three parent traditions of popular music may be a Finnish peculiarity, yet it is arguable that historically the styles of “black music” have been appropriated and adopted throughout the BSR, albeit in clearly different national manifestations. In simplistic terms, one might talk and write about a division between Western postcolonial and Eastern postsocialist dynamics and processes in this

respect; it might be more fortuitous though to approach the conundrum in intersectional terms, meaning the ways in which the global postcolonial condition has become—and continuously becomes—articulated in the context of North-Eastern European postsocialism, whether in its “proper” or Finlandised form, or in whatever materialisation the BSR cultural hybridity begets. This, in brief, is the contribution of the Black Baltic Sea on a conceptual plane.

What is clear, nevertheless, is that there are at least three major areas of enquiry for further research with respect to the cultural politics of music in the Black Baltic Sea. To begin with, when faced with the increased popularity of right-wing political populism not only in postsocialist Poland and—pardon the provocation—Finland but also in Sweden, the homeland of cultural egalitarianism, one has to wonder whether the appraisals of musical new Europeanness are worth the optimism. On another hand, one is left baffled with the potentials of rap as a tool for social and societal change, as it challenges conventions of musical production and the whole notion of musicianship, not to mention the prodigal expectations laid on online distribution. Finally, as Kani Kullervo and other Nordic musicians of Somali background have demonstrated, there are “black enough” artists in the region to contradict the mainstream Islamophobic accounts where only the extremist interpretations make the news. One can only hope that the output of such artists, as well as the critical reception of them, will be of use in examining and elaborating social policies in the future, in the BSR and elsewhere.

The article is based on research funded by the Academy of Finland. The ideas expressed in it were first delivered at the sixth AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe conference in Münster, Germany, September 18, 2015.

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Research Article

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Too Dark to Support the Lions, But Light Enough for the Frontlines”: Negotiating Race, Place, and Nation in Afro-Finnish Hip Hop

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0033>

Received August 6, 2018; accepted November 28, 2018

Abstract: In this article, I examine cultural production as an avenue for mapping African diasporic identities and racialised experiences in Finland. Hip hop culture has long acted as a lingua franca for the African diaspora and has been central in the development of collective identities among second-generation European youth of colour. Prior to the 2010s, the landscape of Finnish hip hop was largely white with little engagement with race or hip hop’s roots as a Black American cultural form. This status quo was disrupted by the rise of Afro-Finnish rappers. Since gaining mainstream visibility, they have catapulted into the national consciousness with music that reclaims the language of racial and ethnic identities, interrogates assumptions about national belonging, and represents the lived experiences of first-generation Black/Afro-Finnish men. Approaching hip hop as a resource for resisting normative Whiteness and carving out space for Black/African diasporic collectivities in the Finnish cultural and political imaginary, I show how Afro-Finnish rappers articulate and navigate Blackness in relation to identity, racism, and national belonging in Finland. In doing so, I emphasise the tensions between racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity, on the one hand, and the rigidity of Finnish Whiteness and national exclusion, on the other.

Keywords: Finland, Black Europe, race, music, place, hip hop, Afro-Finns

In the past decade, the fields of Black studies and African diaspora studies have increasingly expanded beyond the Americas to include the interdisciplinary study of Black communities in Europe alongside other communities of colour. As sociologist Stephen Small emphasizes, this development has been particularly important for advancing the conversation about so-called Black Europe on its own terms— to develop knowledge that is grounded in, produced by, and for the benefit of Black Europe, rather than relying on the translation of U.S.-based concepts and logic about Blackness into the European context (Small, “Introduction: The Empire Strikes Back” xxix-xxx). At the same time, research placing Black people in Europe—and especially Black citizens—at the centre within studies of race in Europe are limited, often engaging Black Europeans only to the extent that they are subcategories of other groups, such as immigrants, refugees, sex workers, criminals, or victims of sex trafficking (Small, “Theorizing Visibility and Vulnerability in Black Europe and the African Diaspora” 4).

Furthermore, although research on Black European communities have engaged questions of national belonging, racial and ethnic identity, religion, racism, and xenophobia from a range of disciplinary approaches, it has overwhelmingly focused on the histories and experiences of Black European communities within the national contexts with the largest African diasporic populations—the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Germany—while the Nordic countries remain comparatively underexplored (Blakely 4). The lack of research on the Nordic context is also attributable to the myth of “Nordic Exceptionalism,”

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which frames race as irrelevant in the Nordic countries. (Sawyer and Habel 4; McEachrane 1). Given this climate, scholarship explicitly engaging with race and racialization in Finland remains scarce, with most research instead concentrating on the language of migration and integration (Rastas, "Racializing Categorization" 148).

Cultural production represents a particularly important avenue through which to map racialised identities and experiences in Finland, as hip hop becomes one of the few public realms where questions of racialization, racism, and belonging are free to be engaged without being limited by political correctness. Hip hop music and culture are, furthermore, often considered to function as the cultural lingua franca of the African diaspora (El-Tayeb, *European Others* 29). Indeed, Afro-German culture scholar Fatima El-Tayeb argues that the new generation of European youth of colour and activists have "appropriated hip-hop as a tool of intervention that allows racialized communities across the continent to formulate an identity negated in dominant discourses; an identity that transcends mono-national assignments through its multiethnic and translocal frame of reference, but that nonetheless, or arguably because of it, effectively challenges minorities' expulsion from national discourses" (*European Others* 19).

