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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The Past in the Present

"ALL CHANGED, CHANGED UTTERLY." Is Yeats's verse about the 1916 Irish uprising and its bloody end an epigram for 2020? The disruption of ordinary life by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has claimed around a million deaths worldwide, surpasses anything since the end of World War II. There is a sudden glut of articles by international affairs analysts about an impending restructuring of the global order. The future of globalization, a phenomenon that has shaped the period since the revolutions of 1989, has been thrown into question by both the virus and rising populism. Business leaders are reconsidering their supply chains, and some American political leaders speak of "decoupling" from a rising China. Experts agree that US–German relations are at a postwar nadir, and the talk of trade war between the US and Europe after the November elections hangs in the air. It may be a characteristic of modern times that we always feel we live in a moment of crisis, but for once the claim seems justified.

Quite a time to be assuming the leadership of an institution dedicated to deepening cultural and political ties between the two greatest powers in the West. I arrived at the American Academy in Berlin in August, after a flight on a near-empty plane and a stop at a nearby doctor's office, where I was tested for the coronavirus. The Academy—with its superb and innovative staff—was in full gear, arranging online programming, helping to acclimate three fellows who, because of dual citizenships, could get to Wannsee, and working hard to secure the admission of the remaining scholars and writers still in the United States.

My arrival in Berlin was genuinely exciting. I was in my last months as a journalist here in 1994, when Ambassador Richard Holbrooke announced the creation of the Academy. Later, in spring 2004, I had the privilege of being an Academy fellow. Even in today's adverse circumstances, it is evident that the Academy has grown tremendously, far beyond the founding vision that inspired it.

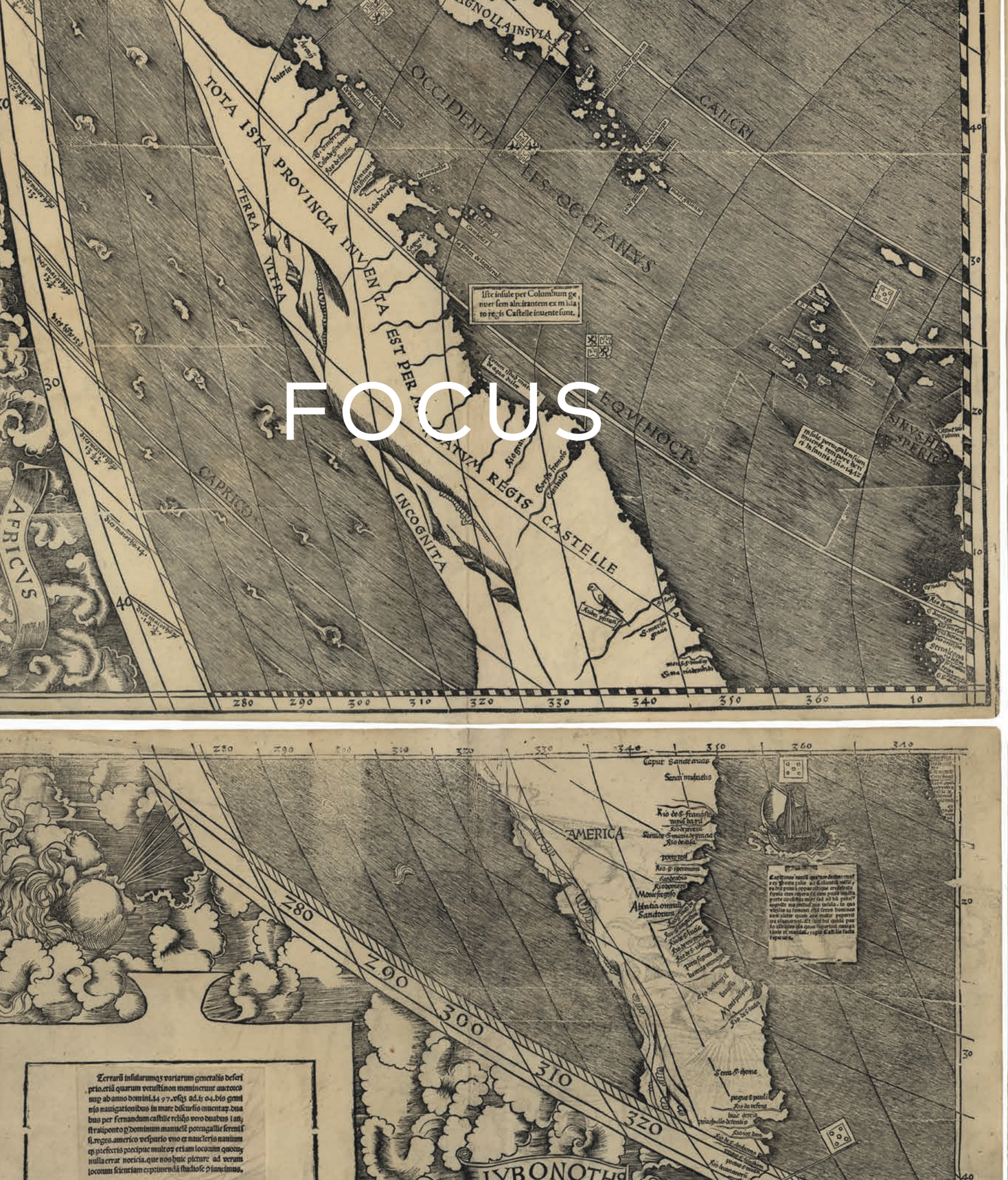
Aside from the obvious health and economic consequences of the pandemic, one unexpected effect has been to throw into high relief a number of profoundly troubling societal ills. None has been more prominent than America's long, difficult struggle to achieve racial justice—a national ordeal whose pain has been sharpened by the killing of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, and a series of similarly shocking events. Academy-affiliated writers and scholars contend in this issue with the past and present of this subject: Fall 2020 fellow Mosi Secret presents an excerpt from his forthcoming book, about a 1960s effort to integrate a Southern boarding school; an interview with Yale professor and 2019 Distinguished Visitor Claudia Rankine addresses white privilege and the mirage of progress that clouds discussion when "you can read the paper, turn on the television, and see that black kids are being killed." Racism, of course, is hardly endemic to the US alone, as Boston University historian and spring 2021 fellow Allison Blakely examines in the continuing debate over the Dutch folkloric figure of "Black Pete," a centuries-old character in Christmas stories and plays. Antiquity provides a somewhat hopeful counterpoint, as suggested by spring 2021 fellow Nandini B. Pandey, a classicist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in a fascinating essay on how ancient Rome evolved a society of thriving diversity through the extension of citizenship and the manumission of slaves.

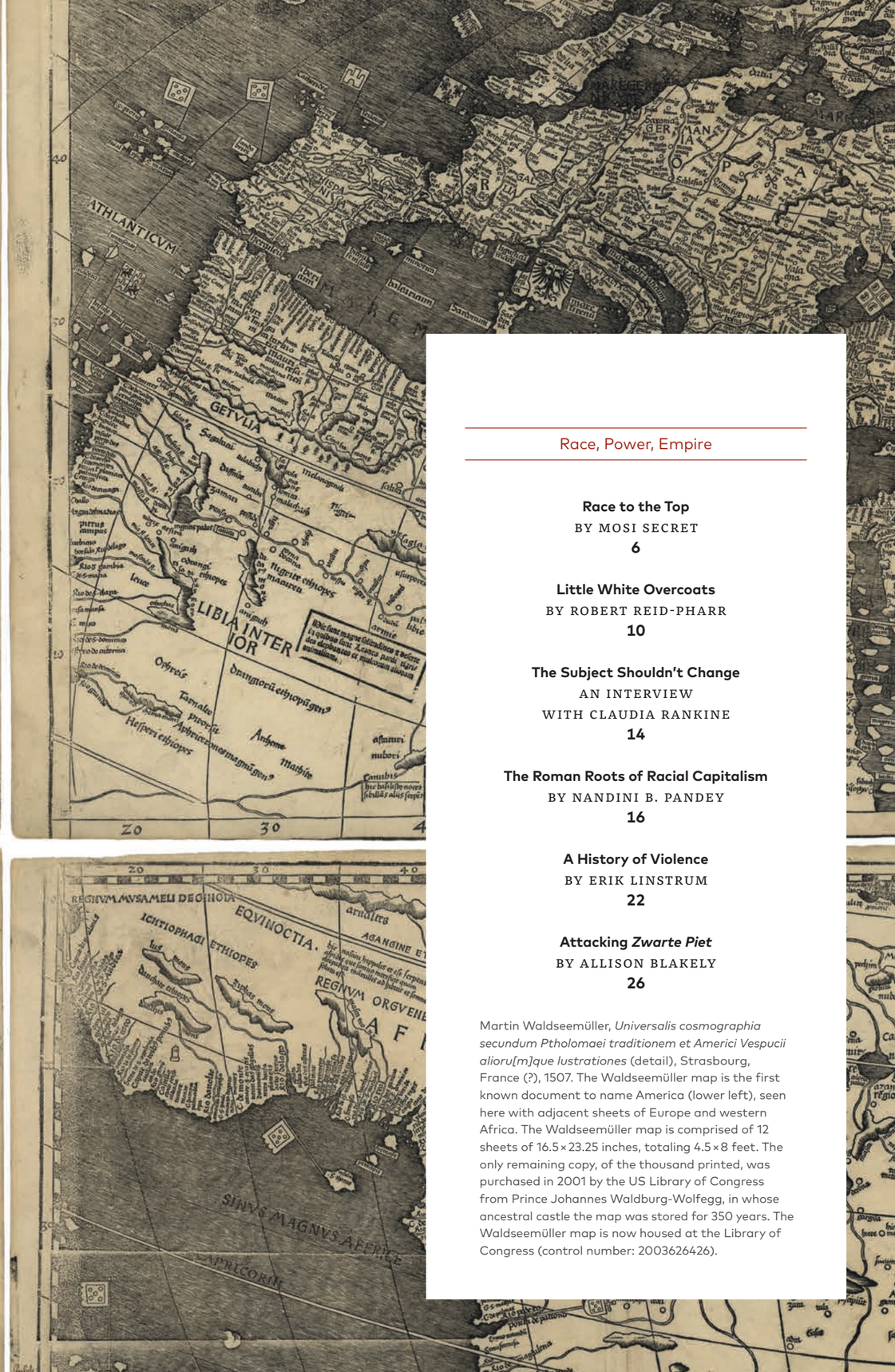
Gender inequities and, conversely, the growing acceptance of individuals with hitherto marginalized or excluded gender identities, also focus the attention of Academy scholars. Yale professor and spring 2020 fellow Moira Fradinger and the Academy's head of programs and development, Berit Ebert, provide a lengthy overview of "Gender Dissidence in the Twenty-First Century," while fall 2020 fellows Lois Banner, of the University of Southern California, and James Green, of Brown University, examine how Greta Garbo and Sarah Bernhardt each navigated and shaped the gender expectations of their times.

These are vital investigations at a time in which the calls for rectifying injustice are urgent. How serious the international and domestic divisions are now is something we will only be able to judge fully in hindsight. Nevertheless, to understand what is transpiring and why—through informed discussion, debate, reflection, and intellectual engagement—is the first crucial step in fully grasping the present. I'm proud to be joining an institution dedicated to taking on these issues—one that is and will remain committed to the open exchange of ideas essential for doing so.

Daniel Benjamin

FOCUS





Race, Power, Empire

Martin Waldseemüller, *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucii alioru[m]que lustrationes* (detail), Strasbourg, France (?), 1507. The Waldseemüller map is the first known document to name America (lower left), seen here with adjacent sheets of Europe and western Africa. The Waldseemüller map is comprised of 12 sheets of 16.5×23.25 inches, totaling 4.5×8 feet. The only remaining copy, of the thousand printed, was purchased in 2001 by the US Library of Congress from Prince Johannes Waldburg-Wolfegg, in whose ancestral castle the map was stored for 350 years. The Waldseemüller map is now housed at the Library of Congress (control number: 2003626426).

RACE TO THE TOP

Shaking up the segregated South

by Mosi Secret

The road to Virginia Episcopal School was more secluded in those days, winding a few miles from the white section of segregated Lynchburg through a wood of maple and oak to the school's rolling campus, shielded by trees and the more distant Blue Ridge Mountains. The usual stream of cars navigated the bends on the first day of school, white families ferrying their adolescent sons. Like nearly every other elite prep school in the South, it had been the boarding school's tradition since its founding, in 1916, that its teachers guide white boys toward its ideal of manhood—erudite, religious, resilient. But that afternoon of September 8, 1967, a taxi pulled up the long driveway carrying a black teenager, Marvin Barnard. He had journeyed across the state, 120 miles by bus, from the black side of Richmond, unaccompanied, toting a single suitcase. In all of Virginia, a state whose lawmakers had responded to the 1954 court-ordered desegregation of public schools with a strategy of declared "massive resistance," no black child had ever enrolled in a private boarding school. When Marvin stepped foot on V.E.S. ground, wearing a lightweight sports jacket, a white dress shirt, a modest necktie, and a cap like the ones the Beatles were wearing, the white idyll was over.

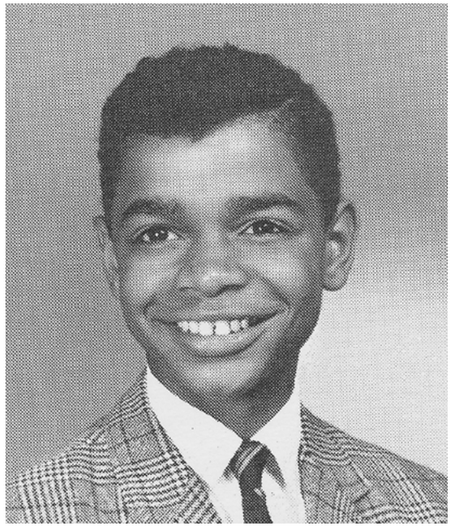
Marvin had just turned 14 when he arrived, and at a little over five feet tall and a hundred pounds, he was a tiny thing. His face was boyishly open, eyes and mouth big and bright, with black hair that grew in waves toward a lopsided widow's peak. His skin was yellow-brown. Marvin had the spirit of a bouncing ball, and back home in Richmond he'd kept his classmates and teachers laughing. In all his years of schooling, he'd never earned a grade other than A. The old couple who raised him, his aunt and uncle, had given him a dime for each perfect report, but money wasn't Marvin's motivation. He lived to please them, and after his aunt died, when he was 12, Marvin lived to please his uncle. Going off to V.E.S. had delighted him and just about everyone else. "The neighbors and the other kids, they were just excited," Marvin recalled. "The thing that gave me such a rush was that I could see it in their eyes. It's like: 'Well, you go, and you show them. You show them what you can do. You show them for us.'"

Another black boy, Bill Alexander, had also been sent that year. Bill had traveled by jet from his hometown, Nashville, to Washington and then on to Lynchburg aboard a propeller plane. He, too, was alone, though he brought more bags than Marvin, coming as he did from Nashville's black middle class. At the airport, Bill hailed a taxi driven by a black cabby. "To Virginia Episcopal School," Bill told him. But those were impossible words to the man's ears. He took Bill to a black Baptist seminary instead. "I told the man, 'No, I'm going to Virginia Episcopal School on V.E.S. Road,'" Bill told me. "He kinda looked at me. I must have said it two, three, four times before he drove all the way up to V.E.S."

Bill and Marvin were part of a quiet but strategic experiment, funded by a private organization called the Stouffer Foundation, to instill in Southern white elites a value then broadly absent: a visceral and compelling belief in the societal benefits of integration. From the beginning, the boys were a pair, one hardly seen without the other, one name seldom said without the other to follow. Bill and Marvin. Marvin and Bill. To their white classmates and teachers, each existed as one half of a singular whole: the new black boys on campus. Bill was more reserved than his roommate (of course they would have to room together), with the look of someone holding something back, behind bespectacled eyes and a half smile. He was six months older than Marvin, seven inches taller, 35 pounds heavier, and his skin several shades darker. His face had already taken a turn toward manliness. A Presbyterian minister's first child, Bill was preppy before he knew what preppy was. A teacher would nickname the new duo Fire and Ice: Marvin, warm-blooded, with his heart on his sleeve; Bill so confident and cool.

That same fall, four other Stouffer students broke the racial barrier at Saint Andrew's School in Boca Raton, Florida. Another three enrolled in the Asheville School in the mountains of western North Carolina. Three more went to the Westminster School on Atlanta's affluent north side. Twenty students in all integrated seven schools, a teenage vanguard that left black America for the wealthiest white enclaves. Not all of them made it. But each year that followed, a new class came. The privately financed experiment would become a turning point in elite high school education in the South, and it would test, in very real terms, how much a black child could achieve in a white environment, and the price he would have to pay.

Black people had emerged from slavery with an almost religious zeal for education. Historians note the intense and frequent anger of the freed for having been denied literacy. "There is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I can never forgive," wrote James Pennington, a former slave who escaped in 1828. "It robbed me of my education." Their collective desire for learning drove the first great mass movement for state-run public education in the South. Between the 1890s and 1915, white philanthropists supported public schools and school boards for black children, ostensibly as an avenue for black advancement. But it was also an investment in subjugation. Philanthropists tended to support vocational schools for black people that prepared them for unskilled, low-wage labor, to the exclusion of the liberal-arts education that was open to white people. The very concept of elite, private high-school education was developed to provide whites an alternative to those public schools, with the effect of maintaining class divide and long-held power structures. James Dillard, a prominent educator who supported the founding of Virginia Episcopal School, was also the director of a philanthropic effort to expand schooling for black people. For white students and for his own sons, Dillard supported V.E.S.'s nurturing of mind, body and spirit. For blacks: "Three years of high school work emphasizing the arts of homemaking and farm life."



Marvin Barnard, 1968. Photo: Virginia Episcopal School

Black leaders debated the merits of educating an elite leadership class versus more broad-based common schooling, a divide famously personified by W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Washington endorsed a more utilitarian model of education, including trade schools and workshops for industrial training. Du Bois's approach was characterized by the term "talented tenth," which he borrowed from a Northern philanthropist and used to describe the cadre of highly educated blacks who would lift other black people up, an ideal that grew deep roots in the culture. In 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to enroll his son in an all-white prep school in Atlanta but was refused. The change would have to start within the white community.

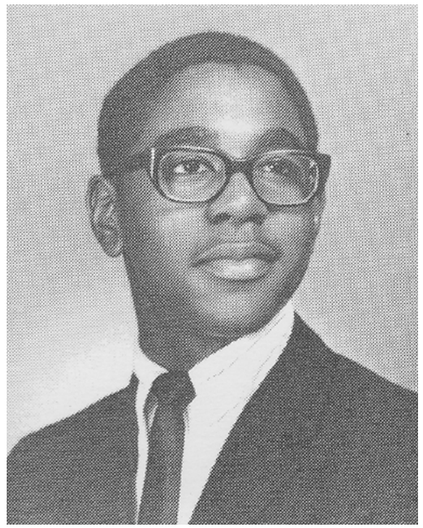
Anne Forsyth, an heiress of the North Carolina Cannon and Reynolds families, traveled in Winston-Salem's emerging white liberal circles in the mid-1960s. One of her sons went to a Northern prep school that had long accepted black students, and Forsyth noticed that racial integration was beginning to occur almost everywhere except the prep schools of the South. An idea took hold of her. What would society look like if she exposed young wealthy white students to black scholarship students? Would the South change if its future leaders were socialized to be less bigoted? Her aim, using a few token blacks to mend the South's racial divide from the top down, was utopian to say the least. It was also novel, a systematic effort by whites to help rid other whites of their prejudices. Providing a better life for black students was secondary.

They wouldn't choose just any black students. Forsyth started the Stouffer Foundation, named for her mother, and hired a small team of like-minded white colleagues who toured the South coaxing schools to open their doors to blacks and scouting black public schools for exceptional students. In the years after *Brown v. Board of Education,* new private schools popped up around the South, and older private schools expanded enrollment. The schools gave such reasons for their growth as "quality education," "Christian atmosphere," "discipline," and "college preparation," but mostly they were academies with nostalgia for the Jim Crow South, schools to which white families fled in order to avoid integrated public schools. Thirteen years after the Supreme Court ruling made school segregation unconstitutional, the Stouffer Foundation quietly sent off its first class.

V.E.S.'s headmaster, a New Englander named Austin Montgomery, agreed to accept Bill and Marvin over the objections of many parents and members of the school's board. "Why, why, why have you done this cruel thing to our beloved school?" one parent wrote. "A private boarding school like V.E.S. is an extension, a part of the family," another wrote. "We have no intention whatsoever of integrating those of another race into our family." The school's tract of land had been part of a working slave plantation until Emancipation. In the years before Bill and Marvin arrived, V.E.S. tore down the remaining slave cabin on the grounds. Their dormitory bedroom looked out on Jett Hall, the campus's main building, and from their windows the campus spread out over 160 acres, with Georgian Revival buildings cropping out of red clay and open green space. The only other black faces belonged to the hired help, like the beloved custodian, Robert

Thomas, son of a man named Paul, who had worked at the school in the old days as one of the white-coated waiters who served white boys in the dining room.

Marvin and Bill each came to V.E.S. with a belief that the Civil Rights movement was his to bear, and that the way to bear it was by proving himself in the classroom. Bill, the preacher's son, had seen the movement up close in meetings at his father's church. Marvin's inspiration came from black cultural figures—Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X. "We recognized that, being the black kids, everything we did was going to be under scrutiny," Marvin said. That meant no sneaking off campus, stealing away with girls, or missing class. "It would go beyond us as individuals, and they would say: 'This is what all black kids do. This is what the black race would do.' Representing yourself as an individual and then being a representative of your people—as I went through school, that became a struggle."



Bill Alexander, 1968. Photo: Virginia Episcopal School

FRESHMEN AT V.E.S. were called "new boys" or, worse, "rats," and all were subject to hazing: fetching things for upperclassmen or doing their laundry. Bill and Marvin accepted their places at the bottom of the hierarchy, assuming that status was based on seniority and not skin color, despite some of their white classmates' reminding them otherwise. "You might hear individuals use the N-word while you're walking down the hall, and you turn around, and nobody would say anything," Marvin told me. "Or you may see something scribbled on the desk."

Montgomery, the headmaster, was a near-perfect archetype of the patrician Northerner, with smart eyeglasses and an old smoking pipe always between his teeth. He kept watch over his new charges from his office window. Just weeks into their freshman year, he informed the Stouffer Foundation of a first triumph: "As I write, the two are playing touch with a dozen others out on the lovely front campus—a use to which I always like to see it put. The game goes on without regard to the usual stream of Sunday visitors and sightseers." Calling Bill and Marvin by their last names, Montgomery wrote, "I thought you might be interested that Friday, unbeknownst to me, the freshmen held class elections, in which Alexander was chosen president by a solid majority—of which Barnard was not one!"

With uncanny speed, Bill and Marvin did just what they set out to do, rushing to the head of the class while shaking up racial allegiances, seldom losing their footing, the path they raced along hewing so closely to the one they'd imagined. A few more weeks into the school year, faculty members posted student rankings on a bulletin board, as they did at the end of every grading period. When the freshman boys pressed up against the bulletin board in their jackets and ties, they saw Bill and Marvin at the top of their class, ahead of all 40-some white boys. "I wanted to get their badges," Marvin told me. "That became one of my mottos. I want to get what you say is good, so that you have to say I'm good."

It's possible that the stars aligned for the Stouffer Foundation's experiment during the first months of Marvin and Bill's time at school. "Divine intervention," Bill calls it now. A high point came on the baseball field, where Bill attracted the attention of white boys at another school, the prestigious Woodberry Forest, which had previously refused the foundation's request to desegregate. Forsyth, the heiress and philanthropist, later spoke about the incident: "Now, I don't know what Bill said to these boys, but the next day during chapel, the head of student government asked Mr. Duncan"—Woodberry's headmaster—"if they were supposed to be leaders in the South scholastically, socially, and athletically, why weren't they leaders in integration?" So Woodberry's headmaster accepted three Stouffer students, the program growing by word of mouth.

ON THE EVENING of April 4, 1968, Bill and Marvin were in their dorm room when news came over the radio that Martin Luther King had been shot and killed. The movement's leader was dead, and they were away from home. "I'm standing in the room," Marvin recalled. "Bill is in the room. And then we hear nothing but—I mean, it's like the whole doggone dorm was celebrating and laughing and whooping. And I looked at Bill, and I'm just like, 'No, this is not gonna happen this way.' I went out into the hallway, and I looked up and down the hallway, and I yelled out that if anybody thinks that this is funny, then come out of your rooms now and tell me. I wasn't the biggest guy around or nothing like that. But they could feel I wasn't taking no mess. And there was quiet." □

The unedited version of this article was first published on September 7, 2017, in the *New York Times Magazine*, as "The Way to Survive It Was to Make A's." nytimes.com/2017/09/07/magazine/the-way-to-survive-it-was-to-make-as.html. To listen to *This American Life's* complementary audio documentary, visit: thisamericanlife.org/625/essay-b

LITTLE WHITE OVERCOATS

James Baldwin and writerly trust

by Robert Reid-Pharr

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1974, Abel Meeropol—still reeling from the sense of defeat and despair following the close of the "hot" part of the US Civil Rights movement and the assassinations of Martin King, Medgar Evers, and Malcolm X—wrote to his remarkable former student, the activist and literary genius James Baldwin. "I have been wanting to write to you for many, many years and since I am very, very much older than you, I had better do so before I cease to exist," Meeropol began.

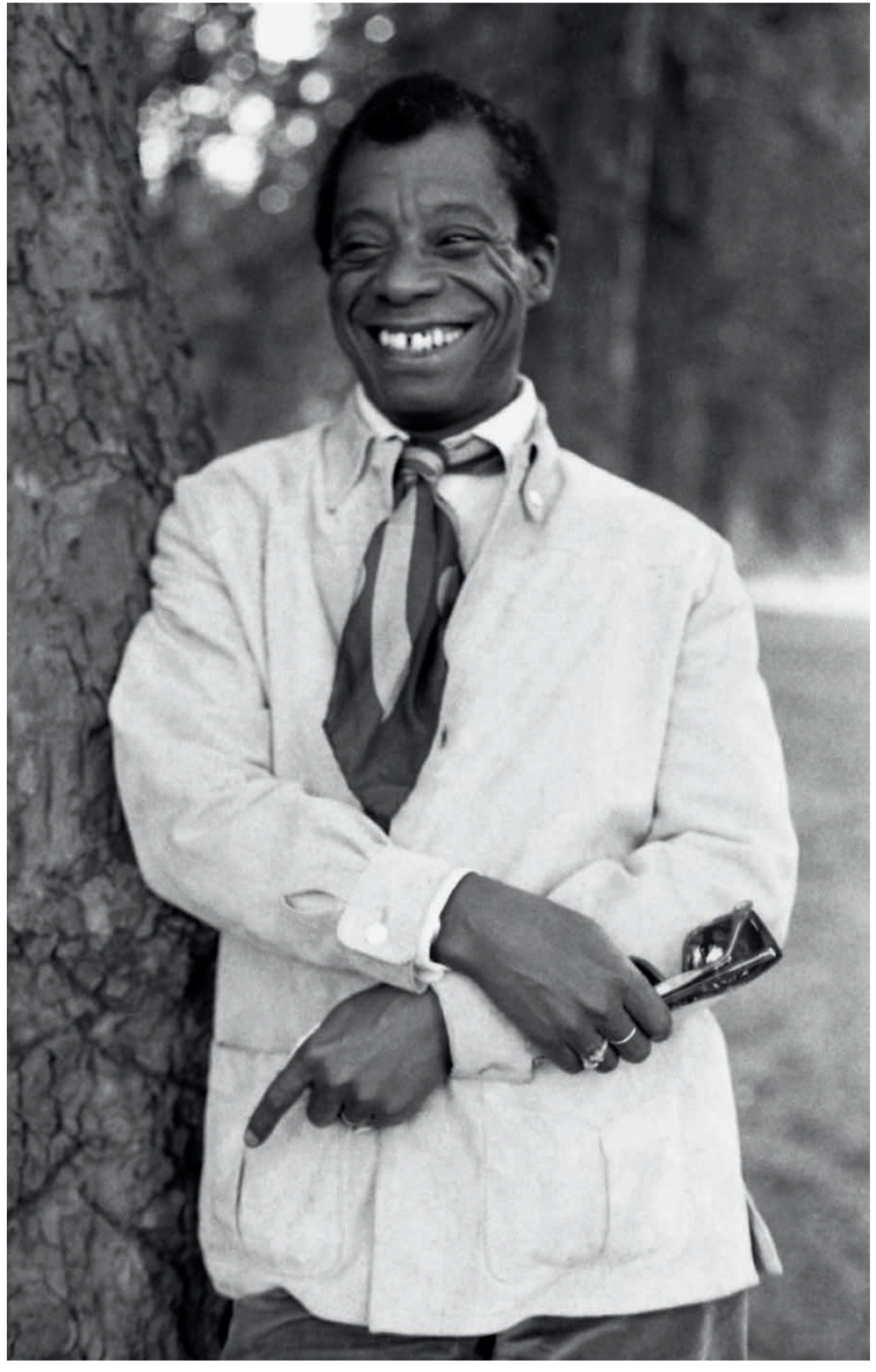
> I taught for eighteen years at DeWitt Clinton High School and I believe you were in my first or second term English class. It is impossible to remember names at my age, but I do recall vividly incidents in the past and the individual involved. I remember a small boy with big eyes and the circumstances which impressed me so much. I made it a practice to send groups of boys to the blackboard to write one paragraph on a particular subject and then have a general discussion with the class as to how well each boy expressed his thoughts and feelings in the paragraph. The subject I suggested to the boys for the paragraph was to describe some aspect of a scene of nature. You chose a winter scene in the country and the one phrase I never forgot was "the houses in their little white overcoats." It was a beautifully imaginative expression from a little boy. [1]

Abel Meeropol, sentimental and aging, could not have written a more perfect, indeed more eloquent paragraph. Baldwin's person, small bodied and big eyed, confident and imaginative, is presented with a delicacy that thumps the heart and nips the breath. One can hardly believe that these effortless and kind words could come from a man whose life was so brutally punctuated by the realities of the country's ever-more-clipped retreat to right-wing hysteria.

Immediately after his paean to the young Baldwin, Meeropol reveals a basic truth about himself and his family that had necessarily been kept private and discrete, if not exactly secret, for many years.

> My sons, Michael and Robert, were the Rosenberg children born to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. My wife, Anne, knew that at some point in their lives, as well as I did, that Michael and Robert as adults would shed their anonymity, which was essential when they were young, and that they would expose the frame-up of their parents. My wife, Anne, died on September 13, 1973. I am glad she lived long enough to see Mike and Robby fight to clear the names of their parents. We were both so proud of the boys. (Abel Meeropol to James Baldwin, September 5, 1974, n.p.)

