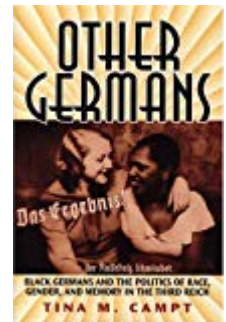


**Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, Reinhard Klein-Arendt, eds..** *Die (koloniale) Begegnung: AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland 1880-1945, Deutsche in Afrika 1880-1918*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2003. 332 pp. EUR 49.90, paper, ISBN 978-3-631-39175-4.



**Tina M. Campt.** *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004. x + 283 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-472-11360-6.



**Reviewed by** Eve Rosenhaft

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As the recent multiplication of H-Net reviews of works on German colonialism and its legacy (including the experience of Blacks in Germany) attests—and as Sara Lennox spelled out in detail in her review of Clarence Lusane's *Hitler's Black Victims*[1]—research in this field has not only intensified to the point where it is one of the most lively and visible areas of German historical studies, but has also entered into a new phase in theoretical and empirical terms. These two volumes each exemplify important developments: Campt a move towards methodological self-consciousness and theoretical depth in the deliberate address to the wider field of Black Studies, Bechhaus-Gerst and Klein-Arendt a necessary broadening of empirical scope. While it has to be said that each dis-

plays the weaknesses as well as the strengths of its respective genre (the pioneering dissertation/monograph and the conference volume), it is also the case that each of them can be valuable in furthering discussion of the real methodological challenges inherent in the field. In particular, I want to focus in my comments on the ways in which the books address the issue of Black agency and how the telling of life-histories (whether by the subjects themselves or by the historian) can contribute to its reconstruction.

Among historians of Germany, the emphasis on critical investigation of the subjectivity of Black and colonial subjects is relatively new, against the background of academic studies which have until recently remained dominated by

a metropolitan perspective, whether they examined the actions, perceptions, or fantasies of the white majority, analyzed the legal and scientific discourses which inscribed, transported and legitimated white racism, limited themselves to the important work of recuperating and asserting the presence of Black people in Germany, or (nominally at least) constructed Afro-German history in terms of "Holocaust." As such it implies a widening of the chronological scope of our studies—or perhaps simply a re-visioning of the "period(s)" between the 1880s and the post-World War II and post-colonial era as the life-span of a single generation. It also calls for a new sense of the geography of colonial and post-colonial lives, in that it requires that we pay close attention to where our subjects "were coming from," in literal as well as metaphorical senses, that is, in the terms in which place is both a shaper of identity in itself and a starting-point for empirical *Spurensicherung*.

Tina Campt's book is not in fact a study of colonial subjects, but of Black Germans "situated firmly in Europe" (p. 7). It focuses on the life histories of two individuals who were born and grew up in Germany in the 1920s and who, indeed, had no direct access to their African origins in childhood and youth. Hans Hauck, the son of a (white) German mother and an Algerian occupation soldier, and Fasia Jansen, daughter of the Liberian consul in Hamburg and a (white) consulate employee, did not know their fathers and were raised in (otherwise) white working-class households in their respective communities. Moreover, as an account centered on the "Third Reich," in which Hauck suffered sterilization and Jansen exclusion from professional training, menial work (though not incarceration) in a labor camp, and the threat of sterilization, the book foregrounds the working of notions of "race" for which "black" was a category without social or geographical distinction. This situation did not exempt them from being placed, or placing themselves, in relation to an imputed colonial or diasporic identity. And Campt's principal purpose and achievement in

this book is to anatomize the way in which her subjects negotiated their own sense of self as gendered and racialized subjects in the face of the *multiple* points of reference offered to or imposed on them by the wider culture and by their daily experiences. The core of the book is an extended analysis of interviews with Hauck and Jansen, which deploys a highly sophisticated theoretical toolkit to explicate the "memory-work" inherent in their accounts. Following the trajectory taken by the research itself, the book begins as a study in Holocaust memory, for which Hauck's relatively naive responses provide promising material.

The encounter with Fasia Jansen, however, leads to a more wide-ranging reflection on questions of Black identity. Jansen grew up in a political household and was active herself in left-wing, internationalist, and anti-racist politics after 1945; she took up and maintained active contact with members of her Liberian family, who themselves traveled between Africa, the United States, and Europe. And she talked back to Campt, her (African) American interlocutor, provoking a conversation about what—if anything—they had in common as Black women. The most exciting part of this book is accordingly the final chapter—described as a "postscript"—which returns to key passages in both interviews to reflect on the problems of intercultural address among Blacks in the context of a discussion of the notion of "diaspora." In a direct challenge to American historiography whose *uncritical* linking of the Afro-German and African-American experiences simply forecloses reflection about issues of Black identity and subjectivity, and drawing critically on British work (Jacqueline Brown and Paul Gilroy), Campt proposes that we "think of the diaspora as less an answer or explanation than as itself a persistent question—What work does diaspora do?" (p. 210).