Following El-Tayeb, I approach Afro-Finnish hip hop as a site for exploring the experiences of first-generation Black/Afro-Finns, analysing articulations of national, racial, and ethnic identity, as well as of national belonging and exclusion in rap songs. In order to contextualise the significance of Afro-Finnish rap as a meaningful alternative archive of the Black experience in Finland, I first introduce the Finnish context in terms of the local politics of race and racism. I then discuss the significance of hip hop music and culture for African diasporic youth, as well as its particular importance as an avenue for what bell hooks termed "talking back" from the margins (hooks 123). In my analysis, I show how Afro-Finnish rappers discuss and define Blackness in relation to identity, racism, and national belonging in Finland, emphasising the tensions between racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity, on the one hand, and the rigidity of Finnish Whiteness and national exclusion, on the other. In this way, hip hop becomes a resource for resisting normative Whiteness and carving out space for Black/African diasporic collectivities in the Finnish cultural and political imaginary.

Race and Racism in the Nordic Context

"Nordic exceptionalism" is framed by critical scholars as the Nordic countries' investment in portraying themselves as "global 'good citizens,' peace-loving, conflict-resolution oriented and 'rational,'" including a self-conception of themselves as colour-blind bastions of equality and progressive social policy (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2). As Afro-Swedish scholar Michael McEachrane highlights, however, this narrative relies upon the continued erasure of Nordic participation in colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and slavery (McEachrane 1). While none of the Nordic countries was a major colonial power, both Sweden and Denmark participated in the transatlantic slave trade and between them established colonies in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Atlantic (McEachrane 1-2). In the case of Finland, its history first as part of the Swedish kingdom and later as a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire has also been used to advance what Finnish anthropologist Anna Rastas has termed "Finnish exceptionalism," by which claims to historical innocence are used to disengage with race and racism in contemporary Finnish society (Rastas, "Reading History through Finnish Exceptionalism" 90). Yet Finnish missionaries also participated in various "civilising missions" in Southern Africa, both extending a colonial hand into the continent, as well as contributing to the framing of Africa as a primitive and heathen continent in the Finnish national imaginary (Rastas, "Talking Back"). In addition to the economic gains it accrued from Swedish colonial enterprises, then, Finland has also benefitted from what social anthropologist Ulla Vuorela termed "colonial complicity" (21).¹

¹ It should also be noted that Finland practised "internal colonisation" in its gradual incorporation of Sápmi into its national borders, thereby displacing the indigenous Sami population from their traditional homeland (Vuorela 21).

The African Diaspora in Finland

Unlike Britain, France, and the Netherlands, the majority of African descendants in the Nordic countries do not come from the nations' former colonies (Small, *20 Questions and Answers on Black Europe* 79-80). Instead, "African descendants in the Nordic countries are...more likely shaped by the so-called 'New African Diaspora' experiences of being post-colonial African immigrants." (McEachrane 6). Furthermore, most African migrants to the Nordic countries have been refugees from the Horn of Africa, which has structured both the population dynamics and the local discourses around the presence of 'racial Others.' While this population represents a great amount of cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, they are likely to encounter similar experiences of racialization, and, as such, experience a similar host of challenges in Finnish society (Rastas, "Talking Back" 187).

During the first half of the 1990s, Finland experienced the arrival of an unprecedented number of refugees from the Horn of Africa, surpassing all other refugee populations (Korkisaari and Söderling 8). As conflicts in East Africa calmed, the number of refugees from Africa began to settle, with the majority of recent refugees arriving from the Middle East. Today the African diaspora in Finland has diversified, including growing populations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Morocco. Still, Somalis remain not only the largest African diasporic population in Finland but the largest non-European immigrant population, as well (*Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Population Structure*). The rapid change from a society almost untouched by African immigration to a society suddenly becoming home to growing populations of Black, Brown, and Muslim people caused a backlash that journalist Esa Aallas tellingly termed "Somali Shock" (Aallas 1). Three decades later, most of the discourse about African diasporic populations in Finland remains focused on the question of integration and assimilation. Indeed, although the Black/African diasporic community has grown into its third generation, most research continues to focus on the experiences of first-generation migrants, with little engagement with the experiences of the Finnish-born second-generation.

One exception is the work of Anna Rastas, who has published articles about the experiences of African diasporic populations in Finland, including ethnic and transnational identities ("Ethnic Identities and Transnational Subjectivities"), experiences of racism (*Racism in the Everyday Life of Finnish Children*), and the role of music as a site for "Africanness" and diasporic cultural production (Rastas and Seye). Rastas has argued that one of the reasons why Blackness as a unifying self-identifier or a conceptual framework has yet to be embraced by most first-generation African migrants to Finland is because of their small numbers prohibiting the forming of strong collectivities ("Talking Back" 189). Another reason Rastas cites, however, is that first-generation migrants tend to maintain strong ethnic and national ties to their countries of origins, thus being less likely to adopt Blackness as their main identity, while this would likely look differently for members of the second generation, who were born or grew up in Finland ("Talking Back" 190).

If we look to the cultural realm, however, the last few years have seen the emergence of first-generation Black and Brown Finns carving out space in the national discourse (Rastas, "The Emergence of Race as a Social Category in Northern Europe"). Perhaps most notably, in 2015 Yemeni-Finnish journalist and activist Koko Hubara launched the blog *RuskeatTytöt [Brown Girls]*, which in 2017 was expanded into the first multimedia platform for Finns of colour *by* Finns of colour ("Ruskeat Tytöt"). As Hubara discusses in her similarly titled 2017 collection of essays about race, racism, and the experiences of Brown girls in Finland, U.S. hip hop became almost universally embraced by the first generation of Finnish youth of colour in the 1990s, providing them with what was often the only source of both visual representations of Black and Brown bodies and discursive representations of narratives about and by members of racialized communities (Hubara 77). This speaks both to the relevance of African American cultural and political identities for the shaping of Finnish youths' understandings of Blackness, as well as to the political potential of hip hop as a cultural form. As such, I follow Black European scholars like Fatima El-Tayeb who argue that it is imperative that we look beyond state-oriented definitions of racial Others in Europe and instead centre European racial minorities' experiences, perspectives, and forms of cultural production in our inquiries (*European Others* xix). To do so, I approach hip hop as an alternative archive of Black/Afro-Finnish culture and experience.