Here one dreams a dispassionate Baldwin snapped into quick attention by the slow motion spectacle of his former teacher's disrobing. The trial and June 19, 1953 execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, convicted of helping to pass American nuclear expertise to the Soviet Union during the Second World War, was a singularly disastrous moment for the American Left, one recognized as *the* bellwether of the increasingly vicious attacks on progressive activists and



James Baldwin in Hyde Park, London, 1969. Photo: Allen Warren. Courtesy Wikicommons / CC 4.0

intellectuals during the 1950s and beyond. The particularly weak case against Ethel Rosenberg was especially galling to progressive Americans who were outraged that this 37-year-old mother of two boys, six and ten years old, had seemingly been put to death largely as retribution for her radical politics. The fact that her execution was so gruesomely violent—a total of five electric shocks given until she lay dead, smoke rising from the char of her flesh—was and is a none-too-subtle reminder to progressive Americans of what the consequences of radical dissent can be.

Even as this surprising revelation undoubtedly left Baldwin stunned, perhaps reeling, Meeropol had at least one more darkly iridescent object in his bag of rare tricks. Like the Harlem Renaissance writers Countee Cullen and Jessie Fauset, who taught at Baldwin's junior high school and high school respectively, Meeropol had been an artist teaching his craft in the New York public schools but always looking outward toward the possibility of a larger, grander, and more public creative life. Years before leaving DeWitt Clinton, in 1945, Meeropol had already attained quite significant success. Writing under the pseudonym Lewis Allan—itself a mark of unfinished mourning, as "Lewis" and "Allan" were the intended names of Meeropol's two stillborn sons—he established himself as a quite successful poet, lyricist, and songwriter, creating works performed by Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Peggy Lee, and Nina Simone, among many others. In particular, he wrote the anti-lynching dirge "Strange Fruit," made famous in 1939 when Billie Holiday's plaintive performance of the piece was released as a single by Commodore Records, with her rendition of the jazz standard "Fine and Mellow" on the flip side.

It is astonishing to consider that during 15-year-old Baldwin's sophomore year at DeWitt Clinton, one of his teachers, whom he would later barely remember, secretly published a song that would become not only an anthem of the anti-lynching, anti-white-supremacist movement, but also an emblem of the refusal of conscious and progressive individuals in the US and elsewhere to turn away from or ignore the systematic ritual killings of African Americans.

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
> Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
> Strange fruit hanging from the Poplar trees.
>
> Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
> The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
> Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh,
> And the sudden smell of burning flesh!
>
> Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
> For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
> For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
> Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Baldwin would quickly register his own shock about how impossibly complicated the social, political, and intellectual situation was at DeWitt Clinton during his time there. Writing to Abel Meeropol on September 29, 1974, he admitted that he had no idea of the profundity of his teacher's involvement in Left American culture nor how much that involvement had cost him and his family. "It never occurred to me, of course, that one of my teachers wrote 'Strange Fruit'—though that also seems, in retrospect, unanswerably logical," he remarked. "Nor could it possibly have occurred to me that one of my teachers raised the Rosenberg children. It's a perfectly senseless thing to say, but I'll say it anyway: it makes me very proud." [2]

I WANT to focus at this juncture less on the matter of the vagaries of human connection, the ways in which none of us can ever be certain of how the actions of our neighbors and colleagues will impact our lives, and instead on pedagogical practice, the teaching of not only writing but also the ability to look, to see, and to transmit what one finds to a not-yet-formed audience, that clumsy entity composed of equal parts promise and menace standing just beyond the margins of the imagination. "Get up! Go the board! Write something! Write it handsomely! Be succinct! Be quick! Take criticism! Return to your seat! Repeat! Do not stop!" Abel Meeropol, committed communist dialectician that he was, focused with his students less on content and style than on form and process. Though the lovely phrase "the houses in their little white overcoats" charmed his teacher, Baldwin recalled nothing of that moment. Instead, his focus remained bluntly on the structure and stability Meeropol provided. "I don't remember what you remember," he wrote. "I remember only the blackboard and the bottomless terror in which I lived in those days—but if I wrote the line which you remember, then I must have trusted you."

Here we see clearly the logic of any effective creative practice. The forms we are taught, the stiff rules of grammar, syntax, tone, and diction the competent writer must learn and re-learn, must allow himself to be captured by if he is to achieve anything approaching "voice," are necessarily secondary to the promise of connection that our handiwork, however inadequate or clumsy, is designed to achieve. The act of writing is, first and foremost, an act of trust. It is a demonstration of the willingness to yoke the languages and sensibilities of one's forebears to the stiff, exacting protocols of formal practice. And if we are lucky and stubborn enough, we might break through the worlds of difference that separate us to show the everyday, human-scale grandeur of our naked faces. Each time we draw pen across paper, chalk across board, a prayer is released. For a moment, we are confronted by a basic, vital, and uncomplicated truth. For those of us who run, for those who leave behind the comfort of the familiar, for those with strong backs and empty hands, our faces turned toward the promise of an ill-defined future, our tender hearts beating valiantly beneath damaged bone and thin winter coats, there can be no rest. Travelers all, we can never stop.

I SHOULD PAUSE for a moment to admit that I am surprised—perplexed, in fact—by the reality that an individual with the remarkable talents and the no-nonsense erudition of James Baldwin actually had so little formal education, indeed just 12 brief years. I have shown already that part of the reason he ended his schooling so well prepared was that from his first days in the New York public school system, gifted educators recognized the uniqueness of his intellect, then actively—indeed courageously—worked to cultivate it. Frankly, it should come as no surprise that Baldwin seems barely to have even considered attending university, not bothering to attempt admission to either the City College of New York or Columbia, both of which were in walking distance of his home. Young, black, extremely poor individuals from families supporting nine children are highly unlikely to gain access to the American higher-education system in the early years of the twenty-first century. We should not be surprised then that this fact was doubly true in the first half of the twentieth.

What inspires me, however, what massages the bleeding heart, is the commitment, the conspiracy, really, of a host of individuals to make do with the scant resources that they had available to them in order to snatch some bit of dignity and promise from the teeth of institutions designed to corral our bodies, dull our intellects, and blunt our spirits. These teachers knew that boys like James could never expect to extend their formal training beyond the sometimes exceptional opportunities afforded them in Harlem and the Bronx. In the face of that reality, they taught the boy to extract beauty and vigor from the resources at hand. And in doing so, they let him know that even though he might never be welcomed in Cambridge, New Haven, Berkeley, Berlin, Oxford, or Paris, at least not through the front gates, he still might seek something approaching safety and solace in the "houses in their little white overcoats." He might take the lessons learned in his youth, massage them, bend them, discard what was worthless, hold tight to what was useful, and then turn his face in the direction of the great, aloof, always-promising world and begin again. □

1 Abel Meeropol to James Baldwin, September 5, 1974, James Baldwin Papers, 1936 – 1992, Sc MG 936, Box 3B, Folder 2, n.p., Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

2 James Baldwin to Abel Meeropol, September 29, 1974, James Baldwin Papers, 1936 – 1992, Sc MG 936, Box 3B, Folder 2, n.p., Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

THE SUBJECT SHOULDN'T CHANGE

A brief conversation about whiteness

The interview below was conducted with Yale University professor, poet, and writer Claudia Rankine, a Distinguished Visitor at the American Academy in November 2019, as part of the Academy's *Beyond the Lecture* podcast series. Rankine was completing her latest book, *Just Us: An American Conversation* (Graywolf, September 2020), about the dynamics and difficulties of talking about race in America, and how those conversations might progress beyond their sticking points. The following interview, conducted by producer Tony Andrews and abridged here for space, can be heard in its entirety at americanacademy.de or on the *Beyond the Lecture* podcast on iTunes, Spotify, and SoundCloud.

Claudia Rankine: *Just Us* is a book that seeks to investigate how conversations derail themselves. What kinds of emotions we have that cause us to stop or will us forward in uncomfortable conversations around race. Each section of the book is a recounting of a conversation with someone. These conversations were then brought to a therapist, a fact-checker, and a lawyer, before my memory rendition of the conversation was returned to the person I had the conversation with, with an invitation for them to respond.

Beyond the Lecture: In the conversations you had for the book, a lot of white men identify with a feeling of exacerbation at the moral indictment that is implied in the term "white privilege." Could you comment on that?

CR: I think it's one thing to feel like the subject has been addressed enough already. But if the reality of black people is not changing, then the subject shouldn't change. People are acting as if the times have changed and black people are talking about something in the past rather than addressing something that is happening right now. And if the same things keep happening, then the same things will be said. What they might think about is why the same things are being said. So, clearly the reality hasn't changed drastically enough if you can read the paper, turn on the television, and see that black kids are being killed. Unarmed black children are being killed by the police, and the police are getting off; that is a profound problem. It's not a little problem, it's a profound problem. That's the thing they should have a moral problem with, not that they're being asked to account for their kind of passive collaboration with this force of injustice.

BTL: There's often a focus here on the question of time, like: "How long are we supposed to feel bad about this?"

CR: The problem with that is the idea that they're being asked to be accountable to slavery, when that's not what anybody is talking about. We're talking about a system of mass incarceration. Do you know how many black people are in prison? We're talking about the defunding of schools in certain neighborhoods. We're talking about the inability to buy homes. We're talking about vast discrepancy of wealth in the United States between people of color and white people. This is not about slavery, even though where we are today is the afterlife of slavery; it's the same policies reinstated under a different name.

BTL: For people to feel psychologically good about themselves, they need to feel like they're good people. The discussion of white privilege seems to take that option away, and if you feel like you're fundamentally bad or not doing enough or have no access to feeling you're a good person, maybe that's the kind of damnation that is being expressed here.

CR: Well, white people have to get over the idea that likeability is part of it. I am not talking about any individual specifically and their particular likeability. I am sure there are good people, nice people, generous people. We're talking about what it means to live in a system where certain people are outside systems of justice. Until we change the system, we are failing. And that "we" is collective. That's including me. [. . .] I think societies have criminalized blackness to the point where white people feel afraid of black people. It's not even something that white people understand is constructed in their imagination. It is reinforced in films, in advertisements. So the fear is a real emotion. The question is, Is it actually attached to me? That's what I would ask them to ask themselves. Is the person standing in front of you acting in any way to actually solicit that fear? There is this great thing in the train station in Boston where they said, "If you see something, say something," but then they added, "Remember, seeing something means seeing an action, not a person." I love that because it reminded me that they were thinking that we don't want people to racially profile people. But that is where the fear is. It's inside the imaginative possibilities of whiteness and not in actions of people. What one really needs to investigate is, as legitimate as that emotion feels, what is soliciting it.

BTL: That's on one level, on the level of white person's emotions. But on the black side there's self-censorship, where I need to be emotionally inert so as to not rile anyone.

CR: One of the ways that people of color and women have been silenced by white people is that they've been classified as, if they're women, hysterical, unable to be rational, and if they're black, they're angry. And what that does is limit your possibility of reactions to certain responses coming from white people. Because the minute you say no, you're irrational. The minute you say no, you're angry. Rather than maybe this moment, the legitimate and rational response to it is anger. But that has been taken off the table for anyone who is not white.

BTL: At your lecture at the American Academy, you mentioned the concept of a white space and how, as a black person, you can enter that space but it will always be marked.

CR: Exactly. People say, "What are you talking about? Anybody can come in here!" But if you go in there, everyone looks at you, and it's not always hostile. Sometimes they look at you in a welcoming way. But the idea is that your entrance has been noted. It's being noted because there was a time when you weren't allowed into the space. Everyone is recognizing the fact that it's a new thing that you're entering. It's disingenuous not to pay attention to the noting of that. Because the spaces in and of themselves are just spaces and why people believe that they are white spaces is because they only let white people in them for the longest time. [. . .]

We're interacting with people every day; we're making decisions about how people get treated every minute of every day. And clearly that treatment has been wanting. It's happening in restaurants, in banks, in hospitals. This double standard in terms of how one person is treated versus another. So we have to be accountable to the fact of the matter, and the system is as the system is. I just think this magical thinking that we can just kind of wish it away and be good people without being accountable to the realities and to the systemic failures that happen is never going to get us anywhere.

BTL: The discourse around white privilege is similar to how people feel after a climate-change documentary, in that they feel the enormity of the issue but also a certain sense of personal lack of agency or ability to change things. Is there a distilled directive you would give them? "Okay, now go and empower," or "Now go and break down injustice"? Or would you say that this issue just can't be boiled down into six steps that we could do to change the planet by 2025?

CR: Well, you know you could now go and vote in ways that allow others to live, understanding that your life already has a pathway. You could also now go and understand that no one is faulting your goodness but only asking you to look at the realities as they reflect on the lives of people who perhaps are not white. It's a question of perspective. It's a question of what are you voting for, how you are continuing to limit the civil rights for other peoples. These are tangible things that can happen in a life. □

THE ROMAN ROOTS OF RACIAL CAPITALISM

Triumph of Dionysus (detail), mosaic, Sétif, Algeria, ca. 200 – 300 CE. Photo: Sophie Hay

What an ancient empire can teach us about diversity

by Nandini B. Pandey

THE IMAGES OF Rome we encounter in our cinemas, museums, classrooms, and books rarely reflect its true ethnic variety. The cold, white statues on display in galleries were once brightly painted, reflecting the many skin tones of Roman people from Spain to Syria. But the cold, white universities that codified the discipline of classics had a vested interest in making Greco-Roman civilization look as white as possible. Blond, blue-eyed children cavort improbably through the pages of Latin textbooks, acculturating new students into classics' history of perpetuating white self-regard and excluding minorities. The 2017 controversy that erupted in response to a BBC cartoon's historically valid depiction of black-skinned Romans in Britain shows just how successfully scholarship, films, and racist assumptions have conspired to whitewash the popular image of Rome. To this day, far-Right hate groups are fond of referencing Greek and Roman history, or rather their intellectually dubious constructions of it, in order to fan fear that "the European races" will be replaced by immigrants.

Fortunately, some classical scholars—among them Mary Beard, Sarah Bond, Dani Bostick, Curtis Dozier, Shelley Haley, Rebecca Futo Kennedy, Denise McCoskey, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Patrice Rankine, and others—are fighting valiantly to correct the record on ancient race and ethnicity, improve our teaching and outreach, and repair our discipline's systemic racism and history of collusion with white supremacy.

My own book project on Roman diversity (for Princeton University Press) unites my research as a classics professor with my experience as a first-generation Indian-American in an overwhelmingly white field. At every institution where I've worked, I hear people say they "value diversity" in the abstract, but engage in behaviors that undermine, tokenize, silence, or heap institutional labor on individuals of color. Diversity measures, too—as well intentioned as they can be, and as necessary to correct deeply embedded inequalities—often backfire against minorities, fanning resentment of our successes and our very presence in white spaces. In a growing wave of criticism originating among minority scholars, Sara Ahmed shows how diversity policies operate to alleviate white guilt while deflecting the need for real change. Nancy Leong places affirmative action within a system of "racial capitalism," whereby white people and institutions derive value from nonwhite racial identity. As a minority scholar who strives to use the classical past to shed light on the present, I often wonder what the history and reasoning are behind the value we place on diversity and ethnic difference. What good does diversity do, and for whom? Do other cultures reveal similar gaps between the rhetoric and practice of inclusion, and what can we learn from them?

Ancient Rome isn't the only place we can look for answers. It's not the first culture to value diversity or the reason institutions tout their inclusivity. And, of course, a brief discussion will necessarily simplify evidence that is copious, complex, and sometimes contradictory. Nevertheless, Rome's strategies for handling diversity have never been so relevant to the present day, with our increasing divisions along the fault lines of race, ethnicity, immigration, and class. Rome not only exemplifies Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper's thesis, in *Empires in World History,* that empires often handle ethnic difference better than nation-states. When it comes to diversity,

as on so many other subjects, Rome can also serve as an estranging mirror through which to recognize the good, the bad, and the ugly around our own modern practices.

CONTRARY TO WHAT the far Right would have you believe, the city and empire of Rome were among the most diverse communities the world has ever known. At the height of its power, from around the first century BCE through the second century CE, the Roman Empire included large swaths of Asia, Africa, and Europe, drawing citizens and soldiers, authors and emperors from all three continents. It maintained peace, law, and a relatively high quality of life among these varied ethnic groups, assimilating them into the state and their gods into the Roman pantheon. Tensions and frictions arose, particularly with monotheistic sects in Judea. All across the empire, war and human trafficking, along with commerce, voluntary immigration, and military service, were important drivers of the intermingling and diversification of local populations. Indeed, Rome forces us to confront—as smiling faces on diversity brochures never do—the troubling causal connections between demographic variety in the present and violent subjugation in the past. On the other hand, Rome's social and belief systems were remarkably unbiased with regard to race or origin; belonging and advancement had little to do with blood or soil.

ALL HUMANS BELONG TO ONE UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC

Diversity was deep in Rome's DNA. Cherished foundation legends featured the Asian refugee Aeneas, the exile Romulus, the motley asylum-seekers he welcomed into his city, and the wives they stole from an outside tribe. There are hints in these stories of the violence and greed that would characterize Roman expansion. But these myths also provided precedent for the tendency to integrate and build buy-in among conquered people that historians and politicians alike credited with Rome's success. Philip V of Macedon complained to the townsfolk of Larisa, around 215 BCE, that the Roman practice of enfranchising allies and manumitting slaves gave them a military edge over more closed Greek societies (*Syll.*[3] 543). Centuries later, in 48 CE, the emperor Claudius argued to expand the admission of Gauls into the Senate, on the grounds that his and many famous patriots' families were once foreigners (Tacitus, *Annals* 11.23-24; cf. *CIL XIII.1668*). Citizenship was gradually if sometimes grudgingly expanded outside the city: first (after armed conflict in the early first century BCE) to Italy, and then to the provinces. This process culminated in 212 CE, when the emperor Caracalla, himself North African on his father's side and Syrian on his mother's, conferred Roman citizenship upon all free men regardless of race. Rome was at its heart a nation of immigrants, built on a foundation of pragmatic pluralism. And Roman identity was an expansive category, based ultimately on shared practices and values rather than accidents of birthplace.

As the philosopher Seneca maintained, all humans belong to one universal republic; it was mere fortune that some were born in Athens and others in Carthage (*On Leisure* 4.1). The Romans' appreciation for the role of providence in determining human difference stands in refreshing contrast to modern America's pernicious entanglement of race, class, and merit. Rome rewinds us to a time before the codification of race and racism—the belief in qualitative hereditary inequalities among people and the continuance of systems that perpetuate inequities. According to most ancient ethnographic thinking, which obviously predates modern hereditary science and the injustices perpetuated in its name, all humans were roughly the same before birth but developed differently in response to different environmental and cultural stimuli. Certain regions were known for producing fine soldiers or shepherds, much as some areas yielded good wine or olives. But people who were transplanted would readjust to their new surroundings. The primary geographical bias we find is a belief that Italy had an exceptionally healthful climate and was thus ideally suited not just to govern but to welcome all peoples. In Pliny's words, Italy was "both child and parent of all lands," uniting scattered ethnic and language groups as "the homeland of all peoples over the whole globe" (*Natural History* 3.5).

Mere luck, not hereditary worth, also determined whether someone was born free or enslaved, lived in a city that was captured and sold into slavery, or fell in circumstances through some other route (cf. Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 47.10). Roman elites saw no contradiction in treating the fellow humans they enslaved as "speaking tools." On the other hand, slavery as practiced in the Roman world did not systematically target certain races or develop pseudo-scientific justifications for enslaving specific groups. People of any color or origin, from northern Europe to Africa, could find themselves laboring in the same household. In fact, Varro advised owners to compose enslaved workforces drawn from diverse regions, in order to avoid infighting among clans (*On Agriculture* 1.17).

In a sense, then, diversity was not just a winning geopolitical strategy; it was also a tool for controlling the oppressed. So, too, was the hope of freedom, equality, and opportunity, thanks to an "open" model of slavery that distinguished Rome from the Americas. Long before modern psychology validated the efficacy of sporadic rewards, Rome developed laws and practices by which slaves could be manumitted and entered into the free citizen population on the whim or will of their enslavers. This was a carrot used along with many horrific sticks to incentivize good behavior among the enslaved. Those with close personal contact with their owners—doctors, teachers, sexual favorites—were most likely to benefit, and by some estimates might expect to serve as few as five years on average (though, as so often in classics, limited evidence makes generalization difficult).

The resultant influx of new, often foreign-born people into the citizen body was subject to certain legal controls but never regulated by ethnicity. Freed people's continued obligations to former owners made most of them settle, marry, and have children locally, further diversifying local communities and gene pools. Some even spent the afterlife with people drawn from all corners of the Mediterranean world: one Roman tomb contained a Theban eye doctor, a man from Smyrna, women from Phrygia and Carthage, and someone born locally to enslaved parents, all of whom had once served the same Roman master (*CIL* 1.2965a). It's an eloquent miniature of the forcible ethnic mingling that ultimately naturalized contact between people from different groups, whether as fellow slaves, coworkers, or spouses.

Successful freedmen enhanced their patrons' income and status. Indeed, some attained levels of prosperity that excited envy, admiration, and caricature. The fictional Trimalchio's tastelessly extravagant dinner party in Petronius's *Satyricon* has inspired tributes from Fellini's 1969 film to *The Great Gatsby*. In Juvenal's third satire, a favorite poem of the alt-Right, an Italian speaker rails against the foreigners who have taken over the city. But the joke's on him: the speaker's Latin name, *Umbricius* (meaning "overshadowed"), suggests that he is jealous because he's been eclipsed by these immigrants' remarkable success. While some feared or reviled the capital's increasingly cosmopolitan economy and society, many others delighted in its status as a crossroads of the world. To poets like Vergil and Ovid, Rome's walls were built not to keep others out but to embrace the world on seven hills; all peoples and nations were at home in its borders. The Greek writer Athenaeus wrote that Rome contained all the cities and peoples of the world within itself, finding "heavenly" wonder in what we might nowadays call its diversity and inclusivity. Modern genetic testing, including a 2019 report in *Science*, confirms the picture of the capital city as an ethnic melting pot.

But, as usual, the picture is far from simple. In the absence of widespread maps, rapid travel, high-speed internet, and other modern tools, most Romans knew and admired their empire's expanse in tangible forms: through goods, pictures, people, and stories that came from distant lands. These were the information technologies of their day, tokens of the distant environments that produced Rome's ethno-geographic variety. This variety was an object of consumer delight. Romans from Plautus to Pliny lovingly connect different kinds of people, marble, dress, and food to the places from which they came. Romans from Londinium to Alexandria loved collecting and contemplating these imported commodities within their homes and towns. An aristocratic woman's bedroom might put a Spanish lover, Greek hairdresser, Arabic perfumes, Levantine glassware, and Red Sea pearls at her command. Circus spectators of all classes populated their mental maps of Rome's

empire with Libyan lions, African elephants, Cilician leopards, Armenian bears, and Thracian gladiators. In such spaces, the products of empire came to stand in for distant realities, allowing people an intellectual means of comprehending but also a symbolic means of lording over Rome's near-infinite variety. Rome's tools for knowing the outside world were inextricably linked with possessing and controlling it ever since the first Roman triumphal procession paraded captives, spoils, and other evidence of foreign victory into the city.

The Colosseum is perhaps the most famous of the many microcosms in which Romans staged and consumed their empire's diversity. This massive amphitheater, funded by the spoils of Rome's violent suppression of a Jewish revolt, culminating in the 70 CE sack of Jerusalem, was built by the labor of enslaved people to house globalized spectacles of violence. The exotic animals and humans who fell in the ring testify to the death and destruction that accompanied Rome's appetite for diversity. But the spectators who assembled were a spectacle in themselves. A poem by Martial (*Book of Spectacles* 3) commemorating the emperor Titus's 80 CE dedication of the Colosseum typifies Roman praise for diversity:

> What race is so far-removed, what race so barbaric, Caesar, that it has no spectator present in your city? The inhabitant of Rhodope has come here from Orpheus's Haemus: the horseblood-drinking Sarmatian has come, and he who drinks the upstream waters of the conquered Nile, and he who's beaten by the farthest ocean's waves. The Arabian has hastened here, the Sabaeans have hastened here, and the Cilicians drip here in clouds of their perfume. The Sygambri have come with their hair twisted into buns, and with hair twisted in different ways have come the Ethiopians. Though these peoples speak in diverse languages, nevertheless they speak as one, when you are hailed as the true father of your country.

If Martial, himself a Spaniard, actually met one of his fellow foreigners at this event, you wouldn't know it from this poem. It is little more than a catalogue of well-worn stereotypes—that of the dreadlocked Ethiopian persists to this day—as colors in a human rainbow, arrayed in circular benches that made the Colosseum a miniature replica of the globe. These spectators' variety is wondrous, to be sure, insofar as it underscores their unanimity in testifying to the dominance of the emperor and Rome. Here, as often when we sing diversity's praises, people's individuality and humanity are less important than their collective variety and its service to those in power.

Martial's poem is just one of many Roman texts and artifacts that implicate the aesthetics and value of diversity with the subjection of individual experience to imperial power structures. When we pan out to feel-good long shots of multiethnic people, we often lose sight of the human details. In Roman times, to appreciate people's diversity meant looking down on them, sometimes literally, just as spectators looked down on exotic animals in the arena and the emperor looked down on *them*. The more sources you examine, the more troubling Rome's local ways of managing and using diversity become. Ovid's praise for the ethnic variety of Rome's women helps male readers pick out victims for assault. Petronius mocks the elite tendency to dine among exotic guests, slaves, and foods as one manifestation of the Roman appetite for humiliating and dehumanizing others. In Rome, diversity was very clearly cultivated by elites, for elites, and served to the people on top. Why, in modern America, do we keep pretending it really helps people on the bottom?

George Floyd's May 2020 murder by Minneapolis police, during a global pandemic with radically disparate health outcomes by race, has drawn the world's attention to what black Americans have always known. Long after the abolition of slavery, they still lack equal rights to life, liberty, and property in the nation their ancestors were enslaved to build. Smiling brown faces and inspirational slogans splashed across institutional inclusivity brochures cannot begin to repair four hundred years of obstacles and injustices. "Diversity" has too long served as symbolic padding between the harsh realities of systemic racism and wishful thinking about fairness and equality.

Comparison with Rome won't solve these problems. But it opens some thought-provoking connections. The United States' much-touted diversity, like Rome's, has ugly roots in slavery, imperialism, and systematic inequity. Ironically, many measures purporting to remedy the latter continue to commodify minorities for the benefit of elites. The Supreme Court, for instance, has ruled that race-conscious college admissions must serve compelling state interests and the majority good. In entertainment and sports, too, minorities are valued insofar as they entertain or enrich the powers that be. Affirmative action operates less to advance systemic racial justice than to maintain the status quo and allow white people to continue reaping value—even the semblance of virtue—from black and brown bodies. Even social-justice warriors implicitly commodify individuals of color when they reduce their complex realities to quotas or hashtags.

But if modern racial capitalism bears troubling similarities with the ancient commodification of difference, it's also worth noting what Rome got right. For all its brutality and exploitation, Rome found ways to share peace and prosperity across multiethnic peoples, to tell inclusive stories about the past, and to free some of its victims from intergenerational trauma and want. We've come a long way since then—or have we? □

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Pursuing the ghosts of the British Empire

by Erik Linstrum

TO WRITE ABOUT the history of colonial violence today is to be confronted with a past pressing ever more insistently into the present. When American scholars like myself are charged with dwelling on the dark side of the now-vanished British Empire because of our own uneasiness about the current American Empire, I'm tempted to respond: "Of course." Every historian is the product of their own time and place, influences better acknowledged than repressed in an illusory quest for detachment. In fact, I would not be pursuing the questions I am now if it were not for a series of grim milestones over the past two decades: prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; torture at Abu Ghraib; kill lists and drone attacks; presidential pardons for war criminals; the militarization of policing; and the persistent, deadly racism that has propelled the rise of Black Lives Matter.

But where critics see only the distorting effects of displacement—a venting of frustration against historical proxies for contemporary villains—I see a productive dialogue between past and present. Cornell University historian Dominic LaCapra memorably invoked another psychoanalytic concept, transference, to describe this process. Historians, he urged, should treat the passage of time "not as simple continuity or discontinuity but as repetition with variation or change." In this way, the British Empire bears on the American Empire through comparison as well as connection. It is a source of analogies, parallels, and echoes, many of them arising from the shared rhetorical habits of liberal empires that profess to educate and liberate rather than conquer and rule. It is also the starting point of a lineage running directly from one imperial system to another, in the form of technologies and practices including free-trade imperialism, gunboat diplomacy, client states, and counterinsurgency. The 2006 *US Army Counterinsurgency Manual,* compiled under the direction of General David Petraeus, even cites 1950s British campaigns in Malaya and Cyprus as exemplars for the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq.

History does not unspool in a straight line, in other words, because historical actors are always looking backward as well as forward, ransacking the past for models and precedents. This two-way traffic—akin to what the literary scholar Michael Rothberg once described as "multidirectional memory"—suggests another way for historians to think about the entanglement of the British and American empires: The traumas of the present have a way of reactivating those in the past, bringing neglected truths to light; these events might anger us but also help us to see our history more clearly. It is this kind of "presentism"—no longer, incidentally, the epithet among historians that it once was—which makes colonial violence such an urgent subject now.

DID BRITISH SOCIETY respond to the use of torture and other atrocities in its overseas empire after 1945? How did it fail to respond? Historians have offered many explanations for the apparent lack of outrage about colonial violence in this period: feelings of solidarity with British settlers and soldiers; the demonization of anticolonial insurgents in the press and popular culture; the desensitizing effects of World War II and the Holocaust; and the still-inchoate nature of legal and moral norms against torture. But the most common explanation for British complacency about colonial violence is also the most straightforward: the vast majority of people at the time simply did not know what was happening. The true nature of conflict in the colonies was, in the words of British cultural critic Paul Gilroy, "buried knowledge," a "hidden, shameful store of imperial horrors," an "unacknowledged presence."

Historians have largely agreed with Gilroy's assessment—and recent events have seemingly proven the point. In 2011, British government officials disclosed that their predecessors had removed thousands of embarrassing files from colonies around the world after imperial rule ended in the 1950s and 1960s, then concealed them for decades at a secret intelligence facility in rural England. Unearthed documents about the counterinsurgency in Kenya turned out to contain evidence of atrocities Britain had long denied, leading to an unprecedented settlement of £19.9 million for the benefit of survivors. At the same time, new details have emerged about the scale of document destruction in the era of decolonization. While officials retreating from empire absconded with some files, they shredded and burned many more. One reason for the extensive attention given to these revelations was that they confirmed longstanding assumptions about a paternalistic penchant for secrecy at the highest levels of the British state. With an elite so committed to governing in the shadows, what could people in Britain possibly have known about the violence carried out in their name?