Among the many commendable insights in this book is the assertion of the crucial importance of "being attentive to issues of the local in the stories and memories of ordinary people" (p.

167). But in Camppt's own account it is an absence of curiosity about the local--about where her subjects were coming from in material terms, and the actual circumstances to which their memory-work refers--that is likely to frustrate historians. The policies and practices that bore upon these two as racial outsiders and which are presented here as determinants of the key object of memory-work (their status as victims in National Socialism) are dealt with in two chapters about the so-called *Rheinlandbasterde* and Nazi sterilization policies, which largely recapitulate the standard secondary accounts of debates and events at national level. Who else was sterilized in the Saarland (where Hauck seems to have grown up), when and how and by whom, remains unconsidered. Similarly: Hauck served an apprenticeship on the railroad; by his own account, it was in order to qualify for an apprenticeship that he remained in the Hitler Youth after joining in 1933 at the age of 13 (and even after his sterilization)--an episode that provokes the first of several fruitful moments of incomprehension between interviewer and interviewee. Hauck continued to work for the railroad until he was conscripted in 1942--six or seven years in all. And yet the character of the workplace and of his experience of work is not explored, either in conversation or by reference to external data. This problem is not just a question of corroboration; even where the emphasis is on the working of memory rather than its "accuracy," independent evidence for events is not irrelevant to our reading. The term "Other within" that Camppt applies to characterize "the paradox of being internal to and to some extent an acknowledged member of this society yet also thoroughly marginalized by and within it" (p. 102) presupposes an understanding of what it is that the subject is "within"--and where the pressure and power to enforce marginality emanates so massively from a central source, as in National Socialism, it must (indeed) be in the details of locality that that understanding is to be found.

There need not be a paradox in the simultaneous insistence on locality and concern with diaspora. The reference to Paul Gilroy is a reminder that a key intervention in this discussion has been his invocation of the possibility of multiple and mutable identities (or consciousness) associated with a concrete history of movement between real places, in the concept of the Black Atlantic. Tina Camppt has played an important role in propagating this approach among German speakers; last year she acted as advisor in the mounting of a "Black Atlantic" series of events in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. The accompanying catalogue publication, edited by Camppt and Paul Gilroy, is not least a fascinating document of a still uneven encounter among metropolitan *Geschichtskulturen*. All but one of the textual contributions to the (German-language) volume are translated from English, French or Spanish, including Camppt's own essay and that of Fatima El-Tayeb. These two essays in turn are among only six (from a total of 31) contributions that directly address conditions in the German-speaking world. And the volume opens with an editors' note on the practical problems of translation.[2]

As a research agenda, "Black Atlantic" invites us among other things to pay attention to the multiplicity not only of cultural points of reference but also of physical spaces in which a Black German or Black European experience has been shaped: to the local in the transnational, so to speak. Africa, Berlin, Paris, Trinidad, Harlem (the ascending scale of specificity here tells us more about white metropolitan visions than about the Black experience, but it also sketches the world as seen by many a European historian) are not only notions but places as well. Lives lived in more than one place and characterized by movement between them constituted the reality of many Black Europeans and the context for their actions and self-presentation, and this experience is particularly true of the first generation of subjects of the German colonial empire. The great virtue of *Die (koloniale) Begegnung* is that it makes this vis-

ible and provokes readers to reflect on its implications for our understanding and practice as historians.

It does this not least by making it difficult for Europeanists to ignore Africa. The volume brings together work by Africanists and Europeanists to discuss examples of the "colonial encounter" in both the colonies and the metropolis between the 1880s and the 1940s. Of the 21 substantive contributions (the last item in the volume is a brief report by Irmtraud Wolcke-Renk on the picture archive of the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft and its digitalization),[3] eleven focus on events and developments in Africa. For Cameroon, Stefanie Michels analyzes the Mpwanku wars of 1904 and Albert-Pascal Temgoua the role of local elites in colonial administration in the north of the colony, while Kai Schmidt-Soltau considers the persistence of a sentimental attachment to Germany among Anglophone Cameroonians today. South West Africa is the focus of Andreas Eckl, who examines the confrontations between the Kavango of the northwest and (respectively) explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators; of Jan-Bart Gewald's examination of why German soldiers and settlers participated in the Herero genocide; and of Wolfram Hartmann's bold attempt to access the nature and consequences of sexual relations between white men and native women. Peter Sebald takes Togo as the case for a critical dissection of the respective meanings of "colonial" and "encounter" in terms of the changes over time in the balance of cultural and physical power between Europeans and natives. East Africa provides evidence for Reinhart Klein-Arendt's discussion of the role of modern weaponry in the German colonial conquest and Michael Pesek's deconstruction of Carl Peters's account of the establishment of colonial rule. Harald Sippel's account of the role and powers of white judges charged with administering local customary law and Ralph Austen's investigation of the survival of German as a spoken language in the colonies and its implications both reach beyond a single colony, Sippel

