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Jean Rahier, Percy C. Hintzen, Felipe Smith, eds. *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xxvi + 261 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03562-3; $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07753-1.

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Why Diaspora? Situating Black Consciousness after Slavery

Why diaspora? This ambitious, promising multidisciplinary volume seeks to answer just that question, drawing from several theoretical approaches, including Clifford Geertz, Aíme Césaire, and Louis Althusser.[1] Its central premise is that "as a metaphor, the political and analytical work performed by the Diaspora has much to do with the issue of recognition and consciousness." Recognition and consciousness are the "central analytics in the scholarly engagement with blackness." Due to the white supremacy that is the heart of this diaspora, the black chain of consciousness is disrupted, resulting in "misrecognition, distortion, abjection, exclusion and erasure" (p. x).The book, which is comprised of nine elegant essays, is organized into two parts. The first is titled "Practices in Exclusion and Misrecognition. The second part is called "The Emergence of Diasporic Consciousness."

The first essayist is co-editor Felipe Smith, a literary scholar. Smith uses musical theatre and blackface minstrelsy to explore the notion of the diaspora as an imagined community. He is concerned with the limits of the concept of nationalism, á la Benedict Anderson, as a model for understanding diaspora and the role a nationalist model can play in the misrecognition of the diaspora and the exclusion of its actors.[2] Given the interconnected and global nature of the African diaspora, his concerns are well reasoned and his argument convincing.

The second essay is by co-editor and anthropologist Jean Muteba Rahier, who looks at the experiences of Afro-Ecuadorian soccer players during the 2006 FIFA World Cup to examine the ideologies (and limits) of citizenship. Drawing particularly on the work of Barnor Hesse, Rahier demonstrates how events like the World Cup can, albeit for what is often a limited period of time, elevate the status of "victorious athletes from subaltern groups" (p. 29). In effect, sports provide "popular and privileged stages that reify" the long-accepted concept among those in the humanities and social sciences that "race" is a socially and culturally constructed concept, without scientific value (p. 41).

Part 2 begins with an essay examining race and diasporic consciousness among West Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area by co-editor Percy Hintzen, a political sociologist. Hintzen argues that in popular perception, West Indians stand as a community positioned as a "model minority" in California, in terms of the area's racial discourse. "Achievement and its relationship to model minority status" are then "central elements in claims made by non-European minorities to the American national space." (p. 53) Because of this, West Indians serve as a contraction between "an exoticized and inferiorized blackness" and "claims to model minority" (p. 65).

Sociologist Lyndon Phillip's essay analyzes the role of Caribana in racial dialogue in Toronto, Canada, and particularly the replacement of traditional Caribbean music with rap. Race, in this context, is a set of performances that disrupts and repositions a performance of West Indian blackness to a more African American blackness.

Gender studies scholar Marlon Bailey's essay looks at the interplay between race, gender performance, and the ethnography of ballroom culture. His aim is to "rethink

the African diaspora so as to theorize the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on black gender and sexual margins" (p. 97). In doing so, he seamlessly merges the seldom combined arenas of queer studies and African diaspora theory.

Literary scholar Stéphane Robolin looks at the contacts and exchanges between South African and black Americans through texts such as Langston Hughes's "Question and Answer" and Peter Abrahams's "Tell Freedom." Literature's ability to transcend geographic boundaries provided the means by which and exchange and affinity for "constitutive outsider-ness" took place (p. 142).

As a superfluity of scholarship has long recognized, the African diaspora began with a mass involuntary migration. It is therefore fitting that this volume would include an essay that unpacks the shared plight of black people and the complexities and controversies behind the proposed voluntary migrations of Pan-Africanism. Historian Reena Goldthree analyzes the paradoxes of black nationalism vis-à-vis a study of Amy Jacques Garvey and Theodore Bilbo and their unlikely alliance. Albeit with distinctly different aims, both Garvey and Bilbo embraced the idea of "race integrity" and the Greater Liberia Act.

Like Goldthree, social anthropologist Jung Ran Forte examines the idea of a transnational diaspora and migration back to Africa through the Beninese Festival of Ouidah. Ouidah 92 was posed not only as a "crucial promotion during the transition toward democracy," but also as an invitation to African Americans for reunion and place of return at what had once been a critical port in the slave trade (p. 175).

The book would have certainly benefited from an essay or two addressing the diaspora in Central and South America. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to expect a single volume to tackle such a highly ambitious question of why diaspora in its entirely. The multidisciplinary approach to this question will no doubt encourage further such beneficial collaborations across fields. The volume does raise at least one interesting question. Smith's essay convincingly argues the limitations of an Andersonian nationalism model in imagining the diasporan community. While he too, acknowledges a limitation to Anderson's model, Robolin also reminds us of the work's role in posing the centrality of imagination in any project of community formation and in the creation of collective consciousness, ultimately arguing that the "constitutive outside" suggested by nationalism "need not be strictly reserved for those presumed to be physically outside the geographical boundaries" (p. 175). Where both scholars come from the world of literary studies, this begs the question–can these two seemingly views be satisfactorily reconciled?

Notes

[1]. Louis Althuser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1995), and *Return to My Native Land* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969); and Clifford Geertz,*The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

[2]. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991 [1983]).

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