The sanitization of the archival record is an important story (not least for shedding light on the relationship between methodological empiricism and ideological conservatism in the writing of British imperial history). It is possible, however, to draw the wrong lessons from stories about secret archives and shredded documents. That is, it would be hasty to assume that the state's grip on the flow of information was ever absolute, to draw a sharp line between knowledge and ignorance—and to conclude, finally, that violence in the colonies never echoed beyond the colonies.

What I have found in my research is just the opposite: that violence drew attention and stirred unease far from the conflict zones where it took place. This violence reverberated along globe-spanning circuits that connected Nyeri and Nairobi, Penang and Kuala Lumpur, and Nicosia and Famagusta with Manchester and Hull, Oxford and Edinburgh, and, of course, London. Many different "circles of knowing," to borrow sociologist Stanley Cohen's phrase, traversed the British imperial world, and they responded to reports of atrocity in different ways.

They all contributed to a larger phenomenon: the erosion of secrecy. Left-wing activists collected testimony from victims, printed pamphlets, held meetings and marches, and pressured politicians to take action. Soldiers pasted photographs into albums, penned letters to their parents, and published memoirs and novels about their experiences. Journalists recorded evidence in their notebooks, swapped stories with colleagues, and dropped unsettling details into the copy they filed. Missionaries and aid workers witnessed abuses committed by British forces, and then drew colleagues back home into debates about the moral trade-offs of counterinsurgency. Playwrights, novelists, and screenwriters took audiences inside fictionalized versions of detention camps and interrogation rooms. Sometimes quietly and sometimes not, violence reached beyond the battlefields of empire into the heart of British life.

MANY HISTORIES OF decolonization are still written from the central parts of national archives. But there are traces of colonial violence, it turns out, in county record-offices and regimental libraries scattered across Britain; in the archives of elite institutions from the Church of England, to the BBC, the *Times* and the *Guardian,* to the British Red Cross; and there are traces, too, in the questionnaires, diary entries, and survey data collected by social scientists, from Gallup and Mass Observation to studies of the East End of London and the New Town of Stevenage.

Chasing these scraps of evidence—a large part of my work as a historian—can be dispiriting and sometimes macabre. I have read letters from soldiers outraged and appalled by the beatings they witnessed. I have also read letters that mentioned far worse acts of violence in the most casual ways imaginable, with a shrug, a racial slur, or a joke. I have seen the color-coded charts regiments used to track "kill competitions" between units. (The highest body counts won bragging rights.) Most disturbing of all are the photo albums. Interspersed with snaps of parties and landscapes, soldiers pasted images of corpses: the bodies of insurgents killed after weeks of pursuit in jungles or forests. Some of these images even show soldiers posing with the severed heads of their enemies: ghoulish mementos that now sit in record offices and regimental museums and, it is safe to assume, many more closets and attics across Britain.

To examine this evidence is to question the conventional characterization of Britain after 1945 as a "postwar" society. For Britain, as for other colonial powers, 1945 did not inaugurate an era of peace so much as a different kind of

warfare: geographically diffuse, morally ambiguous, impervious to neat endings or declarations of victory. What the novelist Graham Greene wrote from Malaya in 1950 could stand as an epitaph for Britain's age of colonial emergencies: "The war was like a mist; it pervaded everything; it sapped the spirits; it wouldn't clear."

Why should these so-called "dirty wars" have posed any problems for Britain at the time? After all, the particular forms of colonial violence employed in the 1950s were hardly new. On the contrary, they had featured in the repertoire of British rule for decades, if not centuries. Nor was colonial violence in earlier periods entirely unknown or entirely uncontroversial. I would point to a few factors, though, which did create a new atmosphere around colonial violence after World War II.

First is the legacy of the war itself. This was not a simple matter of lessons learned about the horrors of state violence: the human rights regime that emerged from the war was designed in large part to perpetuate empire rather than constrain it, and a transnational human rights *movement* in the contemporary sense was—arguably—still years in the future. But the belief that Britain had fought a good war, in moral terms, against Germany, did complicate responses to counterinsurgency. Uncomfortable parallels, particularly in the use of torture, collective punishment, and detention camps, prompted critics of colonial war to decry what they called "Gestapo tactics" and "totalitarian methods." Apologists for colonial war, for their part, insisted on euphemisms like "rough handling" instead of "torture": not only to minimize the extent of the brutality involved but to suggest a kind of incidental, garden-variety callousness rather than the ideologically motivated violence of Nazism.

Second, the colonial wars of the 1950s were fought in significant measure by conscripts rather than career soldiers. Setting aside the exceptional circumstances of the two world wars, this kind of mass conscription was unprecedented in British history. Between 1948 and 1963, every British man between the ages of 17 and 21 was liable to be conscripted. Tens of thousands of them did, in fact, serve in colonial conflicts. Because the pool of potential colonial warriors—to say nothing of their parents, siblings, friends, and lovers—was so large, colonial war represented a looming, inescapable presence in everyday life. With conscripts circulating in and out of conflict zones, letters, photographs, and other forms of evidence reached far beyond the world of professional fighting men. Some demobilized soldiers, radicalized by the brutality of the fighting, penned explicit, sometimes gruesome memoirs and novels to justify the violence in which they participated. Others, appalled by the tactics they observed, turned to left-wing activism when they returned home. Though only a small proportion of men called up for service ultimately registered as conscientious objectors, their protests, too, revealed creeping unease with the morality of keeping an empire by force.

Third, the colonial wars of the 1950s fueled new kinds of politics: antagonistic, sensationalistic, emotive. Because a broad swath of consensus among party leaders tended to dampen controversy where empire was concerned, the most impassioned debates were waged at the extremes. On the far Left, a welter of activist groups—including newcomers like the Movement for Colonial Freedom—publicized disturbing narratives of atrocity from the front lines of counterinsurgency. At a moment when contemporary ideas about human rights were just taking shape, they employed first-person testimony, drawings and photographs, public marches, and letter-writing campaigns to convey the suffering of distant colonial subjects.

Styles of advocacy typically associated with the anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigns of the 1960s were in many ways pioneered by the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s. By the same token, leading figures of the New Left, including Stuart Hall and E.P. Thompson, cut their teeth on criticism of the wars in Egypt, Cyprus, and Kenya. On the far Right, meanwhile, a resurgent fascist movement exploited enthusiasm for racial conflict overseas and—by the end of the decade—resentment about supposedly ignominious retreats from empire. The groups that led directly to the formation of the anti-immigrant National Front in the late 1960s, including the League of Empire Loyalists and the National Labour Party, drew maximum attention to their cause in the 1950s by staging provocative rallies, provoking brawls with anti-colonial campaigners, and running candidates for public office who blended imperialism, racism, xenophobia, and revanchist militarism.

And fourth, the age of colonial emergency was also a golden age of communications. Old-fashioned information channels between Britain and its colonies, always dense, transmitted huge volumes of information about colonial war: letters from soldiers and settlers, reports from missionaries and aid workers, stories from journalists and travelers. But the vividness, the immediacy, which ushered colonial war into British homes was also a product of media: newspapers, which were never more widely read than in the 1950s; illustrated weeklies such as *Picture Post;* radio, which is to say, the BBC; and, of course, the new medium of television. In print and on the airwaves, the coverage of colonial war was less uniformly jingoistic than one might assume; troubling questions about the use of force against civilians and suspects lingered in word and in image. On television, it was not just news programs like *Panorama* that turned a skeptical lens on colonial war, but also a new, edgy generation of on-screen dramas about cracked-up interrogators and morally compromised soldiers.

WHILE IT IS possible to situate the wars of the 1950s near the end of a long tradition of colonial violence, there are also good reasons to see them as the inauguration of a distinctly contemporary moment. Then, as now, the ambiguity of "emergencies" and "exceptions" that furnished the legal basis for war allowed its consequences to unfold in a twilight state of limited accountability. Then, as now, states proved adept at circumventing and co-opting protections for human rights even as they paid lip service to them. Then, as now, communication links and media coverage closed the informational gap between conflict zones and home fronts without closing the empathy gap between them. What makes this history so unsettling is precisely that it does not belong to a distant past.

Whenever we speak about the presence of violence in everyday life, it is impossible not to think of Hannah Arendt's famous argument about the banality of evil, elaborated in more recent years by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Put simply, in this view it is modernity itself that makes extreme violence possible: by detaching decision-makers from the flesh-and-blood consequences of their actions through technology and bureaucracy; by fragmenting moral responsibility across specialized roles, compartmentalized professions, and complex institutions. There's a good deal to be said for this story, and part of what I have found is that groups with their own specialized or professionalized codes—soldiers, journalists, even missionaries—felt bound by those codes in ways that made it harder to speak out against violence. In another sense, though, I think this account misses something about reverberations of violence in the 1950s and, perhaps, in our own time as well. Bureaucracy and technology have not, in fact, always anonymized, distanced, and depersonalized violence; they have also brought it closer, made it more vivid, more intimate. Far from evading a sense of involvement in colonial violence, people in Britain were repeatedly confronted by it, as global networks brought them into contact with the front lines of colonial war. As a result, they had to work constantly to justify their response—or, more to the point, their lack of response.

As these theoretical problems suggest, there is a need to explore not only Anglo-American comparisons, but also comparisons between Britain and continental Europe. Even without taking sides in fraught debates about the "comparability" of the Holocaust, it is possible to observe that the kinds of questions long posed by historians of Germany have relevance to arguments about the British Empire today. There are unmistakable echoes of the 1980s *Historikerstreit,* for instance, in the ongoing debate over whether imperial history is distorted more by focusing on extreme violence or on the everyday patterns and processes that unfolded around it. Even to broach these kinds of analogies is controversial, though, because they inevitably collide with another feature of contemporary politics: the idea of British exceptionalism. As the Cambridge University historian Stefan Collini once observed, "It was for a long time an unspoken premise of much British historiography that nationalism was something that happened to other people." The same could be said for militarism, xenophobia, and political violence.

In the age of Brexit, de-provincializing British history is an urgent project. Reckoning with the ghosts of its empire—a moral imperative in its own right—has value for this reason, too. □

ATTACKING *ZWARTE PIET*

Image from the book *Sinterklaas en Pieterbaas,* by S. Abramz. Illustrated by J. G. Kesler. Third edition, 1926

Dutch folklore and racial history

by Allison Blakely

IN THE DUTCH Santa Claus tradition, the beloved *Sinterklaas* is accompanied on his annual rounds by his equally beloved bogeyman, *Zwarte Piet,* or "Black Pete." Since the 1980s, Piet, whose role in this tradition can be traced back centuries, has become a perennial target of protests and public demonstrations charging that his blackface makeup makes him a racist symbol. Some protests have resulted in police arrests. In one notable case, an unsuccessful legal suit against the mayor of Amsterdam aimed at banning Zwarte Piet's part in the city's annual Sinterklaas parade.

This rising criticism has grown apace with a sharp increase in the black population in the Netherlands since the 1970s, when its former colony Surinam became independent. Subsequently, the total black population in the country's seventeen million has risen to half a million, including the Caribbean islands that are still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Meanwhile, polls taken regularly show well over a majority of the Netherlands' population favors preserving the Sinterklaas tradition without changes. This majority insists that Piet's arguably racist traits are harmless fun, and that those daring to break their societal taboo against accusing the Dutch of racism are themselves behaving in a racist fashion by even raising the question.

It is particularly striking to encounter this cultural standoff in a country with a distinguished reputation as a leading promoter of humanism, liberalism, pluralism, and tolerance. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, over 200,000 Flemings and French Huguenots, and several thousand Jews from Spain and Portugal, all fleeing religious persecution, settled there. The small group of English Pilgrims

who made their way to America in the early part of that century to found the historic Plymouth Colony had lain over in the Netherlands for over a decade. To the present day, the Netherlands has remained a welcoming destination for refugees and asylum seekers from around the world.

IN WEIGHING THE extent to which Zwarte Piet can be fairly viewed as a product of racial prejudice, it should be noted that his dark color originally derived more from ancient elements of folklore and religion than from modern racial thought. But since those older customs also carried pejorative connotations exploited by racism, modern societies with growing populations of color will likely continue to experience unrest unless they find ways to modify racist aspects of cultural practices.

In different countries, counterpart St. Nicholas figures have different names but serve the same purpose. St. Martin is popular in France and Belgium and some parts of the Netherlands, also often aided by a Zwarte Piet. An example of pagan influences in the St. Nicholas legend can be seen in his occasional fusion with the Germanic supreme deity Wodan (the Norse Odin), an all-powerful deity who was believed to fly through the air on his eight-legged horse each December on the winter solstice. Karl Meisen, the main authority on the Northern European variations of the St. Nicholas legend,

> In pagan lore, darkness was also the color for death and winter.

found innumerable names and modifications of the same name. Among the most widely used in the Germanies, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland are Ruprecht the *Knecht* [servant], *schwarzer Kaspar* [Black Caspar], *schwarze Peter* [Black Peter], *Zwarte Piet, Pieterman, Le More, Pére Fouettard* [Father Whip], *Schmutzli* [Dirt], *Krampus,* and *Leutfresser* [People-eater]. All these terms originally referred to the devil.

Thus, the origin of Piet's dark complexion seems traceable to Germanic and Celtic folk traditions, ancient Oriental and Roman traditions, and the convergence of Christian and pagan rites. Ruprecht the Knecht and some of the others were at times depicted as dark, hairy, and with horns. All were associated with darkness and debasement in contrast to the noble white Saint. Ruprecht is also one of the nicknames for Wodan, which makes the splitting of this Germanic chief deity another possible origin of the St. Nicholas pairs, comparable to the Christian dichotomy between good and evil. People portraying these figures have customarily covered their faces with soot or ashes. In pagan lore, darkness was also the color for death and winter. This lends credence to the propositions that in some areas of the Netherlands the dark "companion" figures predated the Saint and were relegated to a subordinate role only with the increased dominance of Christianity. In the Netherlands today, traces of the dual Christian–pagan heritage in the Sinterklaas tradition are still evident in some of the more isolated areas, such as on the Waddenzee Islands of Ameland, Texel, Vlieland, and Schiermonnikoog.

The grip of this celebration on the popular imagination was already evident in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, when the survival of the religious tradition featuring Sinterklaas and dark assistants in the Netherlands was threatened by the Calvinist Church and a government engaged in rooting out all vestiges of Catholicism. Much to the displeasure of the Reformed Church and city authorities, the array of related booths stretched beyond the square and into other parts of the city by the late seventeenth century. Such merriment in honor of the Catholic Saint prompted ordinances in Dutch towns such as Delft and Arnhem against celebrations that in some cases included all-night revelry on the eves of St. Nicholas, New Years, and the Epiphany.

Neither the Protestant Reformation in general nor the triumph of Calvinism over Catholicism in the Netherlands was able to root out this "vestige of popery." The Church was going to have to settle for transforming what had been a more formal religious celebration of St. Nicholas into essentially a children's feast. When it became more acceptable to show Sinterklaas, it is not surprising that the *Sinterklazen* in effect lived on in the guise of Zwarte Piet, who himself did not appear clearly in graphic illustrations of the Sinterklaas celebration until the early nineteenth century. He was, after all, a spiritual force.

The degree of uniformity the tradition practiced in the Netherlands achieved by the twentieth century was due to the wide dissemination of *Mannekensbladen,* or *Volksprenten* (children's prints or penny prints), a form of popular print literature widely disseminated in the Netherlands, France, and Belgium especially in the nineteenth century through the press and schools. The advent of television, of course, and the commercial incentives related to the celebration have brought even greater standardization. This is also how the mode for public celebration most easily contributing to racist interpretation became the most popular.

TWO DEVELOPMENTS in Piet's evolution over the centuries were the most fateful in bringing about his present predicament: his becoming a "Moor" and his popular depiction modeled after the American blackface tradition. The first derived from the Netherlands having been part of the Spanish empire until the seventeenth century. Consistent with this account, Sinterklaas resides in Spain most of the year and arrives in the Netherlands by ship toward the end of November. Zwarte Piet was a Moorish orphan boy Sinterklaas adopted and trained as his assistant. This fusing in the folklore of the historical meeting of "East and West" would come to fuel the current cultural clash within the Netherlands, once its colonial past led to today's increasingly multicultural society.

That the tradition calls him a Moor has become problematic—on one hand because the term "Moor" was one Europeans had earlier used to describe people of black African descent as well as North Africans; on the other, because some in the Netherlands' current Muslim population of some 150,000 also prefer not being reminded of the master–servant relationships in their European colonial past. In keeping with the tradition involving Spain, today's Zwarte Piet is a Dutch man, woman, or child in blackface dressed in the fashion of sixteenth-century Spain, walking alongside the mounted Saint in parades holding the reins. In most instances, the parade will have numerous Zwarte Pieten [the plural form of Piet] who distribute sweets to children along the way.

For assessing the moral character of Piet's role in the Dutch *Sinterklaasfeest,* it is interesting to compare it with the Santa Claus tradition in the United States, a country founded on principles similar to the Netherlands' but where both color consciousness and racism have played greater historical roles. The Santa Claus celebration has never evoked the type of outrage in the United States that now surrounds Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands, though its innocence blurs somewhat when studied in historical context. The American tradition, which did not crystallize until the mid-nineteenth century, is an amalgamation of Father Christmas, brought over by seventeenth-century British settlers, and Sinterklaas, brought by the Dutch to their New Amsterdam around the same time. Father Christmas was just another of the myriad offspring of the St. Nicholas tradition. Piet did not become part of the American tradition because, although New Netherlands was mainly a Dutch colony until ceded to England in 1673, only about half the population of New Amsterdam was Dutch; both the Dutch Calvinist and English Puritan churches in that region shared the disdain for the St. Nicholas celebration of their church leaders in Europe. The current traditional American image of Santa Claus was shaped primarily in the nineteenth century by Clement Moore (1779–1863), an American Biblical scholar and professor of Oriental and Greek literature, and a Bavarian-born cartoonist, Thomas Nast (1840–1902). The American Santa Claus also has European roots.

Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," originally composed just for the enjoyment of the author's own family, is clearly describing a European "right jolly old elf." The imagery surrounding his "eight tiny reindeer" pulling his sleigh across the winter sky also conjures up the Wodan tradition featuring the Norse god on his eight-legged

flying horse. Here it is also interesting to note that Moore gave two of his reindeer, "Donder" (thunder) and "Blitzen" (lightning), names of forces of nature that mix German and Dutch (though modern editors have chosen to just use the German). In the broader American Santa Claus tradition that evolved, all the human characters, including Santa's elves at the North Pole, are white. In contrast to Sinterklaas's Pieten, all are also male, except for Mrs. Claus, his homemaker.

While this does not necessarily represent racial or gender discrimination, black American counterparts of the main protesters against Zwarte Piet, suffering from the legacies of racial and color prejudice, have not failed to notice that the Santa tradition has been traditionally "white," and that this has served to reinforce the predominant perception that the most important figures in society and culture are all white. The Santa tradition also evolved against a historical backdrop that featured slavery becoming replaced by the structure of debasement called Jim Crow that would prolong legal inequality for another century. This was also the era that saw blackface emerge, a grotesque nod to African American culture that aided some black and white entertainers' careers, even as blacks were becoming excluded from respected trades and sports they had engaged in even during slavery. The close historical connection between blackface and Jim Crow is undeniable, since the term "Jim Crow" derived from the name of a dimwitted, clumsy black slave character in an early nineteenth-century minstrel show. Color replaced chains as the main device for social control and economic exploitation.

JUXTAPOSING THE American and Dutch Santa Claus traditions, it seems that in some ways the Zwarte Piet component of the Dutch celebration might be transformed from a liability into an asset. In an era of rampant cultural diversity and elevated political correctness in all major Western societies, in Zwarte Piet the Dutch happen to already have a culturally diverse figure in this ancient tradition—one reflecting both racial and gender diversity and who possesses power to shape the morality of the society that has produced him. Could one possible way for the Dutch to rescue Zwarte Piet from his current dilemma be to embrace this duo as a national symbol of cooperation between whites and people of color for the common good? Piet's age-old role as a bogeyman could continue; but the more recent component, a visage that evokes and popularizes the racist blackface tradition, would need to be abandoned. The history of the American experience with blackface shows that this is not easy to accomplish, since although no longer respectable, it still lingers in many guises in American popular culture, including overt and subliminal advertising. But the American experience also shows that pivoting away from that practice's respectability is possible. A history of flirtation with blackface has not indelibly stained the public images of some of the most revered icons of American popular culture, including Al Jolson, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Shirley Temple, Will Rogers, John Wayne, Laurel and Hardy, the Three Stooges, and Sammy Davis, Jr.

A largely missing element from the majority position in the current polemic in the Netherlands is recognition of how this negative side of Piet impacts their own image of their fellow Netherlanders of color, and their image in society. Such a responsible and admired figure should not be identified with the pure buffoon image projected by the American minstrel tradition; yet this is the version of Piet that is the most commercially marketable. His lucrative market value is surely one reason it is so difficult to modify Piet's portrayal.

An amicable solution to the present impasse must include a willingness to at least modify Piet's portrayal in a direction that harkens back to his early modern incarnation as a respectable servant, before his morphing into an image that immediately brings to mind colonial subjugation or racist denigration. The white majority indignant at being called racist is largely unaware of the Netherlands' colonial history, because school curricula have deliberately omitted the important contribution of the colonies to Dutch wealth and power. Thus, complaining black Netherlanders are generally viewed as outsiders who should be grateful just to be part of Dutch society. There is slight awareness that they have to some degree been members for centuries, but invisible because of the distance from the colonies that most Dutch have been taught rendered them too peripheral to be important for the nation's success. The issue of racism simply must be addressed.

Another possible way of offsetting the negative impact of celebrating a black clown figure in the Dutch tradition would be promotion of developments that would bring more people of color into greater prominence in high positions of leadership and respect. There are, after all, caricatures and stereotypes of white people too in predominantly white societies, but those carry less negative impact within a broader context that renders them comical. There also needs to be wider public attention drawn to the private dimension of the Dutch Sinterklaas tradition, the part that transpires within the home rather than at parades and in commercials. It is in the home that the deepest meaning of the celebration occurs: exchanging simple gifts, reciting poems, and offering an annual renewal of vows to uphold shared moral values that bind together family and community.

During one of my frequent visits to the Netherlands over the past five decades, a Dutch friend pointed out that another deeply ingrained tradition in Dutch culture is a penchant for long deliberations over important issues. He shared a joke about the Dutch entering heaven: On their way, they encounter an additional obstacle, a crossroads with two signposts. One sign points toward Heaven, the other toward *'t vergadering* (the meeting). The Dutch history of finding social harmony bodes well for a national *vergadering* that will end the current discord over Zwartze Piet in one of the country's most important holiday traditions. □

FEATURES

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LEFT ALONE

Greta Garbo's search for solitude

by Lois W. Banner

WHEN SCREEN STAR and legendary beauty Greta Garbo died, in 1990, at the age of 84, she was one of the most famous women in the world. She had become a top Hollywood star in 1926, at the age of 20, when she made the film *Flesh and The Devil,* less than a year after she came to Hollywood from Sweden. She retained that stature for 17 years, until 1941, when she retired from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), her studio, at the age of 36. She then moved to New York and made no more movies. Rather, whether by accident or design, she became a celebrity, famed as a leading member of the international "jet set," led by Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping tycoon.

As a feminist and a scholar, I have long been fascinated by the histories of feminism and of beauty as well as by the lives of prominent women who defined and reflected the histories of their eras. Thus far, my biographical subjects have included Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who led the American woman suffrage movement in the nineteenth century; Margaret Mead, an anthropologist and public intellectual in the United States in the mid-twentieth century; and Marilyn Monroe, a Hollywood cinema star and symbol of beauty from the 1950s to the present. These three women form a disparate group, but their lives display similar themes: a sense of showmanship, a charismatic appeal to others, and a greater or lesser commitment to advancing women's freedom.

Greta Garbo offers a special challenge. She lived much of her adult life in the era between the two world wars, when feminism seemed in the doldrums; she never identified herself with a feminist group; the majority of her audiences were in Europe, not in the United States; and many film scholars regard her as consistently playing in her films the ur-romantic heroine whose life revolves around love—and suffering—for a man. In his acclaimed history of Hollywood films, film scholar Lewis Jacobs described Garbo as "the prototype of the ultra-civilized, sleek and slender, knowing and disillusioned, restless and oversexed and neurotic woman who leads her own life."

I began to crack that stereotype about Garbo when I determined that feminism in the interwar years differed from the women's rights movement that went before it and the feminism that followed it. After woman's suffrage was won—by 1921 in Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States—many feminists turned from political and legal goals to focus on ending Victorian sex restrictions, in line with the sex revolution of the 1920s. They called for trial marriage, free love, free divorce, birth control, and "The Single Standard," a slogan for ending the centuries-old double standard, under which men had sex with impunity, while women were supposed to remain virtuous.

IN MANY OF Garbo's early movies, she plays a modern woman who challenges traditional moral values. Even though Hollywood censors required that they end by approving heterosexual monogamy, she is not punished for violating middle-class values. In 1929, she even starred in a movie called *The Single Standard,* written by feminist screenwriter Adela Rogers St. Johns. In that film, she travels on a yacht with a lover around the South Seas. In the end, she remains with a husband and a son she has acquired along the way, but she isn't punished for having lived with a man to whom she wasn't married.

Garbo's early period of what might be called "proto-feminism" in her films culminated in *Queen Christina,* which she made in 1933. The movie is a biopic of the seventeenth-century Swedish queen who cross-dressed and was bisexual, pacifist, and reform-minded. Garbo later stated that the movie was as much about herself as about Christina. Garbo cross-dressed off the screen, considered herself to be more

Greta Garbo, 1933. Photo courtesy Les Archives du 7eme Art. Colorist: Olga Shirnina

male than female, and was as responsible as film star Marlene Dietrich for making trousers popular among women, as well as turtle-necked sweaters, previously worn by jockeys and prizefighters.

In contrast to all other MGM stars, she challenged the studio's dictatorial head, Louis B. Mayer, by engaging in a seven-month sit-down strike after finishing *Flesh and the Devil,* to end her typecasting as a siren/vamp. She also demanded a new contract with a higher salary, input into choosing co-stars and directors, and the promise of dramatic roles. Given the huge box-office returns on *Flesh and the Devil,* Mayer gave in to Garbo's demands; profits were his bottom line.

But her Hollywood career was never easy. In the 1920s era of ballyhoo and celebrity stalking, fans and street photographers wouldn't let her alone. And she was the favorite subject of the Hollywood movie fan magazines, whose writers engaged in an endless debate about her appearance and her acting. Many of these writers celebrated her; some criticized her. When she came to Hollywood, in 1925—the first Swedish star to do so—small women with round eyes, baby faces, and tiny bodies were in fashion; Mary Pickford, hardly five feet tall, reigned supreme. Garbo was considered too tall—she was five feet seven inches. She had broad shoulders and a chunky body; she was built like a man. Extensive dieting on her part to meet the day's fixation on thinness in women brought out her deep-set eyes, high cheekbones, and sunken cheeks. She looked more Slavic than Swedish. In 1930, one reporter called her "an anemic, over-slender girl, with straight and rather stringy tresses, a skin kissed to washed-out pallor by the cold Northern Lights, shoulders too broad and angular for her frame, oversized extremities." Although Garbo and her cinematographers tried to hide these features, they are apparent in most of her films, including *A Woman of Affairs* (1928).

The racism of the 1920s was directed against her. Swedish immigrants to the United States were usually praised as a favored Nordic race, but an opposing belief held that they were lazy, dumb, and too tall. Slavic immigrants were attacked as dark-skinned peasants, and Garbo looked Slavic. All these epithets were directed against her, while quotations from her were published in a fractured Swedish. "I t'ink I go home," a statement Garbo often made when she left a film set, became a national joke.

Garbo was visited with a cacophony of conflicting opinions; some of her fans were so devoted to her that they were called "Garbo-Maniacs." They dressed like her and wrote letters

> *"The story of my life is about back entrances and side doors and secret elevators and other ways of getting in and out of places so that people won't bother you."*

to the fan magazines defending her. Louis B. Mayer increased her salary until she was the highest paid woman in the United States. But Garbo, who was fixated on becoming wealthy because she had grown up in poverty, finally resigned from MGM and moved to New York. She became fed up with her inability to escape the fans who stalked her—even though she dressed in disguises—and with being cast in second-rate films.

After *Queen Christina,* she gave up trying to effect reform in Hollywood; she did what the studio wanted. She made period dramas in which she suffered over love of a man; the most famous was *Camille,* the story of a nineteenth-century tubercular French courtesan in love with a young man. In her period films, she was usually costumed in frilly feminine garb, which concealed her masculinity and quashed the many rumors that she was lesbian. Such behavior was forbidden by Hollywood's draconian Moral Code, which was put into effect in 1934. Her period films and the femininity of her costumes in them propped up her reputation as "the world's most beautiful" woman, a title MGM publicists bestowed on her.

Always suffering from shyness and melancholia, deeply afraid of strangers, in her later years Garbo found security among wealthy and titled friends. Beginning with the famed Swedish director Mauritz Stiller, who discovered her for films, she always had a mentor to guide her. In the 1930s and 1940s, Salka Viertel, an actress and screenwriter from Germany, served in that capacity, followed by Gayelord Hauser, the founder of the whole foods movement in the United States, and Georges Schlee, an émigré to the United States from the Russian Revolution. (She probably would have married Schlee, but he had a wife who wouldn't agree to a divorce.)

A natural athlete, Garbo did yoga and pilates and walked the streets of the cities in which she lived. She was famed for doing that in New York. But she always had a friend along with her, and she often visited another friend for tea and snacks along the way. Those friends included Katharine Hepburn; Garbo was never a hermit. Nor did she say, "I want to be alone." She contended that she always said, "I want to be left alone."

Garbo found that the fame she had craved as a child and later achieved as an adolescent was a Frankenstein monster. Although she had moments of great happiness in her films and her friendships, her final judgment on her life is tragic. "The story of my life is about back entrances and side doors and secret elevators and other ways of getting in and out of places so that people won't bother you," she stated. And, from the age of seventeen until she died, she chain-smoked, suffering from many ailments smoking causes or worsens, from chronic bronchitis to weak circulation to her final death from kidney disease. In the final analysis, Garbo is a monument to hard work and artistic talent and to the appreciation and mistrust of female beauty in our modern world. □

SARAH BERNHARDT'S KNEE

Feminine "respectability" on the Brazilian stage

by James N. Green

Turn-of-the-twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro was the bustling capital of the newly established Brazilian republic. Slavery had been abolished in 1888, and 14 months later, the 67-year-old empire had toppled. Tens of thousands of freed people of color sought work in Rio, and tens of thousands more Portuguese and Italian immigrants crossed the Atlantic to seek new opportunities in the tropics.

While enslaved and working-class women of color occupied public spaces in Brazil throughout the colonial period and during the Empire (1822–1889), among middle-class women, new opportunities and possibilities only opened up in the later half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, the majority of primary-school teachers were women. Middle- and upper-class women had broken into the legal and medical professions. Women also produced a flurry of feminist journals and initiated campaigns for equal rights, including the right to vote.