Hip Hop and the African Diaspora in Europe

Hip-hop music and culture have historically served as a tool for disrupting dominant discourses that often render racialised communities as simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible—hyper-visible in that they frequently become the subjects of discourse, but invisible in that their own narratives are excluded from such discourses (Collins 7). Indeed, since its inception in the housing projects of the Bronx in the 1970s, African American and Latino youth have used hip hop as a tool for both explicit political resistance and the creative reimagining and reclaiming of marginalised spaces (Rose, *Black Noise*; Rose, “Fear of a Black Planet”). As such, rap music is also an important site for examining the production of counter-discourses and -narratives. Since its global spread in the 1980s, hip hop has also been a crucial cultural sphere in which Europeans of colour have engaged the experiences of race and racism, gender, and national belonging, with scholars going as far as referring to hip hop as the lingua franca of the African diaspora (Prévos; Bennett; Morgan and Bennett; Weheliye; Lipsitz, “Diasporic Noise”; El-Tayeb, “Afro-German Activism, Gender and Hip Hop”). As Awad El Karim’s work with African immigrant youth in Canada suggests, hip hop is also a tool through which African youth learn the language and contextual meaning of Blackness in predominantly white society (Ibrahim 353). Furthermore, Fatima El-Tayeb argues that hip hop has been particularly important in the development of second-generation European youth of colour identities and collectivities (*European Others* 11).

Centering Afro-Finnish Hip Hop

Since its arrival to Finland in the late 1980s, hip hop music and culture has, until recently, almost entirely been dominated by white Finnish men, with limited engagement with questions of cultural appropriation or discussion of its Black American roots (Kärjä). However, music scholar Antti-Ville Kärjä, for example, has analysed the prevalence of humour and parody in early Finnish rap as a strategy for managing the tensions between the racialised origins of rap music and its adoption in the Finnish context. Meri Tervo has also examined how white Finnish rappers have historically engaged in both cultural appropriation as well as the translation of elements of U.S. hip hop culture into their own localised expressions and narratives (“From Appropriation to Translation” 183). Other studies have examined the role of space and place (Tervo, “Tila Ja Paikka Suomalaisissa Räh-Musiikkivideoissa”). Although less explored, some Finnish hip hop scholars have also begun examining music produced and performed by Finnish rappers of colour, engaging how they navigate belonging (Leppänen and Westinen), being the Other (Westinen, “Multi-Semiotic Constructions of Self as Other”), and racial stereotypes (Westinen, “Who’s Afraid of the Dark?”). This article contributes to this growing body of work by examining the ways in which Black/Afro-Finnish rappers discuss and define Blackness in relation to identity, racism, and national belonging in Finland.

Specifically, I discuss a selection of songs performed by James Nikander, Josijas Belayneh, Luyeye Konssi, and Hanad Hassan, better known by their rap aliases *Musta Barbaari* [the Black Barbarian], *Prinssi Jusuf* [Prince Jusuf], and the duo *Seksikäs-Suklaa* [Sexy Chocolate] and Dosdela, respectively. Since their arrival on the mainstream music scene in the early 2010s, Nikander, who is of Tanzanian and Finland-Swedish heritage, and Belayneh, who is of Ethiopian heritage, have catapulted into the national consciousness with music that explicitly comments on issues of identity, national belonging, and racism. While still on the margins of mainstream Finnish hip hop, they have claimed a seat at the symbolic table. Rising to the public consciousness primarily through their social media skits about life in Helsinki’s eastern suburbs, Congolese-Finnish Konssi and Somali-Finnish Hassan have also translated their comedic talents into a burgeoning career as rappers.² Although these men are not the only Black rappers in the Finnish hip hop scene, they have become particularly active media personalities, using their platforms to push forth a conversation about immigration, racism, and what it means to be Finnish.

Much like their early social media content, many of the songs intertwine social commentary with self-deprecating humour. Indeed, the men often combine critiques of racism, national exclusion, and stereotypes

² For the sake of clarity, I will from now on refer to the rappers discussed by their aliases.

through plays on the very stereotypes used to caricaturize Black and African immigrants in Finland. All artists also rap in Finnish, although they often infuse Black American vernacular with Finnish urban (and specifically youth-of-colour) slang³. It should be noted that relying on translations of rap lyrics poses some analytical limitations. As a musical form that emphasises playful lyricism, rhymes, double-meanings, and layered cultural references, the analysis of rap lyrics is inherently a subjective project. Translating rap lyrics in a way that communicates both the literal meaning of words, as well as the culturally contextualised interpretations of them presents a significant added challenge. In fact, hip hop scholars have noted the complex language ideologies displayed in the rap music of African diasporic populations around the world (Pennycook; Westinen, “Multi-Semiotic Constructions of Self as Other in Finnish Rap Music Videos”; Alim; Cheeseman). Nonetheless, as a first-generation Afro-Finn myself, and as a member of the same communities as the rappers I will discuss, I aim to make use of both a systematic analytical approach and my situated lens to contextualise the lyrics I analyse within the relevant context(s).

