Africans in Europe in the Long Twentieth Century: Transnationalism, Translation and Transfer

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The growth of research taking a global or transnational approach has led to a new wave of scholarship focusing on the presence of Africans in Europe, which has challenged previously dominant conceptions of inflexible national identities and has made African historical actors increasingly visible in European history. Hosted by the University of Liverpool, the conference „Africans in Europe in the Long Twentieth Century: Transnationalism, Translation and Transfer", sought to build upon this work and to explore what it means to be African in Europe. It set itself the task of examining the transnational movement of Africans from one contact zone into another and their presence and experiences in Europe. In particular it sought to explore the interaction between African migrants and European cultures and the implications this had for subjectivity, everyday life experiences, and cultural production. The conference brought together established and young scholars from a variety of disciplines ranging from art history and literature to African studies, cultural studies and history.

The opening session of the conference centred on the African presence in Imperial Germany. HOLGER STOECKER (Berlin) presented a biography of the Togolese language informant Bonifatius Folli, who was based in Berlin in the first half of the twentieth century. In doing so he demonstrated the political, ideological, and social boundaries that shaped and restricted the lives of African migrants like Folli. This was built upon by SARA PUGACH (California State) who also concentrated on African language assistants and their reception in Germany. In drawing attention to issues raised by their health she illustrated the ways in which their presence challenged European medical discourse and revolved around notions of acclimatization. STEFANIE MICHELS (Frankfurt am Main) then focused on the lives of two women of African heritage to demonstrate the „cosmopolitan mobility" of Africans before, during, and after the colonial period. In situating the women's biographies in a larger context of Cameroonian involvement in the Atlantic world she reflected on the ways in which the women's transnational lives intersect with and challenge traditional notions of 'race', class and gender.

The second session shifted the focus to African cultural production in Europe and opened with a contribution from CHRISTOPHER HOGARTH (New York City) who discussed African writers in Europe, particularly in Italy. Hogarth brought to light the difficulties they face in their attempts to market their work as well as the points of contestation, which result from disputes with European translators over the content and context of texts originally written in a non-European language. PAUL DAVIS (Indiana) followed with a paper centring on a group of Malian artists who were trained in Europe from 1950s to the 1970s. Davis focused on Mamadou Somé Coulibaly's experiences in the Soviet Union and employed a notion of *cosmopolitanism* in order to illustrate how these artists engaged with and adapted international styles to depict local subject matter in their work. The session ended with EVE ROSENHAFT (Liverpool) analysing two part auto-biographies written by a Cameroonian migrant to Germany and his German born, French educated son. Rosenhaft's paper examined the differing contexts in which the books were written as well as the writers' contrasting approaches to the issue of *métissage*, which in turn provided an insight into the differential processing of a shared familial experience in two different countries and two generations.

LISA SHAW (Liverpool) began the third panel which explored the presence of people of African descent in France with a paper looking at the presence of Afro-Brazilian culture in Paris from 1900 to 1925. She examined the way in which Afro-Brazilian musicians who performed in Paris repackaged their music and appearance in Europe for a white, Euro-

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pean audience. Shaw argued that this was in order to tap into the popularity of US jazz and to avoid being confused with a more problematic black African identity. JENNIFER BOITTIN (Penn State) then focused on the contrasting social and political histories of black communities in Paris and Marseille in order to demonstrate the impact of location on the black experience. Boittin provided an insight as to how these communities functioned internally and shed light on the local and national networks they were engaged in. The first day of the conference closed with ELLEKE BOEHMER (Oxford) reading from her novel „Nile Baby", which explores notions of unhomeliness, a search for belonging, and the practice of Diaspora through the two child protagonists at the centre of the novel. This was followed by a question and answer session.

The conference's second day opened with a panel looking at post-postcolonial Europe. ELLY ODHIAMBO (Independent Scholar) presented the fascinating story of the neglected Ghanaian Pan-Africanist Dr Raphael Armattoe, who lived and worked for a time in Northern Ireland. At the same time he also presented insights into the relative ease African migrant groups have experienced in integrating into in present day Northern Ireland on account of their linguistic practices. DONALD CARTER (Clinton, New York State) explored notions of belonging and culture by reflecting upon what it means to be African in present-day Italy and the ways in which black subjectivity challenges traditional European models of identity and categorisation. These themes were then taken up by CECILIE ØIEN (Oslo) in a paper on *retornados* and white Angolans in Portugal. Øien demonstrated the contrasting identities and perceptions of home expressed by these two groups and the difficulties they encountered in creating a space for themselves within Portuguese society.