Some women took to the stage. The acting profession afforded a handful of Brazilian women freedom and independence unusual for the elite or bourgeois milieu. They could frequent public spaces, move about relatively freely, and enjoy a life unfettered from familial restraints. The theater also offered some adventurous and free-spirited white women, especially those from humble backgrounds, upward mobility and access to men of other social classes. Yet, because of an association between women of the stage and loose morals, they occupied a tenuous liminal position in elite society. On one hand, high society embraced women who appeared in plays or operas representing high culture, European values, and sophistication. On the other hand, however, female performers could suffer public scrutiny and bitter gossip for leading unconventional lives. Through negotiating this complicated status as pariahs and as public performers, these women pushed outward the possibilities for women in a patriarchal and traditional society.

In 1886, Sarah Bernhardt, France's preeminent dramatic actress, made her first of three South American tours. Three thousand people awaited her at Rio's docks. Politician and abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco exalted Mademoiselle Bernhardt on the front page of *O País*. "In Brazil the great artist [. . .] is still in the intellectual territory of her homeland. In no other country will she better verify with precision that verse that one often hears on stage: All men have two countries, their own and France." Having the "Divine Sarah" perform in Rio was grounds for praises doubly declared: "At this moment," Nabuco wrote, "the first of all French theaters is not the House of Molíere but the São Pedro Theater." Bernhardt's visit to the imperial capital offered the elite the opportunity to experience firsthand noble French culture.

On opening night, confusion reigned. Police struggled to maintain order, and ticket scalpers offered exorbitant prices for available seats. Inside, the audience was composed of the "finest, most select, and intelligent families and gentlemen of society," reported *O País* on June 3. They were joined by members of the French colony and the imperial family in attending a presentation of *La Dame aux Camélias*, one of Bernhardt's signature performances.

Mademoiselle Bernhardt's Rio debut, however, did not go as smoothly as anticipated. Students occupying the inexpensive seats began a ruckus when the actor portraying Armand Duval entered the scene. Commentators attributed the youthful rowdiness to the fact that the French actor was beardless and thus inappropriately matched to his manly, virile character. Adding to the commotion, a lighted cigarette from the second gallery fell on the evening dress of the Baronesa of Mamanguape, destroying her garment. The performance continued only because of the intervention of the famed playwright Arthur Azevedo, who stood up and demanded respect for the great French actress, and of the theater's manager, who offered to refund patrons' tickets. No need. By the evening's end, Bernhardt had won over the audience entirely.

Bernhardt's visit was marked by other incidents. Another actress in the French company accused Bernhardt of having slapped her during an altercation outside the box office. Bernhardt, never one to shy away from publicity, ended up at the police station, where the admiring politician Nabuco successfully defended her. Officials dropped all charges. At another gala performance, in Bernhardt's honor, the audience's enthusiasm seemed bottomless: having exhausted the stock of flowers that they showered onto the stage, the male public began to toss items of clothing. Her send-off was no less tumultuous, as hundreds bid their last adieu. A professor of the military academy delivered a farewell address and then presented Bernhardt with a Brazilian flag, which she dramatically draped over her shoulders, eliciting further adoration from the crowd.

Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet, 1899. Layfayette Photo, London. Wikimedia Commons

Sarah Bernhardt was not the first French actress to elicit such enthusiasm in Rio. In 1859, French entrepreneur Joseph Arnaud opened the Alcazar Lyrique Theater, located near Rio's fashionable shopping street lined with French-owned stores, restaurants, and cafés that targeted the sophisticated Francophile upper class. In 1864, Arnaud brought back from Paris a group of actresses, singers, and dancers to supply French entertainment to a Brazilian public. Many of these French performers, as it so happened, supplemented their income as prostitutes or as mistresses. Their embodiment of French culture increased their appeal over that of the *polacas*, the Eastern European Jewish prostitutes, or Brazilian sex workers of mixed racial backgrounds. On stage, they exposed their ankles, knees, or thighs, while singing such French hits as "Nothing is Sacred for a Soldier," to arouse the interest of potential clients, among them many members of the Brazilian elite. As the can-can became popular entertainment for elite audiences in Brazil, dancers generously revealed their undergarments and normally hidden flesh to the excitement of the male audience.

What distinguished a proper elite woman in Rio from a French *cocotte*—a fashionable prostitute—was her public performance. University of Florida historian Jeffrey Needell writes in *A Tropical Belle Époque* that for elite

men of Rio, "The cocotte's attractions derived not only from studied association with Parisian paradigms but from the contrast they made with the perception of elite women." When proper women from the Rio elite did go out, Needell writes, "there should be nothing of the *cocodette* about them. The cocottes' style was well known, and one took pains to avoid it and to maintain the silence, respect, and company tradition demanded."

In the eyes of her Brazilian audience, Bernhardt was not a cocotte. Although her personal life involved a series of somewhat public affairs, in Brazil her public persona linked her to French refinement and sophistication. By embracing Bernhardt as a serious dramatic actress, Rio's elite reaffirmed their social status as connoisseurs of European culture. Although Brazilian men showered her with flowers and their garments, they received no exposed knees or undergarments in return. Proper women could attend and applaud her performance because her role as the conveyor of continental culture to a less civilized Brazil diminished any possible negative association with indecency, immorality, scandalous love affairs, and illegitimate children. Her performance on stage compensated for any moral transgressions committed off stage. Emperor Pedro II could receive and admire her. She could be the envy of elite society.

SIX MONTHS BEFORE Bernhardt set foot on the Brazilian stage for the first time, *Revista Illustrada* published a two-page article entitled "The Eternal Feminine," which heralded certain advances of middle-class and elite women. But these changes merited a certain caution. Citing expanding educational opportunities for Brazilian women, the newspaper noted, on January 16, 1886, "It's time to verify if these educational means should be broadened; if women should be given rights and establish equality with men in carrying out certain positions." Acknowledging that women were capable of entering many new professions and industries that had heretofore been occupied exclusively by men, society needed to hold the line at granting them political rights. Doctor or lawyer, perhaps, but voter or politician, never. The *bello sexo,* as journalists so often called women, may move into new occupations, but their beauty, elegance, and eternal femininity needed to remain in place.

BY EMBRACING BERNHARDT AS A SERIOUS DRAMATIC ACTRESS, RIO'S ELITE REAFFIRMED THEIR SOCIAL STATUS AS CONNOISSEURS OF EUROPEAN CULTURE.

In analyzing the New Women of turn-of-twentieth-century France, historian Mary Louise Roberts, in her 2002 book, *Disruptive Acts,* points to the strategy employed by certain women to "define a 'personality' apart from social convention—beyond their otherness to men—without getting trivialized or demonized by a set of stereotypes." French feminist journalist Marguerite Durand, the editor of the all-female-staffed *La Fronde* daily newspaper, for example, carved out new spaces for women by embracing and then subverting many of the notions attributed to *la belle sex.* Her stunning beauty, blond hair, and elegant style undercut masculine criticism and deflected anxieties about the new realms into which the women reporters had stepped—the courtroom, parliament, and the political world. Using the age-old vision of woman as actress and seductress to counteract the stereotypical notion of feminists as shrill, ugly, masculinized man-haters, she caught her critics off guard and managed to fashion new possibilities for women by transforming seemingly traditional roles of women into something new.

Likewise, Bernhardt made use of an array of tropes assigned to women to create a public personality that afforded her freedom, independence, and immense popularity at home and abroad. According to Roberts, "Bernhardt's womanly woman would be immensely appealing to those men [. . .] who, lost in the turmoil of fin-de siècle gender relations, feared *la grande séductrice* to be an endangered species." Even her famous cross-dressing roles such as Hamlet intervened in the tension between the traditional woman and the New Woman. Roberts argues:

> In an era of debate about gender norms, Bernhardt's star image presented a similar fantasy scenario that fulfilled a need on the part of her public for unity, resolution, and reassurance. To her more socially conservative fans, Bernhardt appeased fears concerning the threat of the New Woman and the demise of female seduction as an everyday pleasure. She transcended the perceived conflict between the independent New Woman and the *séductrice*. [. . .] [S]he was a living example of Marguerite Durand's contention that a woman need not lose her femininity to compete in a man's world. (p. 79)

Soon after Bernhardt's first triumphal Brazilian tour, Cinira Polonio, the daughter of Italian immigrants, made her dramatic debut on the Brazilian stage, imitating the Divine Sarah in the musical review *O Carioca,* written by Arthur Azevedo. Following the conventions of the *revistas de año,* in which actors parodied prominent figures and events of the previous year, Polonio played an unspecified celebrity who spoke Portuguese in a thick French accent. Cinira reenacted an exaggerated version of Bernhardt's quarrel with her fellow actress and made various references to the negative audience responses to the beardless Armand during the opening night of *La Dame aux Camélias.*

Of humble birth, Polonio's entrepreneurial parents successfully managed a fashion shop in downtown Rio that allowed them to send their only daughter to study in Europe. Returning to Rio, she began her entertainment career in opera, but was not very successful. After her 1886 imitation of Bernhardt, Polonio became a popular actress, first in Rio and then in Portugal.

Rather than trying to replicate Sarah Bernhardt, Polonio created a parody of mannerisms that were associated with European sophistication that poked fun at the French and Rio elites. Unlike Bernhardt, however, Polonio did not restrict her repertoire to plays consecrated by the elites as high culture. The limited audience for sophisticated European fare, and the growing urban market seeking popular entertainment, drew her to lowbrow musical comedies. Her performance at age 51 as an elegant *francesa* won rave reviews. Her playful French accent and her piquant double entendres thoroughly amused the lower- and middle-class audiences. Her imitation of the sophisticated French woman no doubt also played with a certain disdain that the popular classes experienced toward the haughty airs of Rio's elite, who indiscriminately embraced all things French. Like many other New Women of her time, she learned how to manipulate male images of the feminine to her advantage. She appropriated and incorporated the exaggerated elegant feminine French figure into her stage performances, while off-stage she refused to marry and became a successful theater entrepreneur. Like the Brazilian modernists three decades later, she borrowed and reshaped (or cast off) elite foreign cultural norms and created something uniquely Brazilian.

SARAH BERNHARDT returned for her third and final series of performances in Rio in 1905. She was, however, not well. Her right knee bothered her, and she walked, painfully, with a cane. According to several biographers, she suffered an accident in Rio that affected the rest of her life. Biographer Joanna Richardson writes, in *Sarah Bernhardt and Her World* (1977):

> On 9 October, at Rio de Janeiro, she met with one of the great disasters of her life. She was playing in *La Tosca.* At the end of the last scene, Floria committed suicide by leaping off the parapet of the Castel Sant' Angelo. Usually, of course, the stage behind the parapet was covered with mattresses; that night, for some unknown reason, the mattresses had been forgotten, and Sarah fell heavily on her right knee. She fainted with pain; her leg swelled violently, and she was carried to her hotel on a stretcher. Next day, when she embarked for New York, a doctor was called to her state-room, but his hands were so dirty that she refused to let him touch her. In vain, her friends protested and insisted they would make him take a bath. Sarah would see no doctor until she reached New York three weeks later.

The knee injury ultimately led to the amputation of Bernhardt's leg, forcing the Divine Sarah to perform during her final years with a cork substitute.

When I began doing research for a project about Bernhardt and the urban life of Rio at the turn of the century, her knee incident seemed to me the perfect illustration of her dual personae. While the elite male audience could enjoy the knees, thighs, and undergarments of French entertainers, the public performance of Bernhardt or of any Brazilian actress who aspired to her theatrical heights required propriety and decorum on stage and a modicum of discretion off stage.

Yet oddly, when reviewing Brazilian newspapers, I found no reference to the knee incident. To a certain extent, this made sense. Supposedly the tragedy occurred in the last act of Bernhardt's last performance, October 9, 1905. But the dates didn't match. Bernhardt first arrived in Brazil on October 10, 1905, a day after the alleged accident. Her last performance in Brazil was on October 17, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* where presumably her knees were indeed exposed to the audience, albeit covered by tights. In Europe, Bernhardt had played the role of Floria in the dramatic version of *Tosca,* but there is no indication that she performed the piece during her tour. In fact, the same night as Bernhardt's farewell rendering of Hamlet, at the Lyrico, Senhora Jacoby and Mario Cavaradossi gave their last performance of Puccini's *Tosca* at the Apollo Theater, several blocks away.

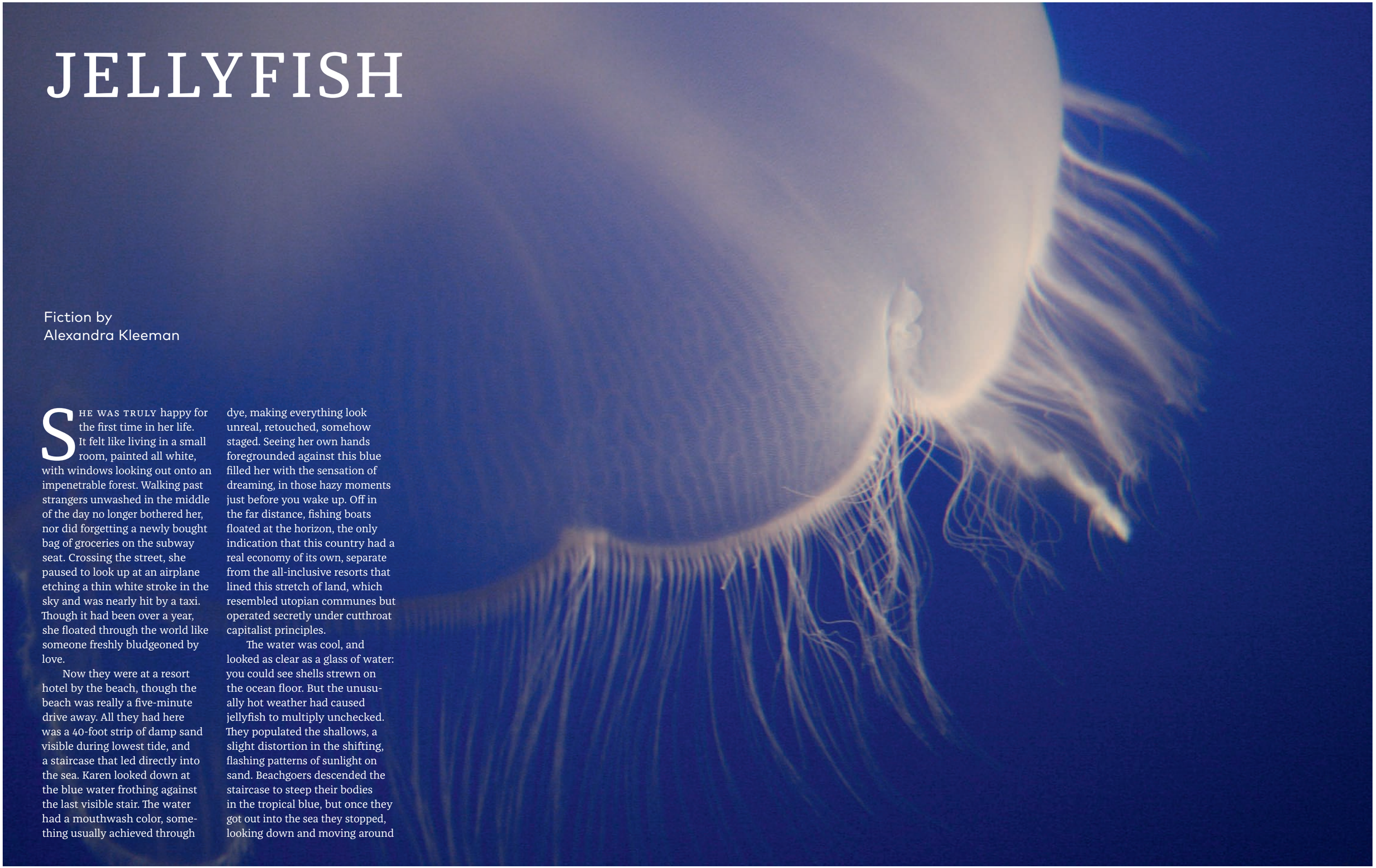
THE KNEE INJURY ULTIMATELY LED TO THE AMPUTATION OF BERNHARDT'S LEG, FORCING HER TO PERFORM WITH A CORK SUBSTITUTE.

What does one make of this? Were Bernhardt's biographers wrong with details but right about the incident? Or was Bernhardt engaged in myth-making, presenting herself as the tragic heroine of *Tosca,* who so thoroughly played her part that she injured herself permanently? Wasn't self-re-creation and the public performance of a series of expected personae an essential element in these actresses' lives, as they constantly battled offstage for relative independence and freedom as adventurous and free-spirited women in a society still hostile to such behavior and inclined to immediately classify them as immoral?

If Bernhardt did, in fact, re-create herself as a tragic heroine, sacrificing herself or her leg for her art, it is hard not to see her as also creating a larger-than-life figure that could withstand the social and moral aversions to her "real life" or off-stage performance as a "new woman." □

JELLYFISH

Fiction by
Alexandra Kleeman



She was truly happy for the first time in her life. It felt like living in a small room, painted all white, with windows looking out onto an impenetrable forest. Walking past strangers unwashed in the middle of the day no longer bothered her, nor did forgetting a newly bought bag of groceries on the subway seat. Crossing the street, she paused to look up at an airplane etching a thin white stroke in the sky and was nearly hit by a taxi. Though it had been over a year, she floated through the world like someone freshly bludgeoned by love.

Now they were at a resort hotel by the beach, though the beach was really a five-minute drive away. All they had here was a 40-foot strip of damp sand visible during lowest tide, and a staircase that led directly into the sea. Karen looked down at the blue water frothing against the last visible stair. The water had a mouthwash color, something usually achieved through dye, making everything look unreal, retouched, somehow staged. Seeing her own hands foregrounded against this blue filled her with the sensation of dreaming, in those hazy moments just before you wake up. Off in the far distance, fishing boats floated at the horizon, the only indication that this country had a real economy of its own, separate from the all-inclusive resorts that lined this stretch of land, which resembled utopian communes but operated secretly under cutthroat capitalist principles.

The water was cool, and looked as clear as a glass of water: you could see shells strewn on the ocean floor. But the unusually hot weather had caused jellyfish to multiply unchecked. They populated the shallows, a slight distortion in the shifting, flashing patterns of sunlight on sand. Beachgoers descended the staircase to steep their bodies in the tropical blue, but once they got out into the sea they stopped, looking down and moving around

nervously, a few steps to the left, then to the right. One woman was stuck in waist-deep water, crying, her face deeply pink. She kept wiping it with short, rough motions that looked like slaps. Over and over she turned back toward the staircase, but she was too far away. The man she had come with was several feet away, doing the breaststroke in tight circles. "You have to kick their heads," he shouted to her. "Kick them out of your way!"

Daniel had proposed to her that morning, and she said yes in an instant. He went to take a shower. Karen had left the bungalow, identical to every other in the resort, and walked out into the swelter. It seemed strange to be apart from him in this moment, but it felt even stranger to wait for him there in the overly cold hotel room, trying vaguely to read a magazine while he washed each part of his body with scrupulous care. She expected the world to feel different now that she had achieved a new life state. Instead, it was deathly hot. Karen walked out to the railing and stared down into the sea. It looked beautiful enough, but the water was haunted. If you waited patiently and let your eyes adjust, it would come into focus: the faint pale outline of a jellyfish, like a ghost of the jellyfish you had seen on TV or in photographs, a bland white space waiting to be colored in.

"She stood there wailing. Every few minutes it got louder, then she'd shout out 'I'm so scared!' or 'They're everywhere!' He just swam around. At the end, he picked her up and carried her out."

"I love how easy it is to pick people up when you're in the water," Dan said, tilting a small full glass of orange juice into his throat.

"What?" Karen asked.

"That's what we used to do when we went on family vacation. Once I was a teenager, my dad used to let me pick him up and carry him around the pool. He was a big guy then, that's when he was still training for marathons. It was hard to do, but it was still possible." Dan smiled and stabbed at his breakfast sausage. He had chosen this resort for its high ratings on décor.

"That sounds nice," Karen said, uncertain. Dan's plate contained a horrifying amount of meat from all different cultures and civilizations.

"It was nice. My mom would bring us all virgin daiquiris from the bar and we'd pretend they were getting us drunk. My dad and I would use them like lances and try to joust in the water."

"Daiquiris?" Karen asked, trying to picture it, the novelty straw pointed outward, weaponized.

"No," said Dan, "My mom and sister. They tried to make themselves perfectly rigid and narrow at the tip."

"Oh, I see," said Karen. Karen had never heard of a happy childhood like Dan's from anyone, but she had seen things like it on TV. When he told her

Dan smiled and stabbed at his breakfast sausage. He had chosen this resort for its high ratings on décor.

about the sunny, lively experiences of his past, she often thought of them as synopses or, if there were many, a montage. She tried to ask the questions that would make these stories take on mass. Was this while his mother was working in prison law, trying to stop the construction of new facilities? Were his lawyer parents troubled by their work, did it make his childhood less bright? Did his father regret training so hard, when it was a marathon that had blown out his knee? She looked out the restaurant window at the perfect blue water full of stinging tentacles, then at the resort-goers crowding the omelet bar, several of them calling out their orders at once. Behind the counter, a boy no older than 16 regarded the ingredients with terror as he cracked two eggs into a small white bowl. Karen prayed that he would not do something tragic like try to escape.

"The worst part of it," said Karen thoughtfully, "was how happy he was. I watched him paddle around, do handstands, splash in the water, while she wept twenty feet away. He might as well have been whistling jauntily."

"Who?" Dan asked, looking up.

"Nothing," she said.

Her own parents had not known how to vacation at all. Once a year, usually in the spring or summer, they would take Karen with them on a trip to some place similar in climate and geography to the place in which they lived. When this happened, there was always a reason: to visit a great-aunt or a friend of a relative, or to go to one of her father's professional conferences where archivists gathered to listen to panels on database administration. On these trips, they stayed in motels or hotels some distance from the center of town, where diverse locations such as Atlanta, Tallahassee, and Richmond converged in an interchangeable span of franchises and family restaurants.

For years, they ate the motel waffles and the croissants of the nicer hotel chains together, but since she had graduated from college, her parents had found a new joy in traveling without her, recreationally. Last year they traveled to Morocco and stayed in a converted inn that had once been a small summer palace. Attached to their mass travel email, Karen found photos of her father looming over a bowl of dried apricots, his mouth exaggeratedly open in an expression of surprise. She found her mother grinning at a small tame falcon perched on her open hand. Her mother was wearing a huge straw hat encircled by small, multicolored bells, a tourist hat. Her father had captioned the photo "my wife has all the bells & whistles!" Karen had the uncomfortable feeling that they had advanced, leaving her behind.

Dan went to the buffet for seconds, leaving behind a plate on which Teriyaki chicken chunks abutted slices of smoked ham piled askew, stratified and resembling steep cliffs or canyons. The plate signaled great abundance and great waste at the same time, cancelling itself out. Karen chewed at a massive piece of under-ripe cantaloupe and swallowed. The hard angles pressed against her inner throat, sliding. She thought to herself that she'd probably become a vegetarian, someday.

A few hours later, it was time to eat again. They ordered at their seats by the pool from a menu as thick as a book. Turning its huge plastic-covered pages made Karen feel like a child again, gaping at the pictures of odd-colored food shot too closely, curiously shiny.

"No thank you," Karen said to the waiter who tried to fill her water glass.

"Stay hydrated," Dan said, pushing his own glass over to her.

It was too hot to move, and they sat by the pool with their laptops on, waiting for more food to come to them and be consumed. As the staff door swung open, Karen could hear several people laughing together in a language she did not understand.

DAN SEEMED TO be working on an architecture project next to her, though he had promised that he would not bring any work along on their vacation. He stared into his screen at a contorted orange shape, zooming in and out on it, rotating it to one side or the other, sighing deeply.

Meanwhile, Karen had become obsessed with reading about jellyfish. The Nomura jellyfish could grow up to two meters in diameter and weigh up to 450 pounds. A ten-ton Japanese fishing boat had capsized after trying to haul up a load of Nomuras caught in the net. She stared at a photo of giant jellyfish clogging a water treatment plant, their heads like plastic bags full of dirty water. She clicked on one link and then back to the search screen to click on another and another. She learned with horror that a jellyfish stinger was not just a stinger: it was a sac of toxins that ruptured when touched, shooting out a ridged, wicked-looking spine. This structure, called a nematocyst, was intelligent—it knew the difference between random pressure and human skin. In the drawings of the jellyfish nematocysts, the stingers resembled harpoons shooting into the flesh and burying themselves there, lodging like insect splinters below the surface. Karen suddenly felt like she was going to throw up. □

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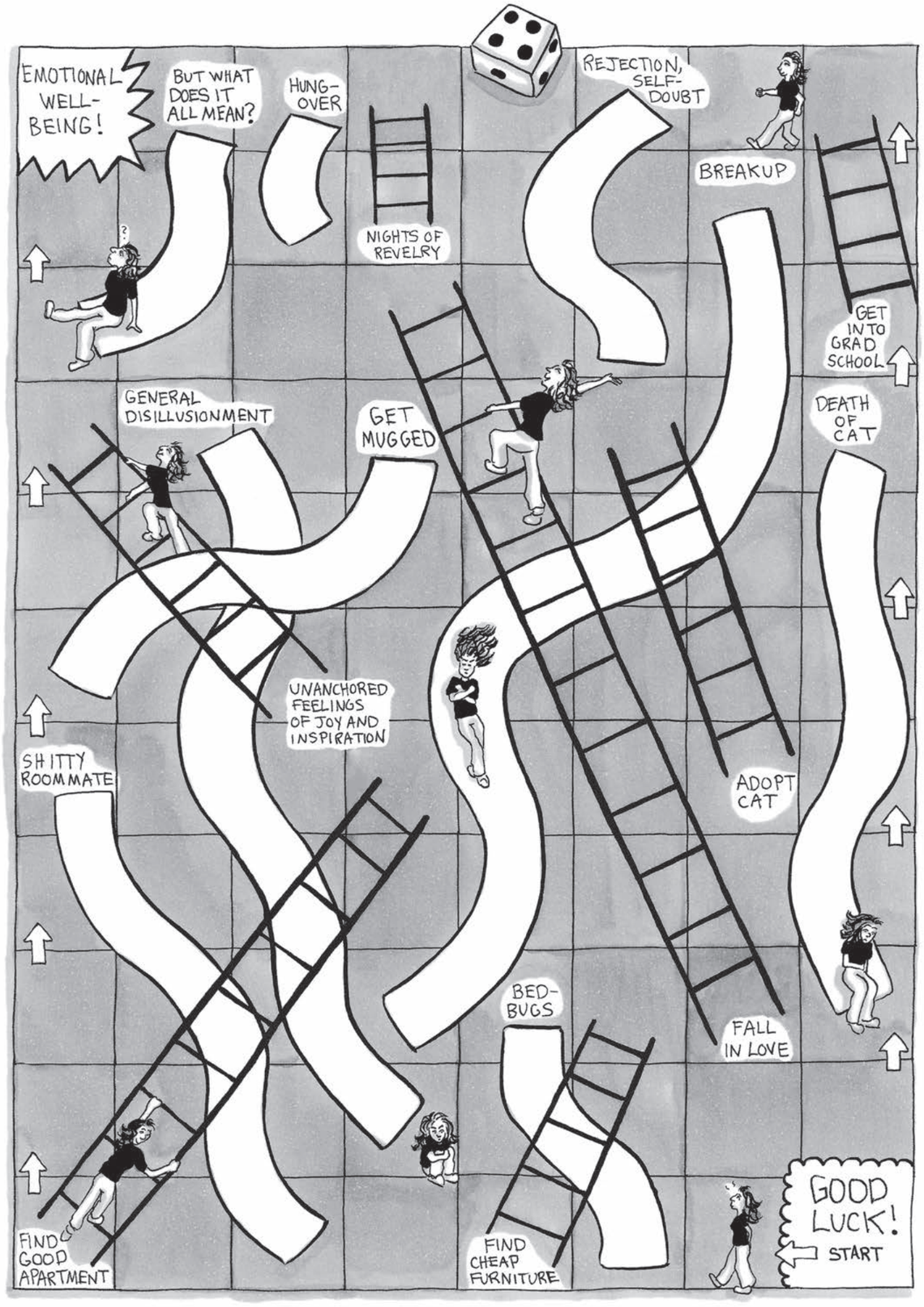
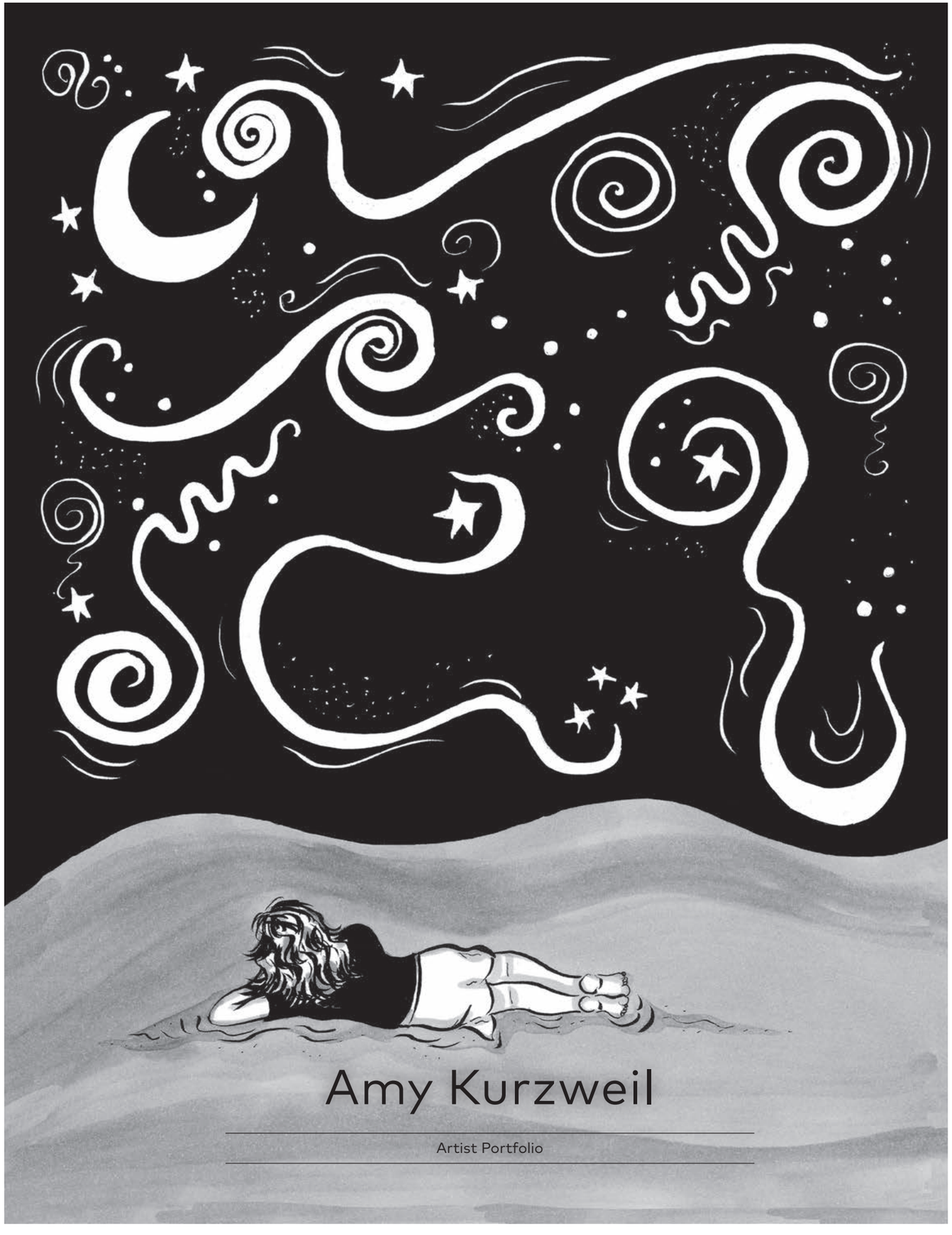




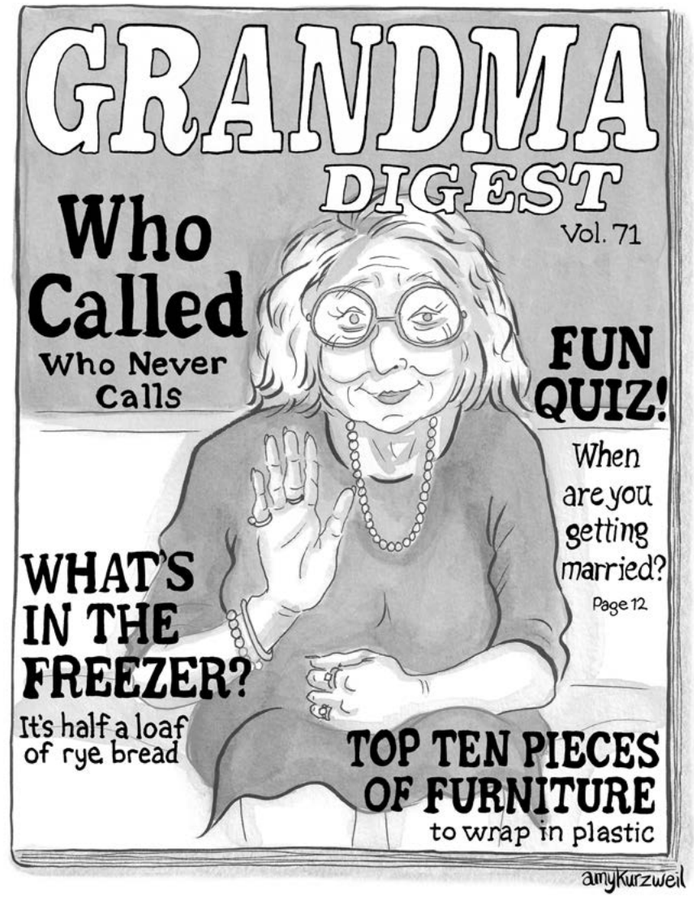
Amy Kurzweil

Artist Portfolio

[PREVIOUS SPREAD] Two pages from Kurzweil's first graphic memoir, *Flying Couch* (Black Balloon Publishing, 2016), about the author, her mother, and her grandmother, the latter an escapee of the Warsaw Ghetto. *Flying Couch* weaves together their stories into a moving portrait of a family's experience and how its history continues to imprint the present.