I focus here on three particularly salient themes of national exclusion, articulations of racial and ethnic identity in resistance to erasure and racism, and the salience of place for establishing spaces of community and belonging for second-generation Finnish people of colour. The analytical themes were developed on the basis of a preliminary study of ten singles for which music videos had been made. I have chosen to explicate these themes through an in-depth analysis of the lyrics and music videos of three songs I find illustrate these themes well; *Salil eka salil vika* [First at the Gym Last at the Gym], *Vuoden Mamu* [Immigrant of the Year], and *Niinku 97* [As in (19)97]⁴. I extend Anna Rastas’ earlier work on memoirs as narratives of resistance in using bell hooks’s concept of “talking back” to frame how Black/Afro-Finnish rappers similarly use hip hop culture and rap music to “talk back” to national discourses that do not acknowledge them, thus exposing the racialized mechanisms of national exclusion and the implicit boundaries of ‘Finnishness.’

Racial Identity as Resistance to Racism

Although Nikander already had a social media following as a competitive bodybuilder, his ascent into popular culture began with the release of his first single, *Salil eka salil vika* [First at the Gym Last at the Gym]. The music video to the song opens with the shot of a dozen Black fists raised in the air, with a logo hovering over them; it reads “Musta Barbaari” and features a raised fist holding a dumbbell. The first words of the song declare “Still alive nigga!” As the title suggests, one of the main themes of the song is hard work. This is echoed in the chorus:

Kuka sano et saat tuloksii ilma duunii
Älä usko niit se on pelkkä satu
Musta Barbaari ei oo nekeri (nekrut ei ikin kuole)
Oon stadin revityin laku
Sä halusit saada hyötyä ilma kipuu
Naah nigga
Sun pitää olla salil eka salil vika
Still alive nigga

[Who said you could get results without doing work
 Don't believe 'em, it's just a fairy-tale
 Musta Barbaari is not a nigger (niggas never die)
 I'm the city's most ripped liquorice⁵
 You wanted to have the gain without the pain
 Naah nigga
 You gotta be first at the gym last at the gym
 Still alive nigga]

³ For a linguistic analysis of some of Musta Barbaari and Prinssi Jusuf's songs, see (Westinen, “Still Alive, Nigga: Multi-Semiotic Constructions of Self as Other in Finnish Rap Music Videos”)

⁴ I have translated the lyrics into English, which I will present alongside the original Finnish lyrics.

⁵ The Finnish slang term “stadi,” although translating to “the city” is always a reference to Helsinki, the capital.

The music video is set in a small gym, featuring Musta Barbaari rapping to the camera while other Black men lift weights in the background. In the first verse, however, the boisterous talk of working hard in the gym swiftly gets intertwined with commentary on racial stereotypes, racism, and resilience, all of which is held together with a thread of humour:

*Yö on musta ja nii oon mäki
Joka yö kohtaan unessani Tupacin
Se sanoo kuuntele mua veli nyt
Valkoset ei ota tosissaa
Jos et oo revitty
Mä heräsin hikisenä
Huusin ääneä still alive nigga
Pakko saada pumpppi päälle
Kuolemaan asti valmis rippaa
Ne yrittää lähettää
Barbaarin takas Afrikkaa
Mut en oo menos bakkii
Mua ei pidättele häkki
Liian vahva liian bläkki
Sun ei tarvi mua enempää motivoida
Mä oon paha musta mörkö
En oo sun kotipoika
Jos mun täytyy ni oon valmis salil yöpyy
Ei kipuu ei hyötyy, nekru häh
Mä käyn sossus enkä puurra hies
Mul on jo vaikein duuni Suomes
Mä oon musta mies*

[The night is black and so am I
Every night in my dreams I see Tupac
He said brother listen up
Whites will never take you seriously
Unless you're ripped
I woke up in a cold sweat
At the top of my lungs I shouted still alive nigga
I gotta get a pump on
Prepared to tear it up until the day I die
They try to send
the Barbarian back to Africa
But I'm not going back
No cage can hold me
Too strong; too Black
I don't need any more of your motivation
I'm the bad Black boogie man,
I'm not your homeboy
If I have to, I'm ready to sleep at the gym
No pain no gain, nigga what
I'll collect my welfare check and not even break a sweat
I already have the hardest job in Finland
I'm a Black man]

In this verse, Musta Barbaari declares himself to be black as the night, using Blackness as a descriptor as well as a racial category, in contrast with his subsequent reference to “whites.” The explicit deployment of the language of race, Blackness, and various uses of the n-word throughout the verse represents a clear rupture in “legitimate language” (Bourdieu 69) around the politics of difference in Finland. In a context ruled by ideologies of colour-blindness, difference is only legitimately named as a feature of immigration, culture, language, or—if you're being radical—ethnicity. By declaring himself to be Black, then, Musta

Barbaari reclaims the language of racialization and counters the discursive erasure of Finnish people of colour. Furthermore, the varied references to Blackness throughout the verse, as well as his rap alias “the Black Barbarian” also illustrate a strategic re-appropriation of negative constructions of Black men as dangerous (“I’m the bad Black bogey man”), savage (“No cage can hold me”), and lazy (reference to welfare check), instead turning them into sources of strength.