emphasizing East African developments in a more wide-ranging study and Austen sketching a comparison between the Haya of East Africa and the better-known case of Duala (Cameroon). Of the remaining essays, five at least specify place of origin in analyzing the experiences of Africans in German-speaking Europe: Sonia Abun-Nasr's account of the life and opinions of the Gold Coast-born missionary David Asante, Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst's report of the trial and execution of a Cameroonian for attempted rape in Hamburg in 1942, Rea Brndle's reflections on the history of a family of Togolese traveling performers, Adja Paulin Oloukpona-Yinnon's survey of individuals from the Togo colony who spent time in Germany between 1884 and 1914, and Leroy Hopkins's biographical study of a Togolese businessman in Hamburg. Slom Komlan Gbanou's analysis of the role of the missionary and scholar Paul Wiegraebe in making the oral literature of Ewe (Togo) accessible to German readers is similarly specific in its cultural-geographical reference. Peter Martin's brief summary of his research on Afro-German political activism between the wars illuminates moments of solidarity between Africans of different origin, and contributions by Fatima El-Tayeb, Ulrich van der Heyden and Heiko Mhle illuminate aspects of colonial(ist) practice that contributed to framing the scope of action of all Africans under German domination (the regulation of inter-racial marriage, colonial exhibitions, and the post-Versailles patronage of the Deutsche Gesellschaft fr Eingeborenkunde, respectively).

The broadly geographical taxonomy I have adopted above is my own. In the volume, the articles appear in alphabetical order of the authors' names. This organization may be read as a sign of lack of editorial energy in a volume that really does little more than bring these articles together; an all-too-typical conference publication, it contains neither index nor introduction (apart from a one-page foreword), nor even a list of contributors, and the contributions are inconsistent in

length and character. Or perhaps there was a deliberate intention to avoid imposing a structure on a collection which is characterized by a wide range of themes and methodologies, and which serves not least as a useful showcase for the multiplicity of directions taken by recent research. At the same time, both conference and book represent a program, as described by the editors, which is important and much to be welcomed: "[to see] the history of the encounter between Africans and Germans in the former colonies and in Germany itself as different aspects of a single common or shared history [*\*einer\* gemeinsamen bzw. geteilten Geschichte*]" (p. 7). Equally important is the determination of most of the contributors to represent colonial subjects as active agents in this history.

The point of agency is where the interests of two otherwise extremely disparate books under review coincide, and here *Die (koloniale) Bewegung* is suggestive in giving access to some of the specificities of the "African" experience that must have contributed to shaping "Afro-German" subjectivities. These possibilities are not fully realized in all the biographical contributions to the volume. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst's contribution does not go beyond the portrayal of Afro-Germans as people who suffer "fates" rather than having lives; it reports and comments solely on what appears in prosecution and Reichskolonialamt files. Like this, and some other recently published sketches of the lives of Afro-Germans, Leroy Hopkins's account of Ernst Anumu proceeds from the reading of a single source, Anumu's *Einbürgerungsakte*, but Hopkins has done enough research in the Hamburg local sources to breathe some life into the man and provide a sense of an Afro-German community in post-World War I Hamburg. The analysis of the life and opinions of David Asante by Sonia Abun-Nasr, distilled from a dissertation, deals subtly and persuasively with the way in which the sense of self developed in his home territory as a pupil of the Basel Mission informed his (appalled) reaction to European ru-

ral society. Finally, Rea Brndle's account of two generations of the Bruce family (both men and women) who traveled back and forth between Togo and Germany between the 1890s and the 1990s is valuable not only as a persuasively rounded tale of transnational lives; it also addresses directly the problem epitomized by the fact that biographers of Afro-Germans often find their subjects first in the police records (and which Brndle elucidates by reference to defensive discourses around asylum-seekers): Not simply the prejudice inherent in the sources, but the actual behavior of subjects who are having to draw on cultural and personal resources to live by their wits, can challenge understanding and description. This problem reminds us that imagining the lives of the first generations of Black Europeans involves most of us in an intercultural encounter, and for many of us this is still a colonial encounter.

#### Notes

[1]. Sara Lennox, "Review of Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era*," H-German, H-Net Reviews, November 2004, at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=166591101759450>.

[2]. *Der Black Atlantic* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2004). See also Claudia Rauhut's review of the event and the catalogue at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=636>.

[3]. The archive, an extremely valuable resource, can now be accessed on-line at <http://www.stub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/dfg-projekt/Bildprojekt/Bildsammlung/Bildsammlg.htm>

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<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

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