[LEFT] "Meet the Author," from the *New Yorker,* November 20, 2017.

[RIGHT] "Grandma Digest" from the *New Yorker,* April 8, 2019.



HYPER-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

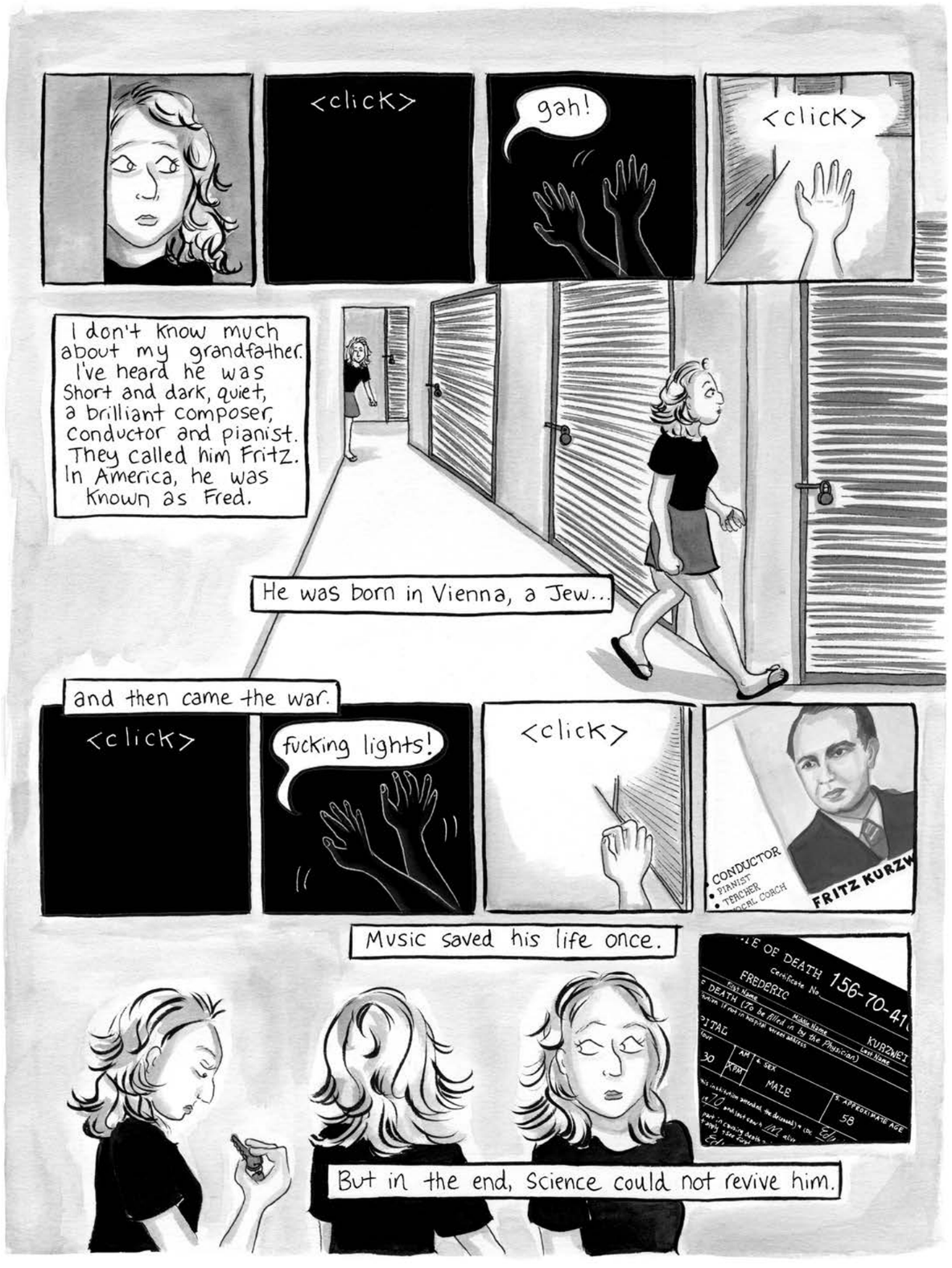
By Emma Allen

THERE'S A LINE FROM Amy Kurzweil's graphic memoir *Flying Couch* that's been running through my head throughout the pandemic. The book is about three generations of women—as much about her grandmother's harrowing escape from the Warsaw Ghetto and Amy's sometimes tense but always tender relationship with her psychotherapist mother as it is about Amy herself. At one point in the memoir, Amy is traveling with her mom, feuding about something insignificant, mulling the gaps in her family tree—erasures of war. "I wonder if shorter roots are thicker roots," Amy writes. "Thicker roots have more knots and snarls." At a time when we're all either cooped up, tripping over our connective roots, or finding ourselves separated by a gaping vastness (Zoom notwithstanding), this image feels particularly poignant. As I bicker with my own mother (with whom I've been quarantining for five months), I think about Amy's musing: "I never know exactly what we're fighting about, but it usually has something to do with leaving each other." We are living in a moment of too-closeness, too-farness, and neverending anxiety about potential loss, or losses already accrued, but, as Amy eloquently puts it, "Humor is mortar. It binds the bridge between the real and the unimaginable."

Thank god for humor. My uniquely odd job as Cartoon Editor of the *New Yorker* these days is to review a constant deluge of jokes about the end of the world, certainly as we know it. But, as Amy so wonderfully illustrates time and again, we make jokes not just to sublimate pain or to keep reality at bay, but because sometimes terrible things are absurd things—just pick up any American newspaper for confirmation. And the ways in which we survive impossible situations can make fools of us, the only sane response to which is to laugh.

Amy explores how trauma manifests over generations, not just through historical data points but through the most minute details of how we live. And that's what single-panel, *New Yorker* cartoons are—hyper-specific observations and juxtapositions concisely conveyed that reveal something greater than their parts. Take, for instance, one cartoon of Amy's that features the cover of an imaginary magazine called "Grandma Digest" which teases such deliciously specific articles as, "Who Called/ Who Never Calls," "Fun Quiz!/ When are you getting married?", "What's in the Freezer/ It's half a loaf of rye bread," and "Top Ten Pieces of Furniture/ to wrap in plastic." From the micro, we infer the macro. As Amy puts it in another cartoon depicting two scientists, one looking into a microscope: "Kind of makes you feel large and significant, doesn't it?"

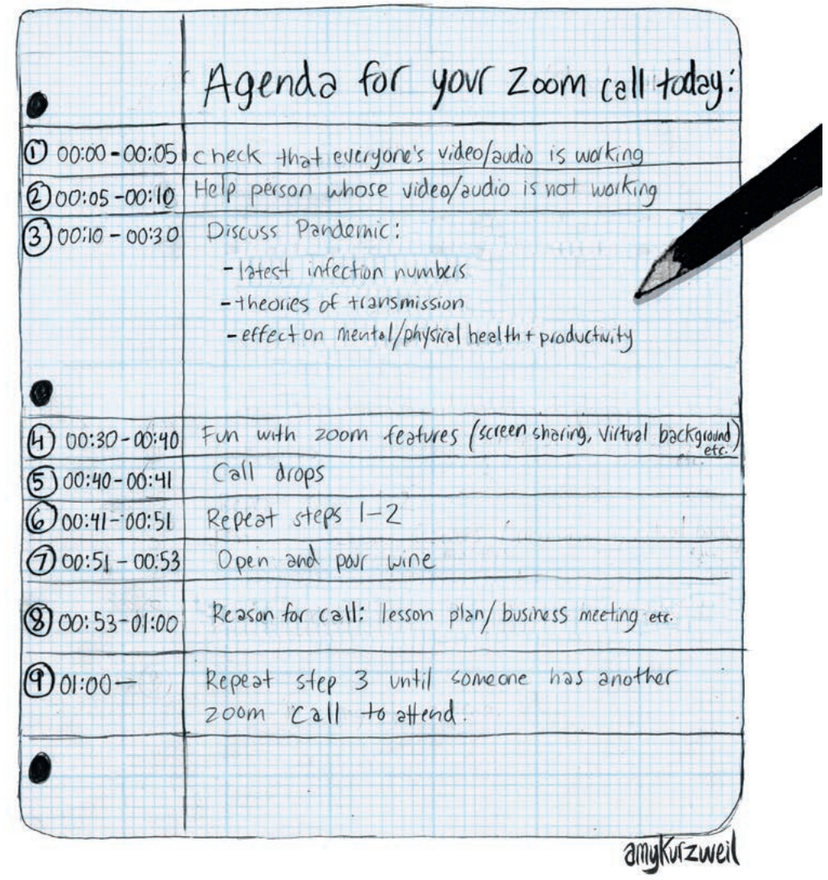
"I'm always mining life for a good story, but all I ever see, I fear, is just my own reflection," Amy laments, in *Flying Couch.* Yet the fact is that each of our reflections, each of our sometimes claustrophobic-feeling experiences is rich with comedic and narrative fodder. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Amy's upcoming book, *Artificial,* is another family memoir, this time about her inventor-scientist father's quest to resurrect his father through artificial intelligence (fittingly, Amy has also published single-panel cartoons about enlightened self-driving cars and a robot cat passing the Turing test). We know that "happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (per Constance Garnett's translation of Tolstoy). Purely happy families are also uniformly not funny (hence the TV laugh-track). The hilarity in being a part of a family that bickers, that is unique in its pain and its perseverance, is what allows for what Amy describes as "the moment of relief in the drawing of lines." What she doesn't name is the parallel moment of relief and pure delight we feel in the consumption of those drawings, for which I, and my mother, are exceedingly grateful. □

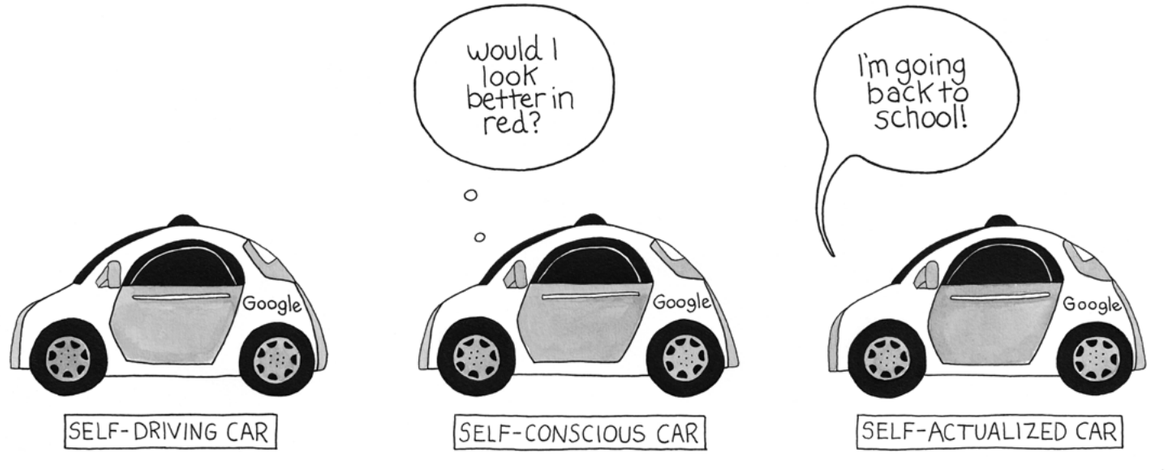


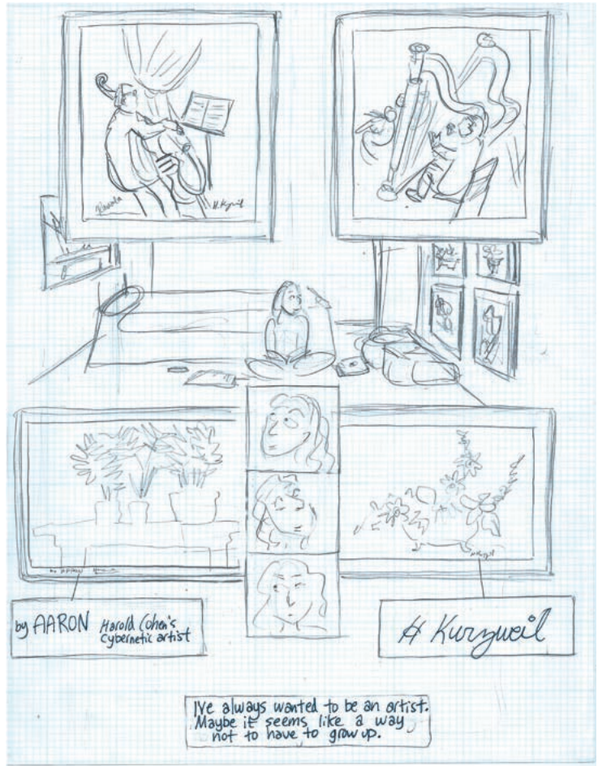
[LEFT] From Kurzweil's forthcoming graphic memoir, *Artificial: A Love Story,* which explores her inventor/futurist father's ambition to "resurrect," with AI, the identity of his own father, a Viennese musician who narrowly escaped the Holocaust.

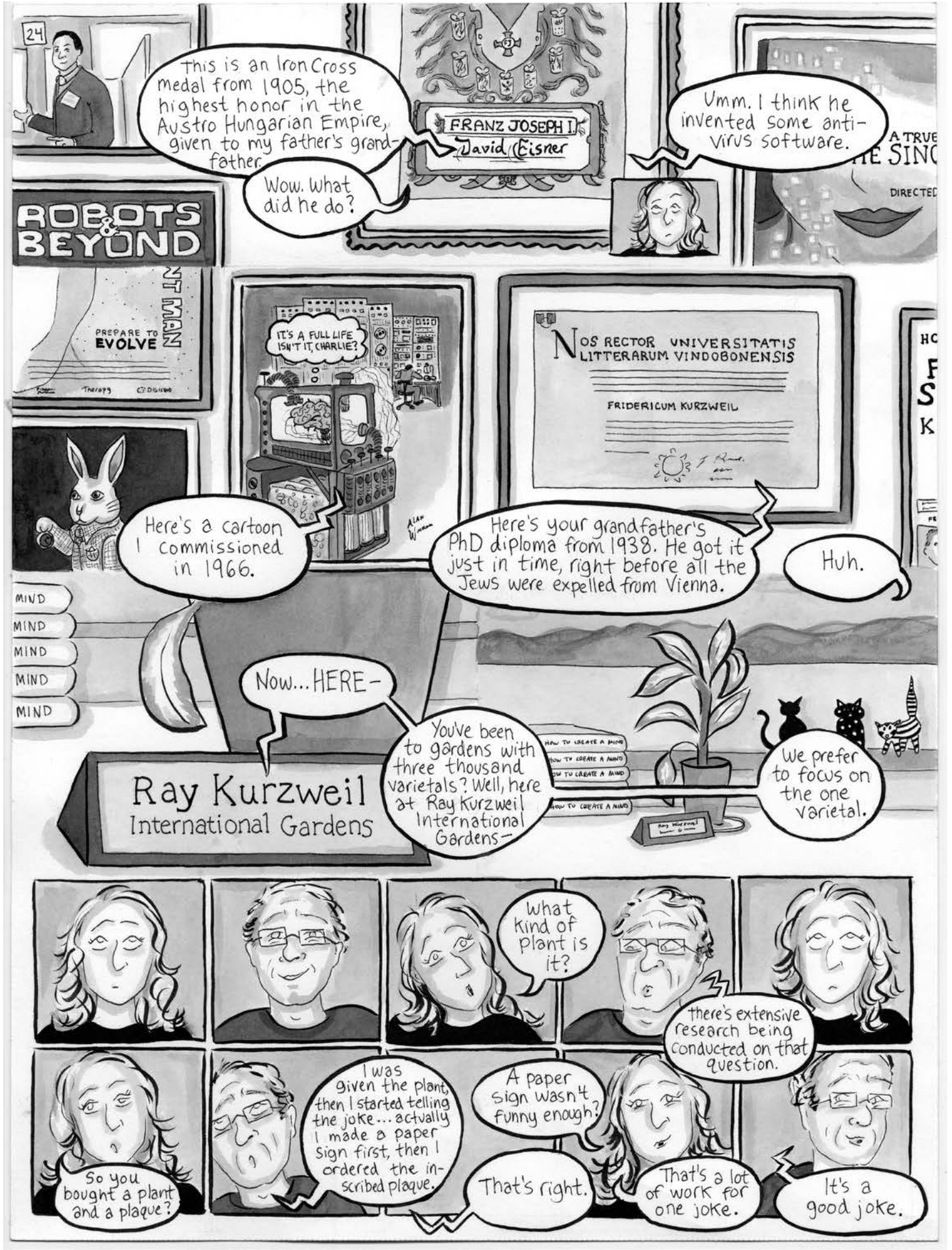
[RIGHT] "Zoom Call," unpublished cartoon, spring 2020

[BOTTOM] "Three Google Cars," from the *New Yorker,* April 4, 2016









"Kind of makes you feel large and significant, doesn't it?"

[TOP] Draft page from *Artificial: A Love Story* (forthcoming)

[TOP RIGHT] Draft page, "Beethoven," from *Artificial: A Love Story*

[RIGHT] "Scientists," from the *New Yorker,* May 30, 2016.

[OPPOSITE] Draft page from *Artificial: A Love Story*

FRANKLIN, 1969

Fiction by Ayana Mathis

A sampan appears. Low to the black water and grenade distance from my post on the shore, it sails out of the mist that descended at nightfall.

Yesterday morning, I was given my assignment: I am one of a ten-man squad to be deployed to an island at the edge of a large bay. I'll keep watch on the beach while the others plant mines. We sail out at 04:00. In the briefing, I was told to look out for indigenous vessels, junks, and sampans. Later that day, Pinky and Mills and I were walking to the chow hall when the Lieutenant yelled over his shoulder, "Seaman Shepherd! Don't fuck this up." Mills and Pinky laughed. Pinky said, "You can't watch for sampans on the bay at night." I asked why and all he said was, "You'll see."

Three men ride in the sampan, two at either end and one in the middle; the conical peaks of their paddy hats are pressed close to their heads. They paddle out of an inlet at the far end of the beach. Their arms move in graceful downward arcs. The one sitting in the middle trails his hand along the surface of the bay. Between his legs a large sack of something heavy and soft is creased in the middle and slumping over on itself. The sampan is black and wooden, less than two feet high with ends that turn up like a banana's. The men sit straight as toothpicks, squinting against the beam from my flashlight. The boat does not list.

I fire two warning shots in the air.

"Identify yourselves!"

The men in the boat throw up their hands and in their haste one of their oars falls into the water.

Fishermen in sampans are not to be trusted. In our briefing, the Lieutenant said it should not always be assumed that they are fisherman. They paddle along in that quiet way they have, then reach under their bundles of fishing net and pull out grenades or MAC-10s.

"Stand up! Stand up with your hands in the air."

I hear the wet suck of boot falls on the sand behind me. Mills yells, "Drop it! Fucking drop it!" even though none of the men in the boat is carrying anything.

First one stands and then another. The boat trembles and lurches. They look at us like we are a bunch of wilding monkeys.

"What's in the sack?" I call. They don't respond.

"They don't speak English." Mills says.

"They understand, they're faking. Dump the sack!" I motion toward the bundle with the butt of my rifle.

I fire another warning shot, this one into the water near the sampan. The man at one end reaches down and heaves the sack over the side. It sinks silently into the bay.

"Move along! Fucking move!" I say.

"Shit, Shep. They leaving!" Mills says.

"Get the fuck out of here!" I shout once more, though one of the fisherman has begun to paddle with the remaining oar and the sampan is creeping forward. Mills walks away, shaking his head.

In a few hours, we'll have completed our mission and then we'll load up the junk and sail away from here. Behind me, my squad is busy digging holes in the beach. I lived near a butcher when I first got married. He was always working whenever I walked by. He hummed while he worked. He was a happy man. Listening to the shovels pushing wetly through the sand, I remembered the sound of his knife cutting through flesh.

I am afraid that the mist over the water will creep onto shore and settle over the sand so that I can't see snakes coming toward me. My neck aches with the strain of scanning the sand for them. I squeeze the trigger of my rifle, softly, slowly until I feel the pressure building under my fingertip, until I am a fraction of a second away from the satisfying pop of the trigger's release. I light another cigarette. I have written a letter to my wife—my ex-wife, I suppose I should call her—our first communication in over a year. My Sissy. She's back in Philadelphia. I think she's really finished with me this time. I'll never be finished with her.

WHEN WE CROSSED the threshold into our apartment on the day that we got married, a maple leaf blew into the living room. It had turned a deep crimson that darkened to burgundy around the edges. Sissy said that the fall was all blood and gold and I held the leaf and said, "Well, here we got the blood." We went back outside to look for the gold. I found a yellow leaf on the sidewalk across the street, not a speck of brown on it. I can't imagine doing that with anyone else— something as silly as looking for fallen leaves in the street, but with her it wasn't silly at all. I gave her that gold leaf and she put it on top of the red one inside of a handkerchief that she pressed into a flat, neat square with the iron. We didn't have any ribbon, so she cut a scrap from the lining of the dress she got married in and she tied up that handkerchief. That was only two years ago.

I don't know where Mills gets all of this beer. We've been drinking since reveille. I smell like stale cigarette smoke and rancid meat. I taste the smell in my mouth—my tongue and teeth are mossy. I ate a can of tuna earlier, and some crackers; my other meals were beer and coffee. I am always nauseous, I can't remember the last time I went an entire day without feeling like vomiting. My beard has grown in irregular patches, beneath the hairs, red bumps flare in clusters.

I'd like to think Sissy wouldn't recognize me, but that's a lie. She's seen me this ugly. When I get back to the ship I'll start a new regimen: I'll limit my beers to the evening after chow, I'll stay out of fights and the brig. I think that I can do that, get myself together. I've done it before, though sometimes I think I am just a bleary drunk, and the periods when I am clean and shaved and useful, I am only hiding from myself.

I got a letter from Sissy last week. She wrote: You have a baby girl, born September 13th. I wasn't going to tell you but she looks just like you, down to the flecks of hazel in her eyes. I don't know what you're going to do now that I've told you, I don't know if I want you to do anything. I was going to keep the secret but I know enough to understand that the things you try to hide come out when you least expect them to. I don't want my baby to have a liar for a mother. She is five months old. Her name is Lucille.

A YEAR AGO, I went to see Sissy on my leave. She'd taken up with some cat after she left me. The two of them were living in a little place on a block in West Philadelphia where neither of them knew anybody. I wore my dress blues. The brass buttons shone in the sun. I felt like the son of a king come to claim his bride. I didn't deserve to feel that way, it was a lie, but the fantasy helped me keep my head up. As I climbed the steps to the apartment I realized that it was remarkable that Sissy hadn't found another man before now. I'll tell her, I thought, that I had come to offer her a divorce. We could go down to the courthouse that same afternoon. I'd free her so she could have an honorable life with this man she'd found. But then she opened the door and she was every inch my Sissy, with the mole on her cheek and her iron gaze.

"I came to get you," I said.

She stood on the threshold looking at me and blinking quickly. I thought she might cry, but she wouldn't give me the satisfaction.

"We're still married," I said. "What kind of way is this to live?"

"I'm living like a woman, Franklin," she answered. "My mother and my sisters won't speak to me, but it's worth it to live like a woman. I don't know when you suddenly got so concerned about my sacrifices."

And there we were in a movie with me as the penitent husband and Sissy as the wronged wife. I said my lines and she said hers. I don't know why I didn't take my hat and go.

"I came because I love you," I said.

"I believe you think that's true," Sissy said.

She never moved from the doorway. Her hands hung at her sides and she made little fists then released them again like she did when she was nervous. Little circles of gold, the sunlight reflecting off of my brass buttons, played across her face. I looked over her shoulder into the living room. It looked all right; it was cozy. Everything in the room was light and lifting, white curtains, a cream sofa, a pale rug on the floor.

"I'm a better man after being in the service." I knew better than to say that to her, but I couldn't think of anything else. "I arranged for a truck to help you move your things. I can call right now, it'd be here in ten minutes."

"A truck!" Sissy laughed in spite of herself.

She knew I didn't have a truck. I don't know what I would have done if she'd agreed.

"A truck!" she said again and shook her head.

She let me into the apartment. I sat on her white couch. She sat opposite me in a straight back chair with wooden armrests.

"I haven't had a drink for days," I said.

"I can't go with you this time, Franklin."

"So you're just going to live like this with this man!"

"You wore me out, Franklin."

I caught my reflection in the living room window. I looked like a pile of fool's gold, you had to squint from all the shine coming off of me—buttons, shoes, epaulettes. I asked myself why I wanted her back so badly. I couldn't answer the question, but I couldn't leave that apartment either.

I got up from my place on the couch and stood crying in the middle of the room.

"I love you," I said.

"We have to be finished, Franklin."

She got up and took my hand. I didn't understand how she could hold my hand like that and tell me no. She stroked my palm with her fingers. I leaned into her because I needed some strength to walk out of that door and she was the only one I could get it from. We hugged for a long time and then I kissed her neck, and her shoulder. I kissed her eyelids and the hollow between her collarbones and we sank down onto that white couch together.

After, while she was buttoning her blouse, she said she'd walk me out to the corner, and you know we walked out to that corner holding hands like we did when we were dating, before I messed everything up.

"You take care of yourself," she said and turned quickly toward the house before I could reply.

That was a year ago. I have not heard from Sissy since then—until I got her letter about Lucille.

We steer the junk toward the gulf. It's slow moving, but we are making distance. The stars and fog fade in the pre-dawn and the sky brightens. Behind us the island is a ridged black silhouette, ever receding. A sampan glides along the surface of the water near the shore of the island. Probably a fishing boat, they come out at this hour. The occupants, a boy and an old man, look into the water and then at us. The boy is pointing at our junk, at me, I swear he's pointing right at me. The old man pushes the kid's arm down.

The sampan is lifted on a low wave, gently, like a ballet dancer lifting his partner, and pushed closer to the island. There is a boom. The boat is lifted higher on an upward moving column of water. The explosion echoes and echoes, it bounces from one island to the next. It knocks in my brain and chest. I am holding my breath but do not notice until it is quiet again and I take a deep inhale that makes me cough and sputter. Mills lets out a low whistle, says softly, "Shit."

I get another beer and drink half in one gulp. We will get back to the ship in two hours. I look into the water for floating body parts. I want to see the boy's head. I ought to be forced to acknowledge what I have done. Most of my missions are at night. I shoot into the darkness and sail away before I have to count bodies. It was the same with Sissy. I was a violence in her life and left before I had to face the damage I'd done; with Lucille there would be more recklessness, more hurt, more promises I don't keep, more destroying the people I love.

I make a wager: if I see any evidence of the boy's life we took I will never drink again. I set my beer on the deck and wait. I scan the water. A light-colored unrecognizable something floats toward me. I lean so far over the starboard side I nearly topple into the water. Behind me Pinky calls, "Suicide ain't the answer!" I hear a round of guffaws. I lean and squint. The floating object appears to be a finger, then a leaf, then a discarded bandage. The current shifts and the thing is carried away from me. I pick up my beer, finish it off. When we get back to the ship I'll go to sleep and when I wake up I'll have the shakes and I won't have the will power to sit on my bunk sweating and throwing up until the liquor's out of my system. I'll take a swig of the whiskey stashed in my footlocker and the days will go on as they've been. And it's not like I don't know I bet my family life on an exploded boy's body parts. I know that, I know what it means about the kind of man I have become. Or always was? I can't quite tell anymore. It is almost a relief to know that the people I love are free of me, that I don't have to lie to myself, that I don't have to pretend that Lucille would be better off for knowing me.