Musta Barbaari also invokes Tupac as a source of inspiration, establishing an explicit connection to Black American hip hop and cultural figures. This also contextualises his use of language within a broader Black diasporic consciousness. The imagery of Tupac coming to him in a dream to give him advice on how to navigate racism not only represents Tupac as a transcendent cultural figure but symbolically positions African American political consciousness as a resource for Black Finnish identity and consciousness. This makes explicit the influence of Black American culture on Black/Afro-European identities and cultures. Indeed, the question of the relationship between Black America and the African diaspora inevitably arises as a central question when examining hip hop globally. While some frame the influence of hip hop culture on African diasporic communities as evidence of U.S. cultural imperialism, cultural theorist and sociologist George Lipsitz reminds us that diasporic African culture is “an ongoing dynamic creation. The radicalism [of which] comes... from the utility of exploiting diasporic connections as a way of expanding choices everywhere” (*Dangerous Crossroads* 39).

Furthermore, the invocation of the Black American experience as a guiding force in the struggle against racism in Finland is an example of what Lipsitz refers to as “strategic anti-essentialism,” which “gives the appearance of celebrating the fluidity of identities, but in reality seeks a particular disguise on the basis of its ability to highlight, underscore, and augment an aspect of one’s identity that one can not express directly” (Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads* 62). In other words, although Blackness entails different meanings, experiences, and histories in the Finnish context than it does in the United States, the strategic alliance with African American discourse allows for the deployment of an explicit critique of racism that may otherwise be deemed contextually irrelevant. Indeed, the racism Musta Barbaari refers to in this verse spans the interpersonal (“Whites will never take you seriously unless you’re ripped”), the institutional, both in terms of labour (“I already have the hardest job in Finland, I’m a Black man”) and migration (“they try to send the Barbarian back to Africa”), and the cultural (“I’m not your homeboy”).

In addition to his stage name being called too on-the-nose and confusing, it was his use of the n-word, the explicitly racialised language, and the claim that being a Black man was the “hardest job in Finland” that sparked the most controversy (Poikelus). Musta Barbaari was interviewed for numerous articles where he was asked to explain his choice of language, as well as his claims about life in Finland. For example, one article published by the Finnish national broadcasting network declared “Musta Barbaari provokes with lyrics riddled with the word nigger” (Vedenpää). Much of the media discourse followed similar lines, along with social media discussions admonishing him for the perceived inappropriateness of his lyrics. His discussion of race and racial stereotypes was also accused of being racist and of increasing rather than decreasing prejudices. While controversial, the song also received overwhelming praise, with young people of colour applauding Musta Barbaari for finally giving voice to the experiences of immigrant youth and, in doing so, carving out a space for them in the national culture.

Resisting National Exclusion

Another aspect of everyday experiences of racism that Afro-Finnish rappers highlight is what they frame as the selective and strategic (if not exploitative) politics of national exclusion. This dynamic is perhaps most explicit in Prinssi Jusuf and Musta Barbaari’s song *Vuoden Mamu* [Immigrant of the Year], in which they discuss being framed as perpetual foreigners unable to partake in Finnish society and culture, all the while being expected to perform their civic duties as Finnish citizens, such as paying taxes and serving in the Finnish army. Indeed, the very title of the song is suggestive of a national discourse that divides people into categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants. Released in 2016, it is noteworthy that *Vuoden Mamu* also came out in the aftermath of Belayneh (Prinssi Jusuf) receiving a great deal of publicity during the summer of 2015

for saving a woman's life when he pulled her out after falling onto the subway tracks. The media lauded him as a hero, and he even received a medal from Finnish President Niinistö (Ampuja). It is fitting, then, that the next single he released explored the tensions inherent in such celebrations of "good immigrants." The lyrics of the song play with the stereotypical immigrant values of hard work and the pressures and negative stereotypes imposed by a society that requires such narratives in the first place:

*Vuoden mamu joten itelleni taputan (taputan)
Kiitos sossu joka anto mulle apuja (aha!)
Silloku ei ollu vielä duunii (duunii!)
Muijat paino mulle, punast luurii
Suomalaiset luuli et laiskuus kuuluu mun kulttuurii (naa boi!)
Mut kun sä kävelet mä juoksen (juoksen!)
Vuoden mamu tehny töitä koko vuoden*

[Immigrant of the year I give myself a round of applause (I clap)
Thanks to social services who helped me out (aha!)
Back when I didn't have a job (work!)
Women would give me the red light
Finns thought that laziness was part of my culture (naah boy!)
But while you walk I run (I run!)
Immigrant of the year been working all year]

In this verse, we see an explicit reference to "Finns" assuming the familiar stereotype that laziness is part of Black/African culture. By constructing Finns as external to him, and as people who do not share this stigmatised culture, we can understand racial stereotypes to function as a mechanism of exclusion, which in turn affirms the association between Finnishness and Whiteness. The stereotype is then contradicted in the line that follows ("But while you walk, I run") referencing the pressure of immigrants having to work harder than Finns to be successful in Finnish society (and to counter the stereotype of laziness). The second part of the first verse also adds commentary on racism and ethnonationalism in Finnish politics:

*Ja mä tulin tekee tänne jyttyt (aha!)
Basso saa jopa Timo Soinin hytkyy (huh!)
Muut mamut mulle tekstaa
Anna tilaa, sä liikaa flexaat
Ei oo aikaa olla rauhas (rauhas)
Lepään sit ku oon haudas (sillon vast)
Veli älä oo vihaaja
Lopetan vasta kun kytät on pihalla*

[And I came here to blow it up (aha!)
The bass will even have Timo Soini getting down
Other immigrants text me
Make some space, you're flexing too much⁶
No time to be at peace (at peace)
I'll rest when I'm in the grave (not 'til then)
Brother don't be a hater
I won't stop until the cops are outside!]