A session on political activism which followed was opened by NEELAM SRIVASTAVA (Newcastle) who focused on unprecedented African reactions to the 1935 Italian invasion of Abyssinia. This, Srivastava argued, led to a global upsurge in a sense of a black collectivity and the growing disillusionment of African activists with Communism. In the second paper ELIZABETH WILLIAMS (London) turned the attention to Britain and illustrated the largely overlooked history of active African diasporic involvement as an important part of the anti-apartheid movement in the United Kingdom. The African experience in the UK formed the focal point of the final session of the conference. DANIEL WHITTALL (London) began with a paper exploring the Aggrey House project to create a hostel for black people in London. Whittall demonstrated how the involvement of people of African heritage in the project was an illustration of their efforts to engage with the racialisation of urban space in 1930s and 1940s Britain. JOSÉ LIGNA NAFAFÉ (Birmingham) then underlined the integral role that the colonial past plays in hindering the integration of African migrants in present day Britain through a study of the difficulties faced by migrants in the West Midlands. In particular Nafafé underlined the role played by the media in creating negative images of migrants based on imagery of the past.

Proceedings were brought to a close by SUSAN PENNYBACKER (Hartford, Conneticut) who offered up remarks on the conference as a whole. Pennybaker underscored the vital importance of placing a history of the African presence in Europe within the 'grander' political narratives of European and global history in order to reappraise these narratives. As part of this she emphasised the need to contextualise factors such as the push and pull elements of migration, the issue as to who has the opportunity to reach Europe, and the aims of the African historical actors themselves. Among the provocative open questions Pennybaker posed were those of the motivation behind carrying out research into the African presence, the political and moral dimensions of such research, and the ways in which research findings can be made more accessible to a wider audience.

As Pennybaker argued over the two days the conference covered much new and exciting ground. The conference provided valuable insights into the established and emerging networks and affinities among people of African descent within local and national frames, but also into hitherto neglected connections across national borders –transconti-

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nental as well as transatlantic. With an emphasis on African subjects as historical and social agents the various contributions underlined the heterogeneity of the African experience in Europe and explored the complex situations in and through which they practiced Diaspora, belonging, and identity. In doing so participants also brought to light the moments of engagement between actors of different cultures and backgrounds in processes of political action and cultural production. The results of these fruitful discussions will shortly be made accessible in the form of a forthcoming publication.

Conference overview:

Welcome: Eve Rosenhaft

Panel I: Germanophone Lives

Holger Stoecker (Humbolt Universität zu Berlin): Bonifatius Folli: A Togolese Language Informant in Berlin

Sara Pugach (California State University):A Death in Berlin: Africans in Health and Illness in Late 19th-Century Germany

Stefanie Michels (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main): Andrea Manga Bell and her Mother-in-Law Emily Engome Dayas - Some Methodological Reflections on 'Race', Gender, and Diaspora

Panel II: African cultural production in the European frame

Christopher Hogarth (Wagner College): Africans in European Literature: Language, Publication and Reception

Paul Davis (University of Indiana): Cosmopolitan Artistic Formations and the Politique Culturelle of Painting in Bamako, Mali, 1950s–1970s

Eve Rosenhaft (University of Liverpool): *Schwarze Schmach* and *Métissages contemporains*: Reflections on Mixed Marriage in Cameroonian Texts of Two Generations

Panel III: Polychrome France

Lisa Shaw (University of Liverpool): Black Brazil(ians) in Paris in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Jennifer Boittin (Penn State University): Black Communities in Urban France: The Africans and Afro-Caribbeans of Marseille and Paris during the Interwar Years

Reading and Discussion

Elleke Boehmer (University of Oxford): Nile Baby

Panel IV: Post-postcolonial Europe

Elly Omondi Odhiambo (Independent Researcher): Can You Speak African? Africans in Northern Ireland: A Transnational Experience in Anglo-Celtic Subcultures

Donald Carter (Hamilton College): Blackness over Europe: Meditations on Culture and Belonging

Cecilie Øien (Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Norway): Of Homecomings and Homesickness: The Question of *Retornados* and White Angolans in Postcolonial Portugal

Panel V: Radical Encounters

Neelam Srivastava (University of Newcastle): Pan-Africanism or Communism? Black Activism in Europe around the Ethiopian War of 1935

Elizabeth Williams (Birkbeck College, London): African Diasporic Agency in the Anti-Apartheid Movement

Film Screening and Discussion
The Greatest Escape: Filming Black Experience
John Sealey (University of Exeter)

Panel VI: New perspectives on Black Britain

Daniel Whittall (Royal Holloway, University of London): Contesting the Racialisation of Urban Space in Britain1931-1948

Jose Lingna Nafafe (University of Birmingham): Luso-African Migrants in the West Midlands

Closing Remarks: Susan Pennybacker (Trinity College Hartford)

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