I reach into my pocket and throw my letter for Sissy into the bay. There was a picture in the envelope, which lands in the water next to the folded paper swan. In the photo I am standing at the dock with my ship behind me. I'm in my dress blues with my white hat pulled low over one eye. On the back of the photo it says: For you and little Lucille. Love, Franklin. Saigon, 1969. □

From *THE TWELVE TRIBES OF HATTIE:* A novel by Ayana Mathis. Reprinted by permission of Vintage Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

FRESH AIR

Thomas Mann and the literature of contagion

by Susan Bernofsky

As I sit in my apartment in New York City, at work on my new translation of Thomas Mann's great novel *The Magic Mountain*, I frequently have occasion to consider the relationship between illness and mobility. If not for the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, my partner and I would be packing our bags for Berlin to begin an eagerly anticipated residency at the American Academy. Instead, we anxiously watch the news for signs that the European Union's restriction on travelers from the United States will soon be eased, if not lifted.

Thomas Mann began his novel concerned with a very specific contagious illness—tuberculosis—in 1913, shortly after Mann's wife, Katia, spent several months recuperating from a pulmonary infection at a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland. Mann envisioned a short, satirical companion piece to *Death in Venice*. But the scope of the project expanded once he started writing, and it was soon clear that it would become a substantial work. The book's path to completion was anything but direct. Mann kept interrupting work on it to return to the perpetually in-progress novel he expected to be his post-*Buddenbrooks* magnum opus: *The Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*. Once the Great War began, he immersed himself in politics as well, with magazine pieces that eventually became the 600-page nonfiction volume *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, published in 1918. After the war ended, Mann's thoughts returned to Davos and the story of the "simple young man" Hans Castorp, who travels from Hamburg to the Alps to visit his consumptive cousin, Joachim. Hans's three-week stay extended to seven years, and Mann's projected hundred-page work sprawled to a thousand by the time it was published, in 1924.

The Magic Mountain is set in the years leading up to the Great War and concludes when Castorp is drafted, following the outbreak of hostilities. The storyline thus ends prior to the global influenza pandemic. If Mann had decided to include it in his novel, he would have had to completely rethink his story to incorporate it, since the pandemic arguably devastated Europe even more decisively than the devastating war itself (which Mann also bracketed out of his novel except for a single impressionistic battle-scene, at the end). Indeed, the epidemic killed more people worldwide than World Wars I and II combined. The disease was misleadingly labeled "Spanish flu," though it probably did not originate in that country; news media in neutral Spain were merely the first to report on the pandemic. They could because they were not subject to the press censorship imposed in neighboring combatant countries, whose governments feared weakened morale.

The influenza's many casualties in the sphere of German-language culture included Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud's daughter Sophie. Franz Kafka, who had been diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1917, contracted influenza one year later, which contributed to the rapid decline in his health; he died in 1924, at the age of forty. It is remarkable that Kafka, for all his frustrating years of illness—including a series of partial recoveries followed by inevitable downturns—produced few texts in which illness plays a significant role. He wrote *The Metamorphosis*, his most important work about physical infirmity, two years before he began to cough blood.

The influenza pandemic hit close to Mann's own home: his daughter Monika—eight years old—fell ill with the flu but recovered. He was well acquainted with the particular agony endured by those forced to watch their loved ones suffer from this severe illness that, still poorly understood, was taking so many lives. I believe this experience influenced his descriptions of lung ailments in the novel. Protagonist Castorp—truly an innocent abroad in the Swiss sanatorium—begins the novel shocked to hear the "utterly horrifying sound" of a tuberculosis patient hacking his lungs out. Castorp himself later becomes fluent in the language of consumptive expectoration. Here's his first impression of the coughing of the (as yet unseen) "gentleman rider": it "bore no resemblance to any coughing Hans Castorp had ever heard before. Indeed, compared to this, every other variety of coughing known to him was merely a glorious, healthy expression of life. This was coughing done under protest, not a series of discrete blasts but a hideous feeble flailing and wallowing in a muck of organic decomposition."

THE TUBERCULOSIS TREATMENT practiced at Berghof Sanatorium as described in *The Magic Mountain* emphasizes the value of fresh air in vanquishing the disease. In the Davos of the novel, sitting out on a balcony in the cold air of a wintry afternoon is understood as cutting-edge therapy. Tuberculosis was only in the 1880s found to be caused by a bacterium—a discovery for which physician Robert Koch won the 1905 Nobel Prize. The disease had earlier been thought to be hereditary. With the new understanding of germs causing the illness, the importance of sanitaria located in mountainous regions replete with lots of fresh, cold, bacterium-banishing air was paramount.

Faith in fresh air's ability to combat infection is also responsible for the impressive size of the radiators in my own New York City apartment, in a building that dates from 1922. During the 1918 pandemic, influenza spread especially fast in the city's many tenement buildings, where large numbers of residents lived crammed together in underheated close quarters; windows were generally kept closed to preserve the little warmth available. In fact, this is one reason why in 1918 (as in 2020) lower-income communities were particularly hard-hit by the illness. Soon after the pandemic, under the influence of the Fresh Air Movement, the New York Board of Health mandated that all new buildings were to be supplied with large boilers and radiators, the goal being to intentionally overheat apartments. Residents would be forced to open their windows to maintain a comfortable temperature, facilitating the circulation of healthful, germ-dispersing fresh air. In 2020, while environmental considerations make us lament the wastefulness of the steam heat still a ubiquitous part of New York City life, the recommendation to keep indoor spaces well ventilated to reduce the spread of Covid-19 is just as important now as in 1918.

Of course, the purpose of the chilly balconies in Davos, where Mann's tuberculosis patients aired out their lungs, was to cure existing infections rather than ward off new ones. Even so, I can't help wishing I had my own nice private balcony as I huddle in my New York apartment translating this novel. Berlin seems very far away. And like Hans Castorp, who begins *The Magic Mountain* by embarking on the longest journey of his life, and then trades in this mobility for a seemingly endless stasis, I find my life, too, newly defined by immobility, watching time endlessly telescope as I translate my way through page after page of Mann's masterpiece, highly conscious of the irony of translating during one pandemic a novel that took shape during another. □

NO REFUGE

Burning the Mediterranean Sea

by Hakim Abderrezak

THROUGHOUT MY CHILDHOOD, my family would travel to Morocco, where my mother was born. The six of us would make the multi-day journey by car from Normandy, crossing much of France and all of Spain. One August, on our return to France, I witnessed a scene that has stayed with me to this day. As I later came to realize, it would influence both my scholarship, which in 2008 began to focus on clandestine migration, and, more recently, my own artwork about unauthorized sea crossings.

One night at the port of Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Morocco, car drivers were directed to park in straight lines in preparation for passport inspection and vehicle searches. While Spanish officers were checking ferry-boarding passes and examining passports, agents had their dogs circle cars and vans and encouraged them to jump inside if they became more animated than usual.

The people in front of us were next in line for the security check. I saw the security dog become very excited. The officer asked all of the passengers to get out of the vehicle. The compact car was packed with suitcases, blankets, clothes, souvenirs, and many other objects. Standing by, the family looked distressed as the dog kept sniffing a bag located under the back seat. The family had not only stuffed their belongings on top of the vehicle and in the trunk; they also filled the space between the front and back seats—a common practice among Moroccan families to maximize space and make it more comfortable for the children to sleep. That small space, however, also contained a teenage boy, who obviously had been instructed to remain hidden until onboard the ferry. He never crossed over the Spanish border. I remember searching for that family on the ferry, but I never found them. Maybe they were all detained. Maybe the teenager became one of the many migrants who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea on fishing boats in the 1990s. I will never know; I will always remember.

BEFORE INCIDENTS LIKE this made it into the international news in recent years—or, rather, before tragedies that had been transpiring for decades were deemed as such and then lumped into what has since been termed "the refugee crisis"—capsized boats were covered by local news, mostly Andalusian networks that reported on captured migrants and corpses washed ashore. For several decades now, literature—among other forms of representation—has also addressed the topic of Mediterranean migration. Since 2009, when I first published about the tragic crossings taking place in the Mediterranean, I have called this body of literary works *illiterature.* This neologism teases out three major features in fictional accounts on the topic. First, the novels, novellas, and testimonies, written in various languages, feature characters who are "ill" before, during, and/or after their sought maritime passage. Second, this literary subgenre has been dominated by male writers ("il" is the masculine personal pronoun in French). Third, in these stories—many of which were written by North African writers in the French language—the Global South is portrayed as an island ("île" in French) that must— along with its inhabitants—be kept at bay at all cost.

"Illiterature" is primarily concerned with the idea of the Mediterranean Sea as an impediment to northward travel. Illustrative titles include Mahi Binebine's *Welcome to Paradise* (2004), Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), Youssouf Amine Elalamy's *Sea Drinkers* (2008), and Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* (2008). The perilous crossing is undertaken by individuals who, in other media, are often dehumanized and depicted as threatening masses, hordes, and invaders. This literary category comprises alternative narratives that attempt to address and redress erroneous conceptions and to raise awareness of refugees' plight. For example, representatives of illiterature such as Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier* (2009) have brought attention to the existence of sophisticated technology used to screen and sieve Global South citizens and their movements. With a focus on individual characters, illiterature makes concrete the human lives that suffer; it voices a humane way of understanding those lives in order to denounce the dehumanizing and desensitizing numbers that flash across our television screens. Unlike the news, fiction tells us about the dream shared by refugees to make the discriminating sea disappear—either behind them (in the case of a successful crossing) or in front of their eyes (in the case of a highly coveted and impossible passage).

Hakim Abderrezak, *Unflappable,* oil on canvas, 36×48 inches, 2018. Image courtesy the artist.

While the above novels and novella—as well as the accounts comprising the book *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit* (2001)—deal primarily with the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, separating Morocco from Spain by a mere 14 kilometers, the more recent corpus has dealt with different lands and islands, and other straits, stretching out eastward to the Strait of Sicily, Tunisia, Lampedusa, Lesbos, Turkey, and more. The widespread goal of reaching Europe by sea has been treated in a variety of creative mediums since before the beginning of the century, as exemplified by Maati Kabbal's short story "Patera Express" (1999). The often-deadly endeavor has also appeared in films by directors hailing from a variety of Mediterranean countries, including Nabil Ayouch's *Mektoub* (1997), Mohsen Melliti's *Io, l'altro* (2007), Chus Gutiérrez's *Return to Hansala* (2008), and Merzak Allouache's *Harragas* (2009). Music, too, has commented on the tragic topic. For instance, in the track entitled "El Harraga" (2012), the iconic Algerian raï singer Khaled sings about a father who mourns the drowning of his two young sons. A wide artistic realm, including fine art and other domains, has collectively reflected the aspiration of a growing number of individuals and characters to "burn away" the immense body of water in their way. Literature, film, music, and visual art have all conveyed characters' longing to dispel the deceiving idea (and deceptive ideal) that the Mediterranean is a sea for all. It is instead a sea that has interrupted travel for many and permitted free movement for a few.

THE DESIRE OF refugees to change their conditions is encapsulated in the term that many migrants and refugees employ to refer to themselves: *harragas.* This Arabic word means "burners," derived from the Arabic *hrig* or *hriq* ("fire"). Originating in North Africa, the designation applies to migrants and refugees alike in that it names individuals (in real life) and characters (in works of fiction) who share similar modes of travel (clandestine), means of transportation (boats), itinerary (the Mediterranean Sea), place of origin (Global South), destination (Europe), and pull and push factors (which, contrary to widespread belief, are

not limited to lack of economic opportunity, and may include denial of fundamental rights, which also affect those labeled as "economic migrants").

In the context of furtive trans-Mediterranean migration, "burning" is mainly explained as an action—namely, harragas literally burning their identification papers to prevent deportation to their countries of origin. Moreover, in Arabic, one either "burns" or "cuts" the sea rather than simply "crosses" it, as in English. In other European languages, transiting the sea also invokes smooth passage: *überqueren* in German, *traverser* in French, *atraversar* in Spanish, *atravessar* in Portuguese, and *attraversare* in Italian. But "burning" must also be understood in its allegorical sense: it is a kind of intense wishful thinking—"a burning desire"—a doing away with a sea-obstacle that obstructs people's right to migrate.

The Arabic language reveals how the Mediterranean has long been conceived as a barrier requiring strong means for getting past or over it.

In this way, the Arabic language reveals how the Mediterranean has long been conceived as a barrier requiring strong means for getting past or over it. Though the idea of "cutting" the sea did not necessarily connote clandestineness a few decades ago, today the language indicates that if one must "cut" the sea, it is because the Mediterranean is not associated with fluidity and motion but rather with rigidity and immobility. Burned down to its bed, the Mediterranean basin could be traversed by walking over it, rather than forcing migrants and refugees to "burn" or "cut" it.

The term "burners" in Arabic also crystallizes a vision of the world, from the point of view of human beings who consider their leave-taking to be legal, ethical, and essential, rather than criminal. Their forced passage symbolically advocates for rights, and it highlights wrongdoing. To call harragas and their acts of migration "illegal" is a problematic misrepresentation; it implies criminalization, regardless of the legality of refugees' movements as acknowledged in international law, which nations have signed and vowed to uphold—but, more often than not, hold up instead.

In our reckoning of maritime tragedies, it is important that we abstain from characterizations like this, to avoid reproducing improper and potentially unethical narratives. It is similarly important to retain harragas' own terms (or at minimum to be conscious of their existence and meanings) in order to better grasp their plight. When discussing a phenomenon specific to a society expressing itself and acting through specific languages, religious obligations, regional traditions, cultural impetuses, and so on, generic terms can easily minimize and distort the ordeal of those living through it.

This is all to say that in order for us to better comprehend why and how the "refugee crisis" has come to be, we must include Southern perspectives in our thinking and research. This implies fully acknowledging the "objects" of discourse as the subjects of their own history, endowed with their own side of the story. This entails lending our ears and giving voice to Global South citizens—both of the harragas and those residing on the southern and eastern rims of the Mediterranean, who have been overlooked or silenced altogether. Their perspective, cognizant of noteworthy regional idiosyncrasies (linguistic, cultural, societal, religious, historic, political, geopolitical) is central in piecing together a fuller picture of what migration means and why it happens. In so doing, local vocabulary is preferable to administrative or political terminology. And neologisms can be useful for teasing out the implications embedded in a native vernacular. These tools are crucial in lending nuance to a hegemonic (or, perhaps more aptly, *hegemaniac*) discourse—a narrative long obsessed with its own supremacy.

In 2015, the expression "refugee crisis"—a misnomer—became the official way of naming something that had been happening for decades. One of the implications of this deceptive appellation is that the crisis is intrinsically European, despite the fact that the impact of forced migration has struck hardest in West Asian nations—most notably Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, who have taken in the greatest number of refugees. The mass movement of people across the Mediterranean was deemed a "crisis" when it began to take place in large numbers and in a more frequent fashion, forcing Europe to worry about its handling of the situation, in addition to its own future and responsibilities.

This worry was first sown in December 2010, when the Jasmine Revolution occurred in Tunisia, paving the way for the Arab Spring, which then unfolded over the years that followed. The Jasmine Revolution is thus still tightly linked to the "refugee crisis," because social unrest in North Africa spurred thousands of people to set off to sea in the hopes of reaching calmer shores on the other side, southern Europe.

Seen this way, recent migration across the Mediterranean began as a form of rebellion, which must be understood both literarily and metaphorically. Migration is an act of activism, a personal struggle undertaken collectively, oftentimes within a community of strangers embarking on the same boat, trying to rise up from a low status in various spheres of life (economic, societal, political) and amid mediatized depictions of harragas as ill-intentioned evildoers, ranging from dangerous criminals to potential terrorists. Modern-day exilic endeavors from Africa, the Levant, and the Middle East have led to what might be called a "downrising"—European officials downplaying the dangers migrants and refugees face and questioning their reasons for leaving. Downrising aims to make asylum-seekers ineligible for rescue and refuge.

In the end, tragedies, uprisings, and unrest go down in history. But will the untold stories of the uncountable number of anonymous individuals who drowned in the Mediterranean make it into collective history? To remember the heroic deceased, one must re-member their bodies that have been dismembered by electronic nets and hungry fish; one must pay homage to their memories for losing their lives while seeking safety and shelter in times of danger, persecution, or war at home. To re-member, we need memorials, for when a nation does not memorialize, citizens do not memorize what must be learned from past mistakes. Struck by a tragic end, migrants and refugees do not leave behind memoirs; they leave only memories maintained by others. Memorials thus serve as alternatives to missing personal narratives.

To write, film, sing, and paint today about migrants departed under the sea is a form of popular memorial. Fictional and artistic memorials have proliferated in the quasi-absence of institutional memorials that honor the memory of burners and acknowledge the deadly character of a phenomenon with global repercussions. The scarcity of such memorials is all the more surprising as the phenomenon of Mediterranean crossing has been occurring for decades. Politicians have thus had ample time to "officialize" their nations' mourning of those who sought their aid. Instead of creating this kind of memorialization, however, the European Union in 2018 began forbidding NGO ships from rescuing drowning men, women, and children at sea. It also began enabling law enforcement to use oppressive and repressive methods against refugees trying to set foot on European soil. These measures and the silence of the thousands of dead harragas have turned the Mediterranean into the world's largest maritime cemetery—a *seametery*. □

GATE OF TEARS

Migration and impasse in Djibouti

by Nathalie Peutz

In OCTOBER 2018, A Yemeni-Ethiopian refugee living in a camp in northern Djibouti showed me photographs of several corpses lying on the roadside just south of the camp. These were the bodies of Ethiopian men who had died that June of cholera or acute diarrhea after traversing Djibouti's scorching desert on route to Yemen and, ultimately, Saudi Arabia and beyond. Although Ibrahim and his friends were incensed by the migrants' ghastly deaths, they had long become inured to their routine presence in and around the Markazi camp for refugees from Yemen. Indeed, during a visit in January 2020, I observed tens of young Ethiopian migrants entering the camp daily through a gap in its chain-link fence. Many of them rifled through the camp's overflowing garbage heaps, searching for food. Others walked among the narrow rows of the air-conditioned container homes that were donated by Saudi Arabia, begging the refugees for their leftovers. Some of the younger Ethiopians hung around the camp's largest shop, eyeing its goods. Its Yemeni shopkeeper, continuing a charitable practice he had adopted during Ramadan, prepared large platters of rice daily that he shared with the migrants who congregated there. By and large, the refugees who had fled aerial bombings, military conscription, and a devastating humanitarian crisis in Yemen often try to help the Ethiopian migrants heading into the very warzone they escaped. It is not just that the "refugees" pity the "migrants" whose day-to-day travails seem even more precarious than their own; many of these refugees, who had themselves migrated previously between Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Horn of Africa, evaluate their own trajectories in light of these passersby.

A crossroads for migration to and from the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the Republic of Djibouti receives mixed and multidirectional migration flows of refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, environmental migrants, and other migrants moving both into and out of conflict. It is thus a productive site through which to examine the legal, political, racialized, and gendered distinctions drawn between refugees and migrants—both African and Arab—who often encounter, discriminate against, or marry one another; share trajectories; traverse these categories; and disrupt or re-enforce social hierarchies as they pursue "a future" through or within the confines of a fitful mobility.

Albeit one of the poorest and smallest countries in the world (with a population of less than one million), Djibouti has one of the world's highest number of refugees per capita. In addition to hosting nearly 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Yemen, Djibouti is a key transit country for migrants heading toward the Arabian Peninsula in search of work. Each year, tens of thousands of Oromo and Amhara walk across Djibouti's arid desert and alongside its coastal highway toward the Red Sea towns of Tadjoura and Obock, where they are crowded onto wooden dhows crossing the Bab al-Mandab strait to Yemen: "the Gate of Tears." If these Ethiopians do not drown, and if they are not imprisoned or held for ransom in Yemen, they continue their journey northward to Saudi Arabia. In 2018, approximately 160,000 migrants and asylum seekers crossed the Red Sea (departing from Djibouti) and the Gulf of Aden (departing from Somalia). In 2019, more than 138,000 migrants and asylum seekers entered Yemen. Notably, this was the second consecutive year that the number of migrants crossing the sea from the Horn of Africa to Yemen exceeded the number of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Europe. In January 2020, another 11,000 migrants arrived in Yemen, 5,000 of them departing from the beaches north of Markazi. The following month, just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, would see the number of migrant arrivals in Yemen reduced by as much as 90 percent (in part due to the closure of the Ethiopia-Djibouti border), the International Organization for Migration designated this Eastern Route "the busiest maritime migration route on earth."

The Markazi refugee camp in northern Djibouti is located just five kilometers south of the town of Obock, where African migrants congregate before being trafficked across the Red Sea. The camp, one of three United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps in Djibouti, was established in April 2015 to accommodate the influx of refugees arriving from Yemen following the eruption of the civil war and its regional escalation, in March 2015. Since then, more than 3.6 million people have been displaced within Yemen and more than 24 million people (out of a population of 29 million) require some form of humanitarian assistance. By comparison, the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who fled Yemen are relatively small—indicative, perhaps, of how difficult it has been for many Yemenis to leave their country due to airport closures, mobility restrictions, and lack of financial resources. Still, by October 2017, at least 190,000 refugees and asylum seekers had fled to neighboring countries, including some 38,000 Yemeni nationals who entered Djibouti, from where the majority sought onward passage to other destinations. Over the past five years, the number of registered Yemeni refugees remaining in Djibouti has hovered between 4,000 and 7,000 individuals divided between its capital, Djibouti city, and the Markazi camp.

Situated directly across the street from the Markazi refugee camp is a Migration Response Center, run by the International Organization for Migration. Established in 2011 and rehabilitated in 2017, the center assists and helps to repatriate migrants returning to their home countries. Some of the migrants temporarily sheltered by the center had worked previously in Saudi Arabia but were deported; some had made it to Yemen but were captured by Houthi forces and held for ransom; some were abandoned in the Djiboutian desert by their smugglers. At times, the number of migrants seeking assistance exceeds the center's capacity to house them; then, for each group of Ethiopians repatriated to their country, another group is waiting and sleeping outside. It is the refugee camp across the street that provides both aspiring and returning migrants with additional sustenance and diversion.

The refugees I have come to know during the course of my research in Djibouti share more than these geographical coordinates and their food rations with the Ethiopian migrants. Many had also worked as labor migrants in Saudi Arabia or had migrated repeatedly between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. Nasir, the shopkeeper who prepared meals for the Ethiopians, had been part of the mass exodus of some 800,000 Yemeni migrants who had been forced to leave Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during the Gulf crisis in 1990–91; others had lost their jobs and were expelled from Saudi Arabia at the outset of the current war. Moreover, as many as a third of the refugees living in the Markazi camp until recently are the descendants of Yemeni men who had migrated to Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Djibouti in the early twentieth century to escape desperate conditions in Yemen. Their children, born of African women, returned to Yemen to flee warfare or anti-Arab discrimination in the Horn. And it is their African-Yemeni grandchildren, anxious to escape the marginalization and alienation they suffered in Yemen, who are now refugees in Djibouti, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

Ibrahim, the Yemeni-Ethiopian man who showed me the photographs of the deceased migrants, is the son of a Yemeni man who had migrated to Harar, Ethiopia, where he married a local Oromo woman. When Ibrahim's "Arab-owned" pharmacy was burned down by Oromo nationalists, he moved to Sanaa, Yemen, where he married an Ethiopian-Yemeni woman from Harar and began his life anew. In 2015, fearing that their eldest sons would be conscripted by the Houthis, they fled to Djibouti. Like many other new arrivals in Markazi, Ibrahim and his family hoped that their refugee cards would lead to third-country resettlement: an escape from this generational circuit of displacement and alienation. To be clear, most of these refugees from Yemen were fleeing the acute brutalities of war: bombs dropping on their neighborhoods; missiles hitting their loved ones at distribution points; Houthi rebels threatening to conscript their sons; corpses lying in the streets. At the same time, for Ibrahim and many other socioeconomically and politically marginalized Yemenis, the occasion to become a bona fide refugee with international protection and the prospects for third-country resettlement was a risk worth fleeing for.

In keeping with its openness toward refugees, the Republic of Djibouti is one of a dozen nations worldwide to pilot the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework laid out by the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016 and eventually adopted as part of the Global Compact on Refugees by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. Although the Compact calls for increased support for third-country resettlement and voluntary repatriation, it also aims to enhance refugee self-reliance and to ease pressures on host countries located in the Global South. Described as "a new deal for refugees," the Compact thus endorses the greater inclusion of refugees within their host societies through improved access to education and employment. To this end, the Government of Djibouti—which had already extended prima facie recognition to refugees from Somalia and Yemen—has taken substantive steps toward socioeconomically "integrating" refugees into the surrounding communities. In January 2017, Djibouti's President Guelleh promulgated new refugee laws aiming to safeguard and strengthen

the refugees' access to education, healthcare, employment, and eventual naturalization. Most immediately, these laws paved the way for the inclusion of refugees in the national health and education systems—a move that, inthe realm of education, will enable refugees following the Djiboutian curriculum to receive nationally recognized certificates to facilitate their employment. In December 2017, these new laws came into effect by presidential decree. And, to much UNHCR fanfare, the government announced that the country's camps would henceforth be considered "villages." In fact, in the Markazi camp/village, this semantic shift was accompanied by the refugees' move from what had been temporary shelters to the more durable container homes donated by Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center.

In theory, Djibouti's implementation of the Framework provisions would help shift support from the parallel structures created for its refugee population to its national educational and health services, which are now available to all. In practice, however, the transition away from NGO-led services has reduced the refugees' access to good medical care within the camp as well as their ability to shape their children's education. Whereas initially the development of what is now officially designated "the Saudi village" appeared to provide support for the UNHCR's push for local integration, its viability is increasingly unclear. Many of the refugees feared that if they were to move physically from their impermanent tents to these durable containers they would be moving jurisdictionally from the tent of United Nations protection to the de facto prison of permanent displacement. Moreover, the increase in Saudi humanitarian aid to Markazi portends to create yet another parallel system. Rather than being "integrated" within national institutions or within the nearby town, the refugees living in the gated and air-conditioned Saudi village may become even more isolated from the local environment and more dependent on outside assistance than they were before. For those who yearn to be resettled in countries such as Sweden or Canada, these houses are nothing more than a gilded cage. Even were the Framework to meet its lofty goals, the refugees I interviewed do not trust that they will ever be "integrated" in a region from which they, their parents, or their grandparents once fled. In the view of the "marginalized" (often racialized as black) Yemenis born to Yemeni fathers and Somali, Ethiopian, or Eritrean mothers, neither Yemen nor the countries in the Horn of Africa had ever fully included or accepted them. It is for this reason that they crossed the sea, yet again, to become *refugees:* refugees who, through the prospect of third-country resettlement, could leverage themselves out of this regional migratory circuit and into a more open world.

And so, with integration signaling a new kind of impasse, the refugees from Yemen are taking cues from the migrants heading toward Yemen. Despite recognizing their material and legal privileges as "refugees"—relative to their own past experiences as migrants and to the conspicuous hardships of the "migrants" passing by—many have come to realize the increasing devaluation of refugee status in today's inhospitable world. With dwindling hope for third-country resettlement, one of the only ways to escape permanent and effectively captive displacement is through movement. One of the men I know waxes philosophical on this theme: "To migrate is to know God," he tells me. Migrating through the world is a way of venerating it. Despite the ongoing armed conflict and the increasing risk of the country sliding into famine, many refugees have returned to Yemen. Boarding cattle boats from the port of Obock, they cautiously embark on the Eastern Route: the route into the war. "Here, we are dying slowly," several men and women have told me. "In Yemen, I'll die quickly but at home." One group of five young Yemeni men decided to join the African migrants heading northward to Europe. They flew to Khartoum, where they paid human traffickers to truck them across the desert into Libya. After two years in transit, including imprisonment in Libya, they boarded a dinghy to cross the Mediterranean and landed in Malta. Currently, they are seeking asylum in northern Europe.

Ibrahim's Ethiopian-Yemeni wife had become so fed up with life in the camp that she paid a smuggler to take her and her young sons to Ethiopia—walking against the flow of the Ethiopians headed toward the Gate of Tears. Unable to support her children in Ethiopia, she took them to Yemen, where she opened a small shop. After a few months in Sanaa and renewed fears that her eldest son was in danger of being pulled into the conflict, she brought them back to Obock to live with Ibrahim as she again crossed the border into Ethiopia to pursue family reunification through a cousin in Canada. Their decisions and so many of the refugees' and other migrants' trajectories can be characterized by what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls "cruel optimism": in this case, the fantasy for a better life that is the very obstacle to its achievement. Bound by the "cruel optimism" that his refugee status would eventually open doors to his family's resettlement, Ibrahim refused to leave the camp. He did not want his sons to grow up in Ethiopia, from where he feared they would eventually be compelled to migrate, like the young Oromo boys who sifted through the camp's garbage for its scraps. Tragically, Ibrahim suffered a stroke in the autumn of 2019 and was brought back to Ethiopia to die. It is not inconceivable that his sons—once refugees in Djibouti, now refugees in Ethiopia—will one day embark as migrants on the Eastern route to Saudi Arabia, possibly passing by the camp in which they once lived. In this climate, the UN Global Compact for Refugees reads less like a global commitment than it does a form of Southern captivity and Northern abandonment. To the extent that there is a refugee "crisis"—as opposed to a mobility deficit—it is that this "new deal for refugees" may erect a new and more pernicious form of encampment. □

SOMEONE'S DAUGHTER

Recollecting the revolution in Tehran

by Naghmeh Sohrabi

At home in Tehran, 1982. Photo courtesy the author

"They arrested Qotbzadeh," Rahaa said, ignoring the thud of my heavy book bag, which I just dropped on the floor. "Move over," I said, and shoved myself into the bench next to her. "Who?!" I asked, and then, hesitantly, "Was he a communist?" Rahaa sent me a sideways glance of disappointment: "Of course not, you donkey," she said, shaking her head.

Rahaa was my best friend in fourth grade. The first friend I made in my new school. She had big brown eyes and an oval face and carried an air of sophisticated intellectualism. I felt a magnetic pull towards my new friend, who not only had political thoughts but flaunted them whenever she could, which, in 1982 Iran, was often. She had revealed to me early on in our friendship that she came from a family of communists. "My father, my older sisters, even I myself am a member of the Tudeh party," she had told me in a whisper as we stood in the middle of the playground at recess. "The Revolutionary Guards have even come to our house looking for party pamphlets." I was star-struck and confused.