What I have translated as the line "blow it up," in the original Finnish used the word *jyttyt*, which is associated with *Perussuomalaiset* [Finns Party] co-founder and current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Timo Soini, who is credited with inventing the term, in reference to the right-wing and anti-immigrant party's unprecedented success in the 2011 parliamentary elections (Tamminen). Coupled with reference to Timo Soini in the next line, we see Prinssi Jusuf's appropriation of the word *jyttyt* as something used to

⁶ "Flexing too much" is a reference to showing off or bragging.

reference the explosive rise of right-wing populism to something that describes the explosive power of his music—which, he adds, will be irresistible even to Soini. We see another linguistic appropriation in the use of the Finnish slang word *mamu* in reference to immigrants. The actual Finnish word for immigrant is the much longer *maahanmuuttaja*, which is often associated with negative discourses. What immigrant communities have done, however, is re-claim this term in its vernacular version (“mamu”) in references to themselves, thereby turning a label used by mainstream discourses to externalize people of colour from Finland (El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* xxi) into a label of collective identification.

The second verse, performed by Musta Barbaari, also reaffirms the notion that immigrants have to work twice as hard, and explicitly makes the connection between race and national exclusion:

*Mä maksan veroi enemmän ku kukaan
Silti ne kysyy mult aina oleskelulupaa
Kuulemma mikään ei tee must kotimaista
Silti koulutatte meist teidän sotilaita
Joo mäkin hangessa makasin (makasin)
Ku oli kylmä ku pakastin
Muistan ku Abdi RK62:n latasi
Ja huusi; et Karjala takasi!
Mä oon musta
Toni Halme uhka sun maailmalle
Ne yrittää työntää mun pään pinnan alle
Liian tumma kannustaa leijonii
Mut tarpeeks vaalee rintamalle
Jos et oo vielkää ihonvärist toipunu
Ni sä oot se ketä ei oo integroitunu
Tääl mamut Suomi-pelipaidat pääl
Eikä kukaa meist ees pysy pystys jääl!*

I pay more taxes than anyone
Yet they're always asking for my residence permit
I hear nothing can make me domestic
Yet you train us to be your soldiers
Yeah I too laid in the snow
When it was cold as a freezer
I remember when Abdi loaded the RK62
And shouted; give us Karjala back!
I am Black
Toni Halme a threat to your world
They try to push my head under the surface
Too dark to support the lions
But light enough for the frontlines
If you have yet to recover from skin colour
Then you're the one who hasn't integrated
Immigrants over here with Finland-jerseys on
And none of us can even stand up on the ice!

This verse exposes the tensions between being a citizen and a contributing member of Finnish society, all the while constantly having the legitimacy of one's presence in the country questioned. It also highlights the contradiction inherent in constructing immigrants and people of colour as perpetually foreign, while legally requiring that all young men—including (naturalised) immigrant men of colour—serve in the nation's armed forces. As he states, these men, too, endured the national masculine coming-of-age ritual by suffering through boot camp during the harsh Finnish winter. In fact, as Musta Barbaari suggests, these men, too, have adopted the national narrative about the tragic loss of the eastern region of Karelia to the Soviet Union in the Moscow Treaty of 1940, a sacrifice made to preserve newly-gained Finnish national sovereignty, but resulting in the displacement of nearly 500,000 Finns (Kirby 215). The reference to the Arabic name “Abdi” signals that the soldier loading the RK62—an assault rifle that is standard issue in

the Finnish defence forces—is Muslim and (likely) Somali. That he is demanding the return of Karjala demonstrates Abdi's marking of himself as a part of the Finnish nation that once lost it—even though his family would not yet have been here.

The second part of the verse makes reference to another element of national exclusion in the form of exclusion from participation in an important element of national culture: sports. When he says, "too dark to support the lions; but light enough for the frontlines," he is referencing the Finnish national hockey team known as the lions of Finland. Not insignificantly, the name of the Finnish national team is a reference to the lion in the Finnish coat of arms. Here again, a form of exclusion is juxtaposed against the strategic inclusion of people of colour when it is that their inclusion will serve the purpose of defending the country's borders. There is also an inherent irony pointed out here in that being called to serve in protection of Finland's borders, and thus Finnish national sovereignty, is so starkly contrasted with the internal boundaries drawn around Finnish national belonging. Indeed, Musta Barbaari ends the verse with reference to the tendency of national discourses to frame immigrants—and Black immigrants, in particular—as fundamentally inassimilable. In response, Musta Barbaari claims that "if you have yet to recover from skin colour, you are the one who hasn't integrated." In addition to framing racism as an ailment, the statement accomplishes two additional things: it explicitly defines claims about challenges to integration as racialised, rather than a matter of immigration or culture, and by doing so, it also disrupts the illusion that Finnish national discourses about immigration are colour-blind.

In the music video, Prinssi Jusuf and Musta Barbaari are both wearing the Finnish national ice hockey team's jerseys—a potentially small and uncontroversial gesture, but which in the Finnish context cuts to the core of questions about national culture and representation. Like many of its neighbouring countries, ice hockey is considered Finland's national sport, and a source of national pride, especially when playing against arch-rivals Sweden or Russia. At the national level, ice hockey also remains an exclusively "white" sport, thus remaining relatively untouched by debates about whether athletes of colour can adequately represent Finland on the international stage. The last line again illustrates the dedication of immigrants to adopt Finnish national narratives and culture. Indeed, he comically exclaims, "immigrants over here with Finland-jerseys on; and none of us can even stand up on the ice!" With this statement, Musta Barbaari points out the complicated entwining of sports and national pride in the symbolic significance of the national jersey. This is affirmed by his suggestion that immigrants wear the jersey not for the love of the sport (since he says they cannot even ice skate), but rather as a way to participate in Finnish national culture.