My own family was the opposite of Rahaa's. As far as I could tell, the only time my parents came even close to political activity was when they checked out a meeting of the Confederation of Iranian Students on their university campus in Los Angeles. I was six, and my father had swung me on his shoulders to give me a view of the large conference room teeming with dark haired men and women, all dressed in bell-bottom pants and wide-collared jackets. I had quietly watched as the arguments between the activist students got so heated they began to shove each other. "Let's go," my mom had said to my dad, and then looked up at me and smiled.

The difference between me and Rahaa wasn't just in our families. It was also in the kind of nine-year-olds we were. I was a child of the 1970s in San Diego, immersed in *Star Wars* and secretly reading Judy Blume novels. She was the child of a revolution in Iran, witnessing the thrills of a mass movement that toppled a monarchy, and its subsequent turn to violence. When, two years after the revolution, my parents returned to Iran with 16 suitcases and two children in tow, I was oblivious to all of that and to the war that had already been underway for six months.

Once in Iran, I slowly began to learn about politics from the stories floating around in my grandmother's neighborhood, which stuck to me as I flitted from adult to adult. Or, snippets of news that streamed out of my father's shortwave radio, incomprehensible voices garbled by static. I longed

to be like Rahaa, a real intellectual, a Leftist perhaps, whatever that meant.

That summer, months after Rahaa told me about Qotbzadeh, I sat cross-legged next to my dad on the rug. I knew that guy on the TV, sitting behind the desk alone, dressed in a dark suit, blue shirt, tieless, and bearded, was him, the guy whose arrest had made my friend so sad.

It was clear from the look on my dad's face and from the drone of the guy's voice that something important was going on, but I had no idea what. My Americanized Persian barely got me through recess at school, let alone a televised confession by a revolutionary. I caught some stuff: acknowledgement that he received money to bomb the house of the leader, Ayatollah Khomeini; some kind of plot to overthrow the nascent post-revolutionary regime. My dad told me Qotbzadeh had been Khomeini's friend. So then why was he trying to kill him? And if he really was confessing to all these things, why was his face like stone and his voice so matter-of-fact? After a while, I just stopped listening and focused instead on his hands grasping the corners of his written confession and releasing it once in a while to make his tortured points. His hands were large, and when he placed them on his face in a rare show of fatigue, they swallowed him whole. His hands. They were mostly what made me sad.

"Did you hear him say he wants either to be forgiven or executed?" Rahaa asked me the next day, sounding proud. "His hands were so big," was all I could muster.

While I knew that the world around me was changing fast and against the adults' expectations, I didn't know why. One day, I was in the car with my aunt and uncle, coming back from visiting yet another relative. It was dark, and I was in the backseat, half paying attention to whatever was being said in the front, half watching the still-unfamiliar city whiz by. I knew something was up when my aunt and uncle lowered their voices to a whisper and my uncle slowed the car down to a gentle stop. We had arrived at a checkpoint manned by men not even old enough to grow a full beard. My uncle rolled down his window and, in a voice gravelly from years of smoke and drink, said "Good evening sir. Is everything ok?" His voice was covered in disdain for these *joojehs,* and I could sense my aunt tense up in the passenger seat. I quickly sat up but didn't know what kind of face to put on: I was curious and I was afraid. The 18-year-old *little chicken* stuck his head in the car, sniffing. No one said anything. I tried to smile, but his eyes just skimmed over my head. My uncle held his breath. He knew that little chicken was sniffing to see if anyone had been drinking. Drinking and smoking opium had quickly become my uncle's favorite way of giving the middle finger to "these pimps and sons of whores," as he liked to call the people now in power.

Leaving New York for Tehran, 1981. Photo courtesy the author

Several long seconds passed. I was worried that even a whiff on my uncle's breath or less—just the defiant look in his eyes—would be enough for him to get dragged out of the car and lashed. But the *joojeh* just pulled his head back out and, without a word, gestured for us to go. "May God protect you," my uncle said, with as much contempt as he could muster. When the window was fully rolled up and we were well on our way, he muttered: "I shit on your heads." No one said another word.

Qotbzadeh's stony-faced robot-like confession and his nervous hands had made me realize that there was more going on than just checkpoints on the streets. I found this "more" increasingly terrifying. So I began to listen to the whispers that whirled all around me.

The best time to catch a whisper mid-air was during siesta, when my mother, aunt, and grandmother would all sit cross-legged on the rug or with their legs stretched out. Their hushed voices filled the room with grievances—such as the price of food, fears over what was happening and what was going to happen, or just everyday gossip. I would rest my head on my mother's lap and pretend to sleep, hoping to catch some juicy tidbit I could then share with Rahaa. But these women were not so easily fooled, so they would change the name of whomever they were talking about to *folani,* the proverbial "so-and-so." If I ever dared ask, "Who?" my mother would say, "Go to sleep. It's none of your business who," and they'd all laugh. For a while, I thought folani was a real person, a person who seemed to lead a fascinating and, at times, sad life.

"Folani was on a diet again, did you hear?"

"*Na?* I just saw her put away a kilo of cream puffs."

"Did you hear about folani's husband?"

"*Nah, chi?*"

"He's an addict. Opium."

"*Ey baba,* you don't say?" (Said with either a shake of the head or a slap to the knee). Sometimes when the topic was dangerously close to home, a relative, say, who was napping in the other room, the use of "folani" would soar to new heights.

"Did you see folani at lunch giving the cold shoulder to folani?"

"Yea, didn't you know? She invited folani, the sister-in-law that the other folani can't stand, to dinner and folani found out, and now *qahr kardan* so they're not talking anymore."

Sometimes, the conversation veered towards the ominous. "Did you hear what Rajaee's wife said?" I lifted my head from my mother's lap. Here was a name I recognized: The prime minister's. But I quickly put my head down and closed my eyes.

"*Na, chi?*"

"She said if they take one unveiled woman from every intersection of the city and shoot her dead, then all the women would start veiling."

My eyes were now wide opened. My mom's chin stared back at me.

"Well, did you hear about that woman from the neighborhood? The one who went to the bank on the corner?"

"*Na?*"

"She's gorgeous, perfectly made up, with long blond hair, wearing a dress, and high heels. She walks up the steps of the bank, takes a tiny handkerchief out of her bag, and ties it under her chin. She goes in, does her thing, then comes out. She doesn't even bother to wait! Right on the steps of the bank, right in front of the guards, she takes off her scarf, shakes her hair several times then leaves."

"*Na baba?* Good for her! *Bilakh* to them all!" said my aunt, then she made a fist but straightened out her thumb. By then, I had already learned that the gesture for "good job!" in one of my countries meant "up your butt" in the other, but still, it was jarring.

"Mommy!" I tugged at my mom's shirt. "Mommy! Why'd the lady wear a handkerchief on her head?" My mother didn't even look down.

"Banks are government buildings. So you have to cover your hair when you go into a government building now. Either go to sleep or go do your homework."

But I couldn't do either. These stories quickly blended into the one I had begun to tell myself every night: A beautiful woman steps out of the bank, shakes her mane, and then is shot dead as a lesson to all the other beautiful women. This woman looked like my mom.

"Mommy!" I would plead every time she was getting ready to leave the house. "Mommy!! Please, why can't you just cover your hair? You'll get killed!"

"Stop it!" my mother would say, "Nothing is going to happen!"

One Friday around this time my family traversed the length of the city from the south, where we lived, to the north to spend the day at my parents' oldest and best friends, the Moradi family. The Moradis were religious: The women, including their daughter Mina, who was just a year older than me, veiled, and at various times of the day the family members would take turns excusing themselves to go and pray. My family, on the other hand, was decidedly not religious. No one veiled and no one prayed. God's existence, in fact, was just not an issue we discussed one way or another. But the families were so close that they strangely mirrored each other: The two dads, the two moms, the two oldest daughters, the two middle sons, and, later down the road, the two youngest daughters. That we didn't have a god in common was never an issue. There was so much more between us.

On that particular Friday afternoon, Mina and I, having exhausted all the gossip and games we could think of, walked into the living room to see our four parents staring at the television screen. A voice commanded a young woman, sitting alone behind a desk in a veil tied crookedly against her jaw to "please enumerate your crimes against Khomeini and the Islamic Republic."

"Who is she?" I asked everyone loudly. No one answered. "WHO. IS. SHE?" I repeated impatiently, and stared at my mom. I knew if I stared enough, she'd eventually have to acknowledge me. She was sitting next to Mrs. Moradi, who had tears in her eyes and kept shaking her head. Finally, Mr. Moradi responded, "Some young innocent girl. Someone's daughter. Someone like you and my Mina." Then he gently touched his leg and sighed, "Oh God."

That summer, as I sat on the carpet and read or took a break from chasing my brother around my grandmother's courtyard, I would catch images on TV of men and women staring vacantly into the camera and confessing their supposed crimes against the state. The revolution had begun to swallow its own, and a bloody struggle had broken out between the various groups that just two years prior had taken to the streets together. I knew all of this because, by then, almost every night, my family would quietly sit together and listen to the sound of automatic rifles rip through the darkness. My parents had explained to me that the government forces were breaking up *khooneh teamys,* safe houses where the counter-revolutionaries were hiding.

"Are there *khooneh teamys* on grandma's street?" I had asked once when the gunfire seemed to be coming from outside her door.

"No," my dad had assured me. "It's nowhere nearby." But I did not believe him. I was convinced it was only a matter of time before we too would be taken out and left for dead in the dark.

What was riveting the adults—and quickly us girls, too—that Friday afternoon was this someone's daughter refusing to confess: "What right do you have to sit in judgment of me?!" she screamed at the interrogator who was off camera. "No, I have nothing to confess," she would say, shaking her head repeatedly.

Then, cut. She disappeared from the screen and a picture of green meadows dotted by bright-red poppies took her place accompanied by the jarring sound of a revolutionary march. There was silence in the living room, but before I could say, "Daddy what happened?" this someone's daughter showed up on the TV again, this time visibly beaten and almost unrecognizable.

"Please enumerate your crimes against Khomeini and the Islamic Republic," the voice commanded her again. "Yes," she meekly answered, her head bowed down, "I have committed crimes against the Islamic Republic." No one uttered a word. Then Mrs. Moradi sighed, hit her thigh with her hand and said, "Help us, God," and rocked her body from side to side.

On the long ride home, I tried to imagine what had happened to that girl in the time that we had blankly stared at the picture of a green meadow, but my imagination only reached as far as my life would go: school, home, family, friends, books, and playgrounds. That face, bruised and battered, defiant and angry, hovered over my thoughts and filled me with the feeling that something was about to go wrong, that somehow this revolution was going to swallow us too, that someone I knew, someone I loved, was going to die in a prison, or in a safe house, or on some random street corner.

Was it then that the night-shivers began? One night, I woke up to the sound of rattling. The sound was so loud it woke up my grandmother, sleeping on the other side of the room. "What's wrong?" she asked in the dark. I tried to open my mouth but it was locked, and *clank clank clank,* was the only answer I could give. My grandmother slid off the bed, turned on the lights, and sat down on the floor by my mattress. I was holding my arms to my body and tightening my neck muscles to make the shivering stop but all it did was make the sound of my teeth banging against each other louder. I closed my eyes, and felt my grandmother get up and leave the room.

"Sedi!" she shouted from the bottom of the stairs, trying to wake up my mother. She hadn't even reached the second "Se" before my mom came flying down the slippery stone stairs and into our room.

"What is it, my love?" she said and touched my forehead. "Does she have a fever?" she asked my dad, who was by now kneeling by my side. He moved forward and kissed my forehead as he has done all my life to measure my temperature. "No, she's not warm."

"Get me all the blankets!" my mom ordered.

I felt the weight of a thousand comforters press against my body and loosen my neck. One second of calm. Then shivers again. I couldn't hear anything from underneath the layers I was buried under, just the muffled sound of my parents' and grandmother's voices. I knew I was going to die, now, in the darkness, under all these blankets, so I poked my head out. My father was sitting cross-legged next to me with one arm draped around the mountain I was trapped under. "You'll be OK," he said.

My mother and grandmother returned from the kitchen holding a glass full of steaming white liquid. "Sit up, my love," my mom said. I shook my head. "Drink it. It's hot milk, and honey," but I knew there was a raw egg broken into it.

I sat up, managing to still make a face to express my dislike of her concoction, and with my father's arm wrapped around my shaking shoulders I slowly sipped the hot liquid. The heat traveled down my gullet and into my chest where it branched out to my limbs, fingers, and toes. The shivers stopped. Color returned to my parents' face. My grandmother plopped herself down on the bed in relief.

"What happened?" my mother asked no one in particular. "I'm too hot now," I whined as I frantically kicked off comforters. "Ok, she's better," my mother said quietly, all emotion drained out of her voice.

But I wasn't better. My parents and brother began to sleep downstairs with my grandmother and me—five people cramped into a small room. Sometimes we all slept through the night. Sometimes the shivers came early, before anyone had had a chance to fall asleep. Sometimes they came late, only hours before dawn. Sometimes the warm milk, raw egg, and honey did the trick. Sometimes nothing helped.

Everyone recommended "the best pediatrician in Tehran" to my parents, none of whom could tell what was going on. "There's nothing wrong with her," they would say to my mother, who refused to believe them. She would travel across this sprawling city, doctor to doctor, with me in tow, convinced that the answer would lie behind a yet-to-be-opened door.

After several weeks, we landed at the state-run Tehran's Children's Hospital. The hospital, unlike many of the doctor's offices my mother had taken me to, was not in a nice part of town, nor did it look very new. As I sat on a plastic chair next to my mother in the hallway waiting for test results, I focused on the dirty yellow paint peeling off the walls. Bored, I swung my dangling legs as hard and as high as they would go.

"Stop!" my mom sternly said, with a quick hand on my arm. "The doctor's here," and she shot up straight and walked towards her.

I knew they were going to whisper to each other, for here in this place, in this city, in this country, important information always came in whispers. I tilted my head towards them, sat real still and tried to hear.

"It's not physical," the doctor said. "Something is frightening her. You have to find out what it is."

My mom turned to me and gave me a strained reassuring smile. I smiled back and swung my left leg as hard and as high as it would go.

I DON'T KNOW when it was that the nightly sound of gunfire stopped. Nor do I know when my mother went out into the streets veiled—as all women eventually were forced to do. I don't know Rahaa's reaction when Qotbzadeh was executed by a firing squad at the end of the summer, nor do I remember mine. By then, my family had moved out of my grandmother's house into a recently built apartment complex, and I was about to start a new school with new friends. I will never know who that girl, that someone's daughter, was. She was first a memory, and then a metaphor for the myriad ways in which a revolution gives rise to a defiant generation and then attempts to crush that spirit of revolt. What I do know is that one day, one ordinary day, I stopped shivering in the night and life went on. □

THE ANDREW W. MELLON WORKSHOP

The Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities was established to address themes of mutual and global intellectual responsibility. Generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the program consists of a fellowship and subsequent workshop, organized by each semester's Andrew W. Mellon Fellow and focused on three designated themes considered in a transatlantic context: migration and integration; race in comparative perspective; and exile and return. Key outcomes of the workshops are published in the *Berlin Journal* and online.

This issue includes two essays from the second Andrew W. Mellon Workshop, "Phonographic Knowledge and the African Past: Sonic Afterlives of Slavery and Colonialism," which took place from June 3–7, 2019, chaired by Ronald Radano, a professor of African cultural studies and music at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Following Radano's summary, Gavin Steingo, of Princeton University, assesses the legacy of French sound theorist Pierre Schaeffer; and Ciraj Rassol, of the University of the Western Cape, in Cape Town, South Africa, considers Rudolph Pöch and the Phonogramme Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. These two scholars were part of a group of 16 participants who explored various dimensions of phonographic archives of transnational black music as they relate to the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Key questions about power and remembrance were addressed in both the workshop and in meetings with experts from the Ethnological Museum and the Sound Archive of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Collaboration with Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt resulted in a public discussion with composer Philip Miller, conductor Thuthuka Sibisi, and previous Mellon Fellow Rosalind Morris.

The third Andrew W. Mellon workshop was convened from January 6–10, 2020, by Roberto Suro, a professor of journalism and public policy at the University of Southern California. "Mixed Motive Migrations and the Implications for Public Policy" challenged longstanding assumptions about immigration politics and policies. Its participants sought to find new formulations of humanitarian obligations and national interests that connect in meaningful ways. They discussed factors impacting migration—globalization, climate change, failed states, military conflict—while also looking at recent developments in destination countries, including nativist national movements, demographic change, and shifting labor market dynamics. The topics of trauma and the rights of children were also addressed, as were existing norms in international law, which were challenged for their selection and control of humanitarian admissions, multinational policies, and the role of third and transit countries. As part of the workshop, the group of 28 experts met with peers from the Museum for Islamic Art and Museum of Near Eastern Art and visited the Barenboim Said Academy; several took part in a public panel-discussion, including T. Alexander Aleinikoff, a professor at The New School for Social Research and the director of the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility; Thomas Bagger, the director-general for foreign affairs at the office of the German president; Naika Foroutan, the director of the *Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung;* Julia Preston, a contributing writer for The Marshall Project and a visiting research scholar and lecturer at Princeton University's Program in Latin American Studies. The panel was moderated by Anna Sauerbrey, the deputy editor-in-chief of the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*.

The fourth Andrew W. Mellon Workshop, "Past and Future Genders: Latin America and Beyond," will be chaired by Moira Fradinger, an associate professor of comparative literature at Yale University. Originally planned for June 2020, it was postponed to June 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic. As a prelude, we include here the article "Gender Dissidence in the Twenty-First Century." □

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– **Berit Ebert** Head of Programs & Development, American Academy in Berlin

Sonic Afterlives of Slavery and Colonialism

by Ronald Radano

THE IMAGE OF Nhlanhla Mahlangu playing the role of an African porter in William Kentridge's *The Head and the Load* is a strange rendering, one suggestive of colonialism's profound incongruities. The photograph fascinates precisely because it brings together so many subtle, intensely doubled oppositions: a reified body and fetishized thing; an imperial "modern" technology and colonized "primitive" labor; an inanimate speaking machine capable of reproducing living sound, lofted above the head of a silent and thingly black subject.

In Kentridge's stage work, which received its premier in December 2018, at New York's Park Avenue Armory, the phonograph as playback device was presented as part of the assembly of creature comforts that accompanied British and European occupying forces during World War I. Yet Africa also knew of this technology years before, when colonizing expeditions first undertook what would become a grand extraction of resources from the continent. Phonographs were put to service to preserve for scientific study what were thought to be the natural sounds of "the Negro," the putative resonances of a primal, human origin that had somehow miraculously endured into the modern present. What Mahlangu, as colonial porter, may have ultimately carried as his load was a sonic representation of himself, a present-day contrivance of an ancient, primal essence. Through a kind of modernist magic, the phonograph had disaggregated a ghostly fragment of audible history from the body of its living maker. Racialized, black sound had transformed into an object, the ownership and mastery of its "voice" carrying forward as a chief point of contest within public culture and commercial markets. In its multiple African and diasporic iterations, the black sound-object would arise as the dominant musical resonance of the global modern era.

The Academy's second Mellon Workshop took as its subject the creation of the black sound-object and the many layers of complexity that accompanied its place in the making of modern, musical knowledge. It asked two key questions: How and why did a putatively inferior, negative form of racialized music become, by way of the doubling effect of reproduction technologies, a superior, hyper-positive expression across Africa, Europe, and the United States? How, moreover, might a music that carries the burden of white Europe's and America's racial fantasies—for

Nhlanhla Mahlangu in a scene from *The Head and the Load,* by William Kentridge, at the Park Avenue Armory Drill Hall, New York City, December 3, 2018 (dress rehearsal). Photo: Stephanie Berger

example, in the enduring belief that black music is imbued with a racially authentic essence—become the voice no longer of an imagined past but of a progressive future?

In order to tackle these problems, we assembled a group of interdisciplinary specialists from Africa, Europe, and the United States whose expertise encompassed many arenas of thought that black music has inhabited: from early sound-recording to colonial African history; from the legal study of ownership to black critical theory and musical composition. The five-day project began with visits to Berlin's two main archives of traditional music: the phonogram archive of the Ethnological Museum, in Dahlem, and the Lautarchiv of Humboldt University, the two institutions joining this fall as part of the new Humboldt Forum.

By the early twentieth century, Berlin had already been recognized internationally as the home of the foremost collections of world music, the Africa archive being its centerpiece. Through the generosity of the institutions' executive staff—notably, at the phonogram archive, Lars-Christian Koch and Frauke Fitzner, and, at Humboldt, Viktoria Tkaczyk and her graduate assistant, Céline Couson—we gained first-hand knowledge about the early history of the collections, while inspecting the contents of the archives themselves, which included hearing a disk recording of an African POW captured in Europe by German armed forces. (France sent colonized African soldiers to Europe, where, upon capture, they were placed into prisoner camps. The Lautarchiv amassed a large collection of POW recordings; many of the recordings were of Francophone Africans.) Tkaczyk's presentation, which described the development of German sound-studies after World War I, raised the question of Germany's repression of its colonial past in the name of a new, seemingly deracinated science. Her paper, paired with Ciraj Rassool's commentary (featured ahead), proposes the imperial archive of Africa to be a material documentation of occupation and subjugation.

The black sound-object as modernist contrivance became an orienting theme for several presentations. Linda Cimardi demonstrated how a UNESCO-funded effort to document the seemingly pure, "tribal" sound of the Bariba people of Dahomey (present-day Benin) was the work of a skilled sound technologist's fanciful editing of field recordings. Nomi Dave revealed how documentary procedures have imparted a kind of sonic masculinity on the West African archive, issuing claims of ownership to the men who performed and recorded it. Gavin Steingo (also featured ahead) argued that the hidden background for Europe's invention of the sound object traced to the composer Pierre Schaeffer's radio and recording experiences in Francophone Africa. And Rosalind Morris introduced the re-mediating effects of recorded sound among informal (*zama zama*) mine workers of South Africa, whose creative listening to familiar music uncannily re-familiarized the most precarious and dangerous of foreign places.

With the presentations of Eric Lott and Anthony Reed, the workshop turned to the other side of the Atlantic, observing how another scene of subjection, the legacy of US slavery, provided the structural basis for a parallel iteration of black music's double character. What could be simultaneously abject and miraculous becomes, in Lott's interpretation, an indicator of aesthetic power, its presence taking form in the wah-wah-pedal-induced "wacka-wacka" sound of the electric guitar, heard across the global expanse of 1970s soul and funk. Reed, in a presentation focusing on the sound artist Matana Roberts, helped us to consider how the interplay of mediated expression in the creation of black arts impacts the production of meaning and value, suggesting a kind of deep-seated intermediation in contemporary black composition. Such gestures to innovation, to futurity, returned us once again to the African continent and to the practice of ululation among Zulu women. In a series of recordings, Louise Meintjes demonstrated how this vocal technique phonographically escaped its generative location, circulating in global pop as the ghostly presence of the "sound of Africa."

Sounds from the past in the making of the present bring hope of a positive future. This is the line of thought that oriented the public forum at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, featuring the work of composer Philip Miller and sound artist/conductor Thuthuka Sibisi. During the forum, the two South African artists, who collaborated with William Kentridge in the production of *The Head and the Load,* presented *Scratching against the Kaboom and Blare of Trumpets,* a sound-art media extraction of the larger stage work, whose compositional materials included the voices of African POWs that Miller first heard on recordings housed at the Lautarchiv. The lively discussion that ensued developed on the workshop's theme of colonialism and slavery's paradoxes of burden and upliftment, of abjection turning toward the miraculous.

A closing session with Miller and Sibisi, led by Tejumola Olaniyan, secured the future as our collective project: How the burdensome load of history embodied in the black sound-object might set the ground for collective awakening, a way of speaking to the force of racism's audible legacy in the making of a new, conscious tomorrow. In this, the workshop would be musically and temporally resonant with so many pasts present and new beginnings.

I would like to thank Michael Steinberg, Berit Ebert, Johana Gallup, and John-Thomas Eltringham for their tremendous support. This second Mellon workshop is dedicated to the memory of Tejumola Olaniyan, Wole Soyinka Professor of the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison, whose provocative commentary over the course of the five-day event proved energizing and uplifting. For us, as he would say at moments of celebration, "more grease for the elbows!" □

Sound Objects

by Gavin Steingo

FRENCH POLYMATH PIERRE Schaeffer (1910–1995) is remembered today equally as a composer and as a theorist of sound. As a composer, he is canonical in at least two ways: Schaeffer is typically covered in surveys of twentieth-century "classical" music, and he is also beloved by contemporary electronic musicians, who routinely bequeath to the composer grandiose monikers such as "the godfather of sampling." His legacy as a theorist, meanwhile, is largely attributable to several major figures writing in his wake—most notably French composer and scholar Michel Chion, a central figure in film studies who was a student of Schaeffer's—and to his conception of sound as an object (*objet sonore*), enabled by the revolution of phonographic recording. It is this conception that underlies his resurgence in the new field of Sound Studies.

Ronald Radano's description of last year's Mellon workshop at the American Academy made repeated reference to "sound objects," asking where a racially sensitive version of the concept might fit in studies of recorded music of Africa and the African diaspora. Participants in the workshop were asked to examine "critical questions about the power and significance of the black sound-object," to inquire into "what might distinguish the black sound-object from other recorded forms," and to explore what kinds of "lives" these sound objects have lived. It is interesting in this light to think of Schaeffer, who, in the 1950s, worked as a radio engineer in Dakar, the peninsular capital of Senegal, and co-founded the ethnographic record label Ocora, in 1957. For there is reason to suspect that his notion of the "sound object" owes as much to colonial radiophonic practice and field recording in Africa as it does to his compositional style and philosophical orientation. I'll explore this critical position in what follows.

Despite the careful historical work on a serious biographical reassessment of Schaeffer, many composers and sound theorists remain unaware of Schaeffer's African sojourns. Very few African music specialists who have worked extensively with Ocora recordings (over seven hundred) realize that Schaeffer had anything to do with the label. But staging an encounter between Euro-American sound theory and postcolonial historiography provides a pathway for rethinking the notion of the "sound object," for it offers a meaningful way to understand phonographic knowledge and the afterlives of slavery and colonialism.

IN HIS ROLES as composer and theorist, Schaeffer examined what happens to sound when it becomes progressively removed from the original context of its recording. As a composer, he continually experimented with this kind of sound reproduction; his compositions were in many ways experiments in reproducing sound. Much of his music was meant to be an alternative to what he viewed as the overly abstract compositional practice of the time, particularly the serial techniques of composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. He called his style of composition *musique concrète* (the French word *concrète* does not mean "concrete" as much as something that is "palpable" or "non-theoretical"). In some of his most famous pieces, Schaeffer recorded simple objects such as bells and then played the sounds backwards, slowed them down, or chopped off points of attack and decay. He also made special phonographic disks with a locked groove to produce repetitive cycles.

Writing about his earliest compositional experiments, Schaeffer uses the term *objet sonore* to refer to the thing being recorded. But over the course of the 1950s, the "object" in both his compositions and in his writings drifts increasingly further away from the thing being recorded. Instead, "object" begins to designate sound itself—split from its source through technology—as it is manipulated to become music.

One can hear this contrast in two compositions: *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948) and *Étude aux objets* (1959). The first, based on a recording of a train, is manipulated in several ways, but the train is clearly audible. The second piece, *Étude aux objets,* by contrast, is not obviously a recording of any particular physical object. Rather, Schaeffer recorded bells and other objects and then processed those sounds, but what the listener hears is a panoply of shimmering, clanging sonorities, not physical bells. One would be hard pressed to identify, simply by listening, what the sounds are actually of. (Here, I am leaning on the work of American music theorist Brian Kane, of Yale University's department of music.)

As a theorist, Schaeffer was committed to understanding precisely this kind of transformation from real-world sound source to abstracted sonority. To do so, he developed a rich lexicon of terms, which have become standard in the relatively new discipline of Sound Studies. The term "sound object" has been widely deployed; it invites us to give greater priority to unanchored, deracinated sound than to sound-producing objects. It asks us to define sound as pure form, as "sound as such."

Why did the meaning of "sound object" shift from sound-producing object to sound-as-object in Schaeffer's oeuvre? What happened between *Étude aux chemins de fer* and *Étude aux objets*? At the same time this transition was happening in his musical compositions, it was also happening in his writing about music. There's a long break between Schaeffer's two main books—*À la recherche d'une musique concrète* (1952), written as a series of diary entries with some elliptical

sketches of the "sound object," and *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966), a full-blown theoretical treatise in which he conceptually elaborates on all his musical ideas, including the "sound object."

In trying to understand the motivation for Schaeffer's insistence that we study "sound as such," cut off from its source (rather than how sound relates to the things that produce it), most scholars have taken Schaeffer at his word. For example, Brian Kane notes that in the *Traité,* Schaeffer attributes his conceptualization of the sound object to his reading of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, whose writing on the method of phenomenology stressed the importance of attending closely to one's experience and consciousness, by bracketing things as they might exist outside of ourselves. But the attempt to interpret Schaeffer's ideas this way misses something important: the sections on Husserl in Schaeffer's 1966 treatise make up a total of eight pages in a book comprised of over five hundred. The treatise covers a massive range of topics, from anthropology to physics to art history. The decision to focus on eight pages of Husserl can only be attributed to a prioritization of philosophical discourse over other matters.

But if the major shift in the 1950s was not due simply to Schaeffer's engagement with the work of Husserl, what did happen during those years? The answer—or at least one answer—is that Schaeffer had spent several of those years in Africa. "It is crucial to note that the Schaeffer who returned to France in 1957 after three or four years absence [...] when he dedicated himself to working in Africa," writes Michel Chion, "no longer thought, said, or wrote the same things he had four years earlier." Oddly, this is about as much of a mention of Africa as one will find in the vast literature on Schaeffer's music or theories.

While Schaeffer focuses on densely theoretical matters in his *Traité,* in interviews and other less formal publications, he sometimes mentions the relationship between the various aspects of his work—and, not least, Africa. In a 1987 interview, he recalled, "I was involved with the radio in Africa in the same period as I was doing *concrète*—I was doing both at the same time. I was deeply afraid that these vulnerable musical cultures—lacking notation, recording, cataloguing, and with the approximative nature of their instruments—would be lost."

If preservation was indeed important to Schaeffer, then the logic of the "sound object" comes more clearly into focus. The valorization of sound severed from its source as articulated in Schaeffer's theory means that recorded sound provides a completely adequate record of a musical culture. And let us be frank: it was not simply the case, in Schaeffer's time, that "vulnerable" African musical cultures "*would be* lost"—as if using the passive voice somehow absolves the perpetrators of their theft. Instead, one cannot help but infer that Schaeffer was aware, somewhere in his mind, that French colonialism was directly responsible for the destruction of African music and culture.