Race, Space, and Belonging

In contrast to the discourses of national exclusion, Afro-Finnish rappers highlight the importance of urban space and especially marginalised immigrant-dense neighbourhoods as spaces of belonging. In nearly all songs, references are made to the eastern suburban district of Helsinki, which is considered the primary home of African immigrants in Finland, and where all the men themselves grew up. As is the case in other European countries, the majority of Black/African diasporic populations reside in greater metropolitan areas (Small, *20 Questions and Answers on Black Europe* 77). Immigrants have also historically tended to reside in particular parts of Helsinki, with East Helsinki neighbourhoods being home to the greatest immigrant populations. For example, in 2016, over thirty-four per cent of the East Helsinki neighbourhood of Meri-Rastila's population was of foreign descent (Malmberg). East Helsinki is also colloquially considered to be the main home of Black communities in Helsinki, as suggested by common references connecting East Helsinki to immigrants in hip hop culture as well as television programs. One of the most notable examples includes the short-lived television series dealing with the everyday lives of immigrants in East Helsinki entitled *Mogadishu Avenue*, a reference to the nickname of the main street in the Meri-Rastila neighbourhood where many Somalis live (Ahola).

In several songs by Afro-Finnish rappers, East Helsinki is discussed as a space of belonging, home, and freedom (juxtaposed against the broader context of exclusion), as well as in terms of its reputation as home to immigrants and low-income residents. The first single released by Seksikäs-Suklaa and Dosdela, *Niinku 97* [As in (19)97], perhaps serves as the most explicit example.

Bussi täynnä somalei
Somalei
Bussi täynnä somalei
Somalei
Bussi täynnä somalei
Somalei
Niinku 97
Niinku 97
Niinku 97
Kontulan kentällä

[Bus is full of Somalis
 Somalis
 Bus is full of Somalis
 Somalis
 Bus is full of Somalis
 Somalis
 As in (19)97
 As in (19)97
 As in (19)97
 On the Kontula field]

The title “As in (19)97,” in combination with the reference to the Kontula field, invokes the infamous 1997 attack in which a group of Nazis assaulted Somali youngsters playing football on a field—an attack which reverberated throughout Finland’s Black communities and has since become an urban legend (Sarhimaa). The music video to the song features a bus full of young Black passengers—including many other Black/Afro-Finnish rappers—driving around in circles on this field as they dance along to the trap beats of the song. The seriousness of the racial violence referenced, thus, is juxtaposed against this celebratory image of the community.

The title’s use of “97” also gestures toward a layered reference to the postal code (00970) and corresponding bus line (97), which runs through the East Helsinki neighbourhoods of Kontula and Mellunmäki. The use of the bus—a racialized and classed public space in its own right—to represent the social dynamics of the broader community is not only relevant to the extent that it serves as a marker of who may be represented as passengers on a given bus line, but it also speaks to local common-sense understandings of what George Lipsitz refers to as the racialization of space and the spatialization of race (“The Racialization of Space” 12). Indeed, bus lines in Helsinki are overwhelmingly (although not exclusively) numbered according to the postal codes they serve in the northern and eastern working-class suburbs, thus symbolically marking bus lines as extensions of the communities they serve. The bus line someone takes, then, serves as a colloquial signifier of the community they are from. From this perspective, the staging of the 97 bus as a Black social sphere is not that unusual.

It is also illustrative of the tongue-in-cheek spirit of the song, as exemplified by the first verse’s commentary on going ‘clubbing’ as an illustration of classed differences:

Koko maa pakos vaa
Klubil täyttyy kokonaan
Sä tulit tilataksil
Me tultii yödösäl
Sul on 50 tonttuu
Meil on 50 somppuu
Bussi täynnä somaleit ku kontulan kentällä
Elämä on kovaa kontulan kentällä
Ne ei pysäyttäne meit ees maihinnousukengällä
Bussi täynnä somaleit, iso kolari
Puhokses ne riitelee
“Onks Puff Daddy somali?”

[The whole country escaping
 The club fills up completely
 You came with a pre-ordered cab
 We took the night bus
 You got 50 acres
 We got 50 Somalis
 Buss full of Somalis like the Kontula field
 Life is rough on the Kontula field
 They didn't even stop us with combat boots
 Bus is filled with Somalis, big accident
 At Puhos they're arguing
 "Is Puff Daddy Somali?"]

The image of leisure is again juxtaposed against the "rough life" of Kontula. With another reference to the '97 attack, this verse also asserts resilience in the face of militant racism ("they didn't even stop us with combat boots.") Indeed, the music video continues to show the young passengers of the bus getting out onto the field and enjoying an impromptu block party complete with games, dancing, and barbecuing. The juxtaposition of the field as a symbolic site of the struggles of Black communities in Finland against images of celebration, then, signals a deliberate reclaiming of embattled public space. The mention of "Puhos" is a reference to an old shopping centre in East Helsinki where the majority of shops are immigrant-owned. A staple in the community, Puhos features halal butchers, a Turkish market, a Somali café, and a mosque space, for example. The song's reading as an ode to east Helsinki as a Black/African diasporic space is made explicit in the second verse, as they call out various eastern neighbourhoods:

*Tää lähtee kaikille kontulast
 Itiksest, vuosaarest mis vaan on somppuja*

[This goes out to everyone from Kontula
 From Itis, Vuosaari, wherever there are Somalis]

These creative re-imaginings of marginalised spaces as spheres of community and belonging represent a core feature of Black community-making in the African diaspora, as well as a central component of hip hop culture (Forman; Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*; Rose).

Discussion

I have highlighted three related ways in which first-generation Black/Afro-Finnish rappers use hip hop to negotiate racialised lived experiences; by resisting national exclusion, articulating and affirming racialised identities in resistance to colour-blind racism, and by reclaiming marginalised places as a way to carve out spaces of belonging within the physical landscape of the nation. In advancing these discourses, I argue, these rappers have also claimed their place in the cultural imaginary. In this way, hip hop becomes not only an avenue for the articulation of racialised lived experiences in Finnish society but a means of conjuring new meanings of what it is to be Finnish (Westinen, "Multi-Semiotic Constructions of Self as Other in Finnish Rap Music Videos"; Leppänen and Westinen). By approaching hip hop as a living archive and as a site for the production of counter-narratives that "talk back" to mainstream colour-blind discourses, this study contributes to both Finnish and global studies of hip hop, understandings of the politics of race and racism in Finland, and the expanding study of Black European identities and cultures.

A consistent feature of how Afro-Finnish rappers engage identity is the fluidity of the language which rappers use to refer to themselves and their experiences in racialised, ethnic, and national terms. These rappers often use explicitly racialised language by referring to themselves as Black, while in other moments aligning themselves with the categories of Finn, immigrant, African, and, in some cases, with specific African national identities, such as Somali or Ethiopian. As such, all rappers appear to use racial, ethnic, and national language in fluid ways, suggesting both the salience of these social categories for their everyday

lives, but also the hybridity of these identities. This complex combination of racial, ethnic, and national identities also suggests the importance of advancing intersectional readings of their use of language, as Blackness, Africanness, and foreignness are entwined in the Finnish national imagination. Hybridity in both modes of identification and expression appears to be a defining feature of African diasporic hip hop around the globe. The use of hybrid language, for example, is a common way in which rappers navigate between hip hop's origins as a Black American cultural form, the global elements of hip hop culture, and its localized manifestations (Alim; Bennett, "Hip Hop Am Main: The Localization of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture"; Androutsopoulos and Scholz; Droessler; Pennycook).

While the rappers discussed here exercise their agency in strategically invoking different identities, they also distinguish themselves and their experiences from that of "Finns," thus framing themselves outside of the boundaries of Finnishness, tacitly suggesting that Finnishness continues to at least in part be defined by Whiteness. This speaks to the continued salience of the construction of people of colour as external to the Finnish nation and the persistence with which second-generation Finnish people of colour continue to be excluded from the society they know as home. This dynamic becomes particularly salient in songs that include commentary on what they frame as the selective and strategic (if not exploitative) dynamic of national inclusion, such as being framed as perpetual foreigners unable to partake in Finnish culture, all the while being required to perform their duties as Finnish citizens. The construction of second-generation people of colour as perpetual foreigners without a legitimate claim to the nation is also a persistent aspect of European racial politics—even in national contexts where people of colour have been part of the national landscape since the colonial era (El-Tayeb, *European Others*; Alba; Hine et al.). Indeed, while the construction of Finnishness as reliant on Whiteness is in part rooted in the notion that Finland has historically been ethnically homogenous (Tervonen), the mutual entwining of race and nation is also a legacy of colonial boundary-making to ensure the "externalization" of the racial Other even within the nation (Balibar and Wallerstein 39-45).

Hip hop scholars have also emphasized the importance of race and place in hip hop, both in the United States and globally (Forman, "Represent"; Rose; Forman, "Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City"; Hebdige; Bennett, "Hip-Hop Am Main, Rapping' on the Tyne"). As Murray Forman has argued, hip hop is not only intimately tied to the politics of place by virtue of its birth in the context of post-industrial urban America (*Black Noise* 21), but also because of the centrality of neighbourhood, city-based, and regional identities throughout hip hop history ("Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City: Hip-Hop, Space, and Place" 203–06). The globalization of hip hop culture, then, has led rappers around the world to navigate between cultural appropriation, on the one hand, and the translation of U.S. hip hop to their local contexts, on the other (Tervo, "From Appropriation to Translation"; Androutsopoulos and Scholz; Bennett, "Hip Hop Am Main: The Localization of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture"; Ramsdell). In the African diaspora, the spread of hip hop has also rendered U.S. Blackness accessible as a resource for establishing transnational as well as local identities (Ibrahim; El-Tayeb, *Afro-German Activism*, "Gender and Hip Hop"). The use of U.S. Blackness as a resource for navigating the local politics of race is highlighted by the Afro-Finnish rappers I discuss in their incorporation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), as well as the invoking of politically conscious Black American rapper, Tupac, as a guide for how to navigate racism in Finnish society.

The hybridization of racial, ethnic, continental, and national identities appears to be central not only to the Afro-Finnish experience but rather speaks to the complex politics of identity in the so-called 'new African diaspora,' as well as what Fatima El-Tayeb describes as the "queering of ethnicity" in the diverse, migrant-dense, urban communities in Europe. Yet the salience of race as a marker of national exclusion also speaks to the precarious social status of second- and third-generation people of colour in Europe. The embrace of hip hop by first-generation Finnish youth of colour, then, reflects not only the global appeal of U.S. hip hop culture but also the importance of US Blackness as a political and cultural resource for the emerging Black diaspora in Finland. The centrality of East Helsinki in emerging Afro-Finnish rap illustrates the reclaiming and reimagining of marginalized social space that is a staple of hip hop culture, representing one of the central ways in which Black/Afro-Finnish youth use hip hop as a resource for advancing a politic of belonging in a context that continues to frame them as the Other.

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