Irrespective of his intentions, Schaeffer's theory of the sound object had this specific echo of the broader political context in which he was living: African music could survive even if colonial France wrought destruction on its occupied territories. Accepting Schaeffer's theory of the sound object, it's possible to say that today African music has not only survived but even thrived in the hands of electro-acoustic composers and DJs in the intervening decades—even as contemporary France continues its aggressive assault on African life through monetary dependency and other forms of neocolonial violence.

Schaeffer's valorization of the sound object over and above its source suggests a more general dehumanization, of turning sounding people into audible things whose sonic afterlives suggest the continuation of sound as "dead" life. The forms of theory and compositional practice bequeathed to us by Schaeffer created a kind of phonographic reification, where the sound object fulfills the "thingly" status of the incorporeal African "body" in the colonial imagination.

From the perspective of the present, it is possible to see and hear Schaeffer's work as part of a much larger double-movement: the acceleration and dizzying circulation of black music, on the one hand, and the incarceration and enclosure of black bodies, on the other. If black lives matter, then we are in need, additionally, of a revolution in how we think about sound in general, and in particular when it comes to the African continent and its diasporas. □

The Sounds of Violence

by Ciraj Rassool

AMONG THE SIGNIFICANT collections housed at the Phonogramme Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna are the audio-visual field recordings of the medical scientist and anthropologist Rudolf Pöch, which he produced in German South West Africa and Bechuanaland in 1908. Created expressly for the Vienna archive by employing sound reproduction technologies developed by Thomas Edison and the archive itself, the recordings featured the songs and speech of the Khoesan people (known at the time as "Bushmen"), who lived in the Kalahari and spoke the Naro language. Initially produced on wax moulds, they were subsequently transferred to nickel-plated copper negatives or "galvanos," the process overseen by Pöch himself, who from 1909 to 1913 served as a research assistant at the Vienna Archive, working in close cooperation with Erich M. von Hornbostel of the Phonogramme Archive in Berlin. (Pöch was appointed to the first professorship of anthropology and ethnology at the University of Vienna, in 1913.)

Some of Pöch's recordings were accompanied by photographs and films that documented hand clapping and dance movements. As a form, the recordings and their supplements reflected a moment of new institutional commitment to research across disciplines, bringing closer unity between field collecting and scientific laboratory study. As the world's first sound archive dedicated to audio-visual research, the Vienna archive embodied this new, cross-disciplinary perspective.

Looking back at its accomplishments over the past 120 years, the Phonogramme Archive portrays itself as a protector of heritage. On its website, it notes that it is "the world's oldest sound archive." Founded in 1899, it stands as one of the major institutions that "safeguards a considerable part of the worldwide heritage of orally transmitted cultures [that existed before] the impact of Western civilization." It understands its main work as having generated, collected, and catalogued audio-visual research recordings from many disciplines and regions, its curators attending to a longterm commitment to preservation and making the collections accessible to the public.

This work began in earnest in the 1960s, when the metal negatives served as the basis for creating new recordings employing epoxide resin. (The original wax recordings were lost in World War II.) These, in turn, provided the basis for re-recording and the eventual transfer of Pöch's recorded sound to audio CD and CD-ROM.

In 2003, on the occasion of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA), held in Pretoria, South Africa, Pöch's recordings were published by the Academy of Sciences as part of a multimedia historical edition. At the conference, Pöch was celebrated as one of the pioneers in field-based sound recording. The intention behind digitization and publication was to make the early holdings of the archive "easily accessible, especially in the countries and regions of their origin." The Kalahari recordings were also included in the "historical" collections (1899–1950) produced as part of the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register, underlining their "universal significance." As historical documents, the phonographic collections carry value in their sheer historicity: they represent "the oldest sound documents" (*Tondokumente*) of Khoesan languages, of the "animated testimonies of the Bushmen," and of their polyphonic singing. Pöch's recordings became the basis of an institutional and disciplinary edifice of preservationism driven by an ideology of stewardship advocating permanent availability through care, digitization, and scholarship, all brought together under the aegis of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. These curatorial commitments to stewardship and preservation were an outgrowth of the archive's celebration of Pöch's seminal work.

This meeting of stewardship and heroic celebration took on its most developed form in the digital assembly of Pöch's "fragmented and almost forgotten estate" through a multi-institutional Viennese cultural project supported by the Austrian Research Fund. For many who gathered around this project, Pöch was a "groundbreaking" and "pioneering" media scholar, noted for his phonographic, photographic, and cinematographic field work in the Kalahari, together with expeditions to German-occupied New Guinea, between 1901 and 1906. (He also worked with Robert Lach in the recording of Russian, Turk-Tatar, Armenian, and Jewish POWS during World War I.) Pöch was described as "one of the last to lead multi-disciplinary, scientific expeditions on a large scale," who undertook documentation through "a wide range of media that were state-of-the-art at the time." The project aimed to be a means of integrating and reconnecting different media formats that, having been "scattered across different Austrian institutions," were now "fragmented and almost forgotten." An internet-based, digital database would facilitate new opportunities for "critical review" by scholars. It was hoped that the outcome would be a virtual museum that would meet the requirements of archiving and public dissemination. This was first and foremost a project of Austrian heritage consolidation, albeit framed through the logics of world heritage, with Pöch positioned centrally as a pioneer of heritage stewardship. The project's leaders expressed their opposition to any form of material restitution, expressing their desire instead to "repatriate [. . .] material by way of digital restitution" to the people who had been studied.

This preservationist paradigm came unstuck when it became increasingly apparent that Pöch's Kalahari sound-collecting had taken place as part of a climate of heightened violence and colonial disruption, reaching an initial apex in the first decade of the twentieth century. Pöch's phonographic legacy of Kalahari recordings needed to be understood as part of the wider multi-disciplinary collecting projects generated at the time, with significant components of their accumulation having been carried out unlawfully and largely concealed from authorities. Setting the context for collecting efforts was the genocide in southern Namibia (located today in the borderlands of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa) occurring in the violent and disruptive transfrontier colonial landscape of the Kalahari.

These conditions contributed to speakers of N|uu and other Khoesan people being forced across the Gariep River into the northern Cape, itself the locus of a violent, disruptive history, of widespread displacement and loss of access to land, the outcome of which was that many were turned into seasonal farm laborers. Pöch's research and collecting benefitted from colonial administrative

networks of officials, missionaries, and police, with local officials nonetheless declaring human remains collecting or assembly of rock engravings by him as illegal. This served to protect the interests of the new South African settler nation that was emerging, whose scientists and museums laid prior claim to research access to the remains of "Bushmen" who were deemed to be living fossils. Notwithstanding these proscriptions, Pöch ensured that he and his assistants were able to assemble human remains and rock engravings, with many corpses boiled down to bone immediately after disinterment. Pöch also had a special interest in the collection of soft tissue, and this was achieved by the disinterment of two corpses at Gamopedi, in the Kuruman district, which were broken at the knees and transported in a barrel of salt.

Pöch's effort to preserve and collect grew directly out of the recognition of loss. His ethnological and physical anthropological research sought to archive that which had not yet disappeared or become extinct. His initiatives generated a large, incongruent aggregation of objects, a kind of assemblage of personhood and things that included ethnographic materials and cultural documentation as well as skeletons, skulls, corpses, and body casts, which were then separated and distributed across a number of institutions in Vienna. Pöch had covered 6000 kilometers across southern Africa, and apart from the 67 phonogramme recordings, 1000 meters of film, and 2000 photographs he produced, the expedition generated a sizeable supplementary archive of 1500 letters, together with 30 parcels of 100 boxes containing 1000 ethnographic objects, 4 historic art images and inscriptions carved into rock, 80 skeletons, 150 skulls, and 2 corpses.

Pöch's Kalahari recordings need to be reassessed alongside this wider collection of ethnographic objects, stolen rock-engravings, and illegally disinterred corpses, skeletons, and skulls that pose doubt about the pioneering and preservationist framework for understanding his legacy. This doubt was caused initially through research on the ways in which Pöch and his assistants had acquired human remains and rock engravings, which had been the subject of a legal inquiry that took place immediately after his departure from southern Africa. As a result of negotiations between the governments of South Africa and Austria during 2012, the remains of Klaas and Trooi Pienaar, which had entered the collection of the Academy of Science as corpses, were returned to the Northern Cape in South Africa, where they were reburied at Kuruman. Subsequent research in South Africa and Vienna has resulted in the matching of records of the illegal disinterment of the remains of three more named persons from the Kuruman area with skeletons held by the Department of Physical Anthropology at the University of Vienna. In addition, two of the stolen and illegally exported rocks, now with faded art images, have been identified in the collection of the newly rebranded World Museum.

Over the past half-decade, a new official willingness has emerged in European countries such as France and Germany to inquire into the ethics of their museum collections acquired under colonial conditions. They are forced to face up to a new era of restitution of human remains and the possibility of the restitution of colonial artefacts, artworks, and documentation, especially those assembled within a "context of injustice." At present, these advances have been contained within disciplines and disciplinary museums, and deliberations have not paid sufficient attention to how the collections were often acquired together, as part of the same expeditions, often by the same scholars, and to how these were distributed between collecting institutions and disciplines, and how these disciplines were later reorganized. It might seem more reasonable to consider colonial collections of skulls and skeletons as being marked by violence.

The time has arrived to also reconsider the frameworks of preservation and stewardship that have attached themselves to all aspects of the ethnographic enterprise, including the recording of music and sound. Colonialism's violence took the form of plunder, rapaciousness, and defilement of the human body of physical anthropology, but it was also an unacknowledged and repressed characteristic of ethnological praxis and imagination. The phonographic records of the African past in Austrian and German museums are not sounds of lost or disappearing cultures. They represent instead the historical sounds of violence. □

Gender Dissidence in the Twenty-First Century

by Berit Ebert and Moira Fradinger

ALL AROUND THE world since the dawn of the twenty-first century, new ideas about the gendered aspects of human life have prompted unprecedented advances in national and international law, transnational social movements, interest groups, and grassroots feminist initiatives. Creative alliances against patriarchal power, racism, and speciesism appear across generations and regions. So much so, that magazines such as *Time* and *National Geographic* as well as other international outlets have called our times one of "gender revolution."

To better understand the zeitgeist, it is helpful to briefly trace key moments in the genealogy of these new visions of gender and sexuality across the past century. Discourses of gender, sexuality, mental health, and the human as such that had begun in the early twentieth century have recently accelerated or seen shifts in direction, resulting in further blurring of the lines between the traditionally "normal" and "abnormal." What was once considered a mental disease—and for that reason at times criminalized—is now gradually being depathologized and decriminalized in some parts of the world, paving the way for future social change.

Activism, International Organizations, and Depathologization

ARGUABLY, AMONG THE most important factors to consider when looking at the shifts in gender conversations are the development of international organizations, transnational movements, nonconforming interest groups, and depathologization initiatives, which sped up at the turn of the twentieth century and into our own. Activism for the protection of sexual diversity was making headlines—from the landmark achievements for women's voting rights in the 1920s to movements for reproductive freedoms in the 1960s to recent movements toward decriminalization and depathologization of same-sex desire. In the new sciences, research discovered the "sex hormones" (estrogen and testosterone), strengthening the connection between ideas about gender and biology. Nineteenth-century disciplines such as psychiatry and psychology advanced in the confinement, disciplining, and "correction" of gender and sexual deviance. The medical sciences were granted more authority in determining the meaning of normal human experience.

These forms of control generated intense social protests and launched new political movements. As early as 1897, for example, German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, in Berlin, advocating for the decriminalization of gay relations in Europe. The committee had the support of no less than Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, August Bebel, and Leo Tolstoy. Hirschfeld also joined the League for the Protection of Mothers and supported the legalization of abortion in 1905, the same year Sigmund Freud presented his first theories of sexuality in Vienna. In 1919, at the time of the unprecedented movements against traditional notions of sexuality during the Weimar Republic, Hirschfeld founded Berlin's *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. In 1928, he gathered international sexologists in the World League for Sexual Reform. While today Facebook offers as many as 71 gender options and Instagram users can type their gender identity as they see fit, in the 1920s Hirschfeld had already proposed 64 possible forms of identity, well beyond the modern Western fixation on a stable binary grid of "feminine or masculine."

The 1920s opened roads not only to the decriminalization of sexual behaviors considered deviant but also to the reimagination of the "normal." This was also the time for a resurgence of political movements toward the unification of Europe, among others Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa-Union in 1922. Its members included Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Ortega y Gasset, Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Franz Werfel, Richard Strauss, and Stefan Zweig.

After WWI, internationalism and international law set common standards of dignity for human life, with the establishment of the International Labor Organization (ILO), in 1919. Its nine instituting states increasingly understood the need for cooperation to obtain similar working conditions in varying countries, including granting special protection for women, mothers, and child workers. After WWII, human rights as a paradigm accelerated the development of international law.

In 1945, 51 states founded the United Nations (UN). In 1948, they adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Twenty-one countries founded the Organization of American States (OAS), and 61 states established the World Health Organization (WHO). The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, and the following year it adopted the European Convention on Human Rights, which is based on the category of the individual, emphasizing the worth of the human person. The Convention's Article 14 prohibits discrimination on a vast range of grounds: "sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

While the foundations of human rights stem from the postwar era, this paradigm gained global momentum in the 1970s, during the latter part of the Cold War, when most of the collective narratives of the political Left collapsed and the Third World project was weakening. The decade of the 1970s also linked gender and human rights: the UN declared 1975 the International Women's Year and it held the first World Women's Conference, in Mexico. That same year, the legendary women's strike in Iceland saw 90 percent of its female population take to the streets to protest for the indispensable nature of their work, and demand fair employment practices. In 1979, the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), outlining a way to gender equality by highlighting gender discrimination in education, politics, employment, healthcare, economic and social life, and in both urban and rural contexts. Still, while women's movements were questioning notions of womanhood and maternity, the CEDAW took them for granted. Women's international mobilizations as well as the development of reproductive technologies, the first of which was the contraceptive pill, started to change forever the control that women

could now have over their bodies, and ideas about biological motherhood.

The 1960s and '70s also saw the emergence of the "anti-psychiatry" movement. In 1973, same-sex desire was eliminated for the first time from the Diagnostics and Statistics Manual (DSM) categories of mental illness. (The DSM is used today around the world alongside the WHO International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems [ICD], to monitor, collect statistics, and provide uniform tools for diagnostics.) The connection between mental illness and social discipline was placed on the progressive global agenda. Asylums for the mentally ill were considered forms of incarceration. In 1978, ten activist organizations in England founded the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), which now brings together over 1,600 organizations from 158 countries. In 1979, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) was created. Though at the outset it followed the 1980 DSM (4) classification of trans* people as having a "gender identity disorder," the association has lent its voice to the decades-old plea of social movements demanding that gender be completely depathologized. In 1972, Sweden was the first country to legalize trans* identities, albeit only with medical approval and bodily modification requirements, which included sterilization until 2013.

The 1990s saw a global explosion of activism and legal advancement that laid the groundwork for today's acceleration: the WHO eliminated same-sex desire from its list of mental illnesses; the UN issued its declaration for the eradication of domestic violence; the OAS wrote the Convention of Belém do Pará, which upholds the rights of women to lead a life free of gendered violence. (The Council of Europe adopted a similar Convention in 2011.) The EU advocated for a gender perspective in public policy encompassing all areas of life, insisting on this principle at the 1995 Beijing Conference of Women. The latter agreed upon the Declaration and Platform for Action for the twenty-first century, aiming at full gender equality. The end of the 1990s also saw larger trans* activist associations across the globe.

Twenty-first-century gender activism has brought transnational women's strikes, massive social movements against gendered violence, and unprecedented activist pressure on the international medical community to remove the remaining pathologizing categories for gender experience from the DSM (5) and the ICD (11). While as of May 2020 many countries have legalized gay marriage, there is still a lot of work to do. In 2011, the United Nations passed a resolution urging all member states to protect the rights of sexually diverse people. The DSM (5) and the WHO, in 2013 and 2019 respectively, removed "gender-identity disorder" from the list of mental illnesses. Until 2012, in every country, gender nonconforming people had to go through either bodily modifications or psychiatric evaluations to be allowed to live according to their subjective experience of gender. This has been rapidly changing since 2012.

What follows is an account of the latest legal reforms concerning nonconforming gender-identity recognition. It focuses exclusively on the Americas and the European Union (EU), examined separately insofar as EU states belong to a supranational system.

The Americas

IN MAY 2012, Argentina increased the stakes for the global conversation about gender identity when it became the first country in the world to legalize the depathologization of gender on the grounds of human rights. The Argentine Gender Identity Law requires only a simple bureaucratic mechanism, eliminating all pathologizing vocabulary, to allow an individual to define their gender identity. In 2009, neighboring Uruguay already had its own Law for the Right to Gender Identity and Change of Name and Sex in the National Registry. Uruguay eliminated the requirement for medical intervention as "proof" of a person's decision, though it still stipulated that a person must live according to their new gender for the two years prior to the official change in records.

The 2012 depathologization in Argentina immediately made a worldwide media splash: Justus Eisfeld, the co-director of Global Action for Trans Equality in New York, told the Associated Press, "It is a real game changer and completely unique in the world. It is light years ahead [. . .] of even the most advanced countries." In 2018, Uruguay modified its law following the Argentine model, including a one-percent labor quota for trans* people in public administration and, like Sweden in 2013, established compensation for trans* people who suffered institutional violence.

The Argentine law influenced the Global North and had a profound effect in Latin America. In December 2012, the European Parliament referred to the Argentine model (see next section). Then, in 2015, Colombia permitted a change of name in the national registry. Although similar in effect, this law came about in a different context from its Uruguayan and Argentine counterparts: the Colombian decree responded to Sentence T-99/2015, in a judgement from March 10, about the enlistment of trans* people in the military and established gender identity, sex, and sexual orientation as "cultural categories in permanent transformation [. . .] according to individual experience." As of 2019, Colombia started discussing a national gender identity law based on human rights. In 2015, Mexico City eliminated all previous pathologizing requisites from its 2008 laws. In 2015 and 2016, Ecuador and Bolivia followed suit. In 2019, Chile issued its Gender Identity Law citing depathologization as a first principle.

Some of the legal models above are hybrids and lie somewhere in between total depathologization and changes in classificatory (and diagnostic) vocabulary. For example, the multinational state of Bolivia bases its gender identity law on the principle of equality, establishes the difference between "sex" (biological and binary) and "gender" (cultural and multiple), and allows for changes when the person is single, widowed, or divorced. The 2015 Ecuadorian Organic Law of Management of Identity and Civil Data, which retains the binary options "man/woman," requires two years of living in a different gender than the one assigned at birth. As of 2019, a number of lawyers have been arguing that the law should follow the paradigm of human rights. In Canada as of 2012, several provinces began liberalizing their gender laws, but some provinces kept requirements until a 2017 federal law based on the Canadian Human Rights Act allowed for legal gender recognition. Oregon in 2017 became the first state in the USA to allow a non-binary option in drivers' licenses without medical certificates; as of 2019, 14 states allow for a "third gender" option.

Argentina's leap forward was to shift from pathology to human rights. In no case, the law established, will it be necessary to have judicial authorization, or surgical, hormonal, or psychological treatment to register a change of identity. All that the law demands is the individual's autonomy: its bet is on the individual's desire. Even more radical are the law's provisions for free access to bodily modification within the public healthcare system, along with the recognition of children's gender identity rights. Argentina had the world's first case of a six-year-old child, known as "Lulú," petitioning for a gender and name change.

The law's definition of gender identity leaves ample room for a variety of gendered experiences. The Argentine lawyers and activists who had been working on the legal shift since 2007 decided to follow the so-called "Yogyakarta Principles," agreed upon in Indonesia in 2007 by international experts, activists, and former officials of the UN. These principles do not specify how many genders exist or what they are. They apply the frame of human rights to sexual orientation and gender identity. Gender identity is not defined as biological; it can be different from the sex assigned at birth and depends on a subjective experience. In the Argentine law, these notions were translated with the term "self-perceived identity."

The refusal to define gender categories in the text of Argentina's law makes room for a vast range of gender experiences. In 2018, for instance, citizens were allowed to select "non-binary" in their national identity documents. In 2019, Argentina registered a new identification category: "travesti femininity." Travesti is a specific type of Latin American trans-feminine identification that does not coincide with any English categorization of "cross dresser." Argentina's activists are seeking a change in the law so that the option "non-binary" becomes available for everyone.

In a sense, Argentina's leap forward cannot but be a sign of the times, as technology is available to reshape our bodies more than ever before, and neoliberal politics valorize individual self-determination as they withdraw state intervention from certain areas of life (while increasing surveillance in others). But it is useful to note some of the latest national particularities that made such change possible, especially because these advances occur in the paradoxical context of other stagnations, including the absence of a complete legalization of abortion (as of May 2020. Malta is a similar case, with likely the most advanced gender identity law but still criminalizing abortion).

Argentina's gender identity law belongs not only to the political momentum generated by previous laws and a coalition of political activist groups, but also to the importance that the human rights discourse holds in its civil society. In Argentina (as in Brazil, Paraguay, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico), human rights were incorporated in the reformed National Constitution (1994). The gender identity law came on the heels of the 2010 legal protection for egalitarian marriage (the decision not to call it "same sex" was to avoid limitations in the definition of marriage). Most importantly, it also came on the heels of the radical 2010 Mental Health Law and the 2012 Right to Euthanasia Law, which was ratified the same day as the Gender Identity Law. Both laws grant more autonomy to patients, who can now refuse treatment.

The adoption of the international human rights discourse after the fall of Argentina's dictatorship (1976–83) is also crucial for understanding the grounds on which the new laws were advocated and accepted. Even during the dictatorship, human rights became a defining type of activism in all Southern Cone countries. Perhaps the most renowned embodiment of human rights in the region are the women who defied the military during dictatorship by disobeying the curfews and going out to the streets under life-threatening conditions to reclaim the "appearance with life" (*aparición con vida*) of their "disappeared" relatives. Two Argentine groups—Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, both founded in 1977—were of importance. The Grandmothers in particular dedicated their lives to looking for the children who were born to mothers in captivity, taken away from them and distributed among families that the military favored. Human rights activism led to Argentina becoming the first country in the world whose citizens sent its own military to trials for crimes against humanity, in 1985.

During the transition to democracy, the Grandmothers advocated for the right to truth and identity of children born in captivity. When the first children were found, it became known that they had been registered with false names and wrong dates of birth. The Grandmothers authored slogans including "Do you know who you are?" and "You have the right to an identity," which set the tone for a social discourse about identity as a human right. This right gave impetus to the trans*communities to advocate for the registration of a gender identity that does not correspond to the one registered at birth.

European Union

UNLIKE THE POLITICALLY diverse example of Latin America, 27 European states form a supranational entity that can issue binding law for all member states. The result is a multi-level system of intertwined legal, political, and social structures added to the national dimension.

The European Union originated from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), founded in 1951. Its guiding principles—the guarantee of permanent peace as well as economic and social progress—follow the ideas of the international organizations established in the 1940s. The two world wars encouraged the creation of an economic and political community that extended beyond competing nationalisms. The founding member states, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands, thus built a supranational structure that is neither an international organization nor a state. It develops instead binding decisions in specific policy areas. It has its own jurisdiction and its legislation has direct effect on its citizens, as Giandomenico Majone wrote in a March 1998 European *Law Journal* article, protecting "the rights and interests (as defined by the Treaties) of the citizens of the EC/EU, even against the majoritarian decisions of a Member State, or the unanimous position of all Member States."

In 1957, however, the adoption of the equal pay provision—the forerunner of the Union's gender equality policy—in the European Economic Community Treaty (EECT) was driven neither by the protection of the individual nor women's rights or social justice but rather by the logic of fair competition between member states of a common market.

But little would have come from the equal-pay provision were it not for women's activism. French Sociologist Évelyne Sullerot was among the first to develop a European perspective on women's work and to structure activities through existing institutions, as did Belgian trade unionist Émilienne Brunfaut, who helped to shape organized labor in Europe. In Italy there were widespread women's movements opposing the integration of women into male-dominated social systems, such as the Demau group or the Movimento di Liberazione della Donna. Carla Lonzi published the feminist pamphlet *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Let's Spit on Hegel). Many of these figures attempted to translate these feminist ideas into the contexts of trade unions. In the 1960s, the famous Herstal factory strike brought together women workers who called for the application of the equal pay provision in Article 119 TEEC. The far-reaching public attention paid to this case, along with the determination of the advocate Éliane Vogel-Polsky and her arguing of the *Defrenne* cases in the 1970s, are still considered the founding moment of the EU's women's policy. This further led to legislation regarding social security, access to work, affirmative action, parental leave, and, more recently, sexual orientation and trans* rights.

But it was not until 1997 that Article 13 in the Amsterdam Treaty provided the European Union with a legal basis to address "discrimination based on sex, racial, or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation." The first legal trans* case, *P v S and Cornwall County Council,* which reached the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 1995, was also the first case worldwide to prohibit discrimination in employment or vocational education against a trans* person. No EU law had previously addressed the topic. Referring to the member states' common legal traditions and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, the CJEU broadened the paradigm of anti-discrimination—but at the same time disclosed its limits and ambivalence. The dismissal of a trans* individual was declared to be contrary to the EU law, as were national provisions that hindered trans* people from receiving salary components, such as pensions.[1] The CJEU rulings finally led to a new *Equal Treatment Directive 2006/54/EC,* which, for the first time, explicitly recognized the legal concerns of trans* individuals. The directive, however, did not address the national requirements for gender recognition or aspects of violence.

Only recently did a new development set in, advancing the antidiscrimination discourse to include human rights, both on the national as well as on the European level. Although the Treaties of the 1950s made no reference to human rights, the 1986 Single European Act and the 1993 Maastricht Treaty both mention their protection. But it was only at the 2000 Nice Summit that the EU announced its own Charter of Fundamental Rights with a direct reference to trans* people, in Article 21, and made the Charter legally binding with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. Among the Charter's sections are "Dignity" (right to life, integrity of the person, among others), "Freedoms" (respect for private and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the protection of personal data, and the right to marry), "Equality" (non-discrimination and equality between men and women), "Solidarity" (worker's rights, including collective bargaining, access to health care, environmental and consumer protection), "Citizens' Rights," and "Justice."

At the same time, national legislation beyond the EU's labor market provisions differs with regards to gender identity law. In 2014, Andalucía became the first EU region, and Denmark the first EU country, to do away with all medical and psychological requirements. France was the first country in the world to declassify trans* as a mental illness in 2010, while maintaining the obligation for surgery until 2017. Today, Belgium, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, and Portugal allow a change of name and gender in the national registry without any requirements other than an autonomous individual decision. Since 2017, Greek citizens have been under no obligation to undergo surgery or a mental diagnosis, but legal assistance to register a gender identity change is still required. Moreover, people aged between 15 and 16 require a medical assessment; after age 17, if unmarried, a juridical process. Still, eight EU Member States require sterilization, and 18 Member States demand a mental health diagnosis. A comprehensive protection against discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation does not yet exist within the Union's legal framework.

Nevertheless, the European Parliament has been actively working on the promotion of a comprehensive legislation related to LGBTI rights. In December 2015, the Commission issued a *List of Actions to Advance LGBTI Equality,* covering non-discrimination, education, employment, health, free movement, asylum, hate speech/hate crime, EU membership, and foreign policy. As it had done in the 1960s and 1970s when addressing social policies, the Commission also engaged with civil society groups and non-governmental institutions when developing its new human rights approach. These organizations include ILGA and Transgender Europe (TGEU); the latter was founded in 2005 in Vienna and currently has 145 member organizations and 255 individual members in 44 countries across Europe and Central Asia.

The inclusions of human rights in the Union's discourse and the (non-binding) initiatives by the European Parliament and the Commission have yielded no concrete political results. A 2008 proposal for a *Council Directive on Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of Religion or Belief, Disability, Age, or Sexual Orientation* outside the labor market has not reached required unanimity in the Council. Continuous efforts by activists have not yet gained sufficient access to the Union's political process.

The Parliament reiterated the urgency to act upon the *List of Actions* proposed by the Commission in February 2019, stressing the Union's priority of advancing equality and non-discrimination. That same year, the Commission also actively reinforced gender rights as human rights. It also took part in the human rights conference of Baltic Pride, in Vilnius, Lithuania, and the EuroPride, in Vienna. It also organized and supported several LGBTI human rights conferences and workshops for government officials and civil society representatives, both from EU Member States and beyond.

In its final report, issued on May 15, 2020, the Commission, while recognizing a positive trend in public opinion, warned about anti-LGBTI incidents in the Union and stressed its efforts to curb them. In this context, issues such as same-sex marriage must be addressed because of the specific architecture of the EU and the freedom of movement of persons and residence. This is why in its landmark decision *Relu Adrian Coman, Robert Clabourn Hamilton, Asociația Accept v. Inspectoratul General pentru Imigrări, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne,* from June 5, 2018, the CJEU obliged member states to recognize marriages that were legalized in other member states, even if the legalization of same-sex marriage remains the prerogative of each member state. At present, 13 EU Members recognize same-sex marriage: Austria (2019), Belgium (2003), Denmark (2012), Finland (2017), France (2013), Germany (2017), Ireland (2015), Luxemburg (2015), Malta (2017), the Netherlands (2001), Portugal (2010), Spain (2005), and Sweden (2009). While the Netherlands was the first country to legalize same-sex marriage, Austria protected it explicitly in 2019 with the constitutional prohibition of discrimination enshrined in the principle of equality.

This multilayered legal system specifically reveals the interdependency between national and supranational law, social and political developments, civil society activism, and our views on life as such.

By Way Of a Coda

THE RECENT WAVE of liberalization of gender norms is guided by the paradigm of human rights, and it encompasses all minorities. While Magnus Hirschfeld defended gay rights and women's right to obtain an abortion as early as the 1920s, the twentieth century always saw setbacks, if not backlashes, too. As late as in the 1940s, women in other countries were still considered irrational or unruly if they held opinions of their own; some would even be sent to mental asylums. In England, sexual activity between men was illegal until 1967, and "non-conventional sex" between men and women until 1994, while Denmark became the third country in Europe to fully legalize same-sex relations, in 1933.

Minorities, whether in gender identity, sexual diversity, mental health, race, religion, or disability, have a long history of being categorized as abnormal. Social-progressive movements of the 1920s and 1960s, along with the more recent promotion of a human-rights paradigm, have broadened notions of human autonomy. Activism has grown stronger by becoming transnationally connected. Our century is witnessing seismic shifts in what we consider the normal and abnormal.

But we also live in a century of technological surveillance and consumerism, which have also gone against the paradigm of human rights. Individuals lose autonomy in some areas while gaining freedom in others. Moving forward, however, the synergy of technology and human rights can help us avoid losing sight of humanity. This is why our critical vigilance must be permanent. The above developments show that it is up to the strength of our social and political activisms to expand our notion of the human and value all forms of life. □

1 See European Court of Justice: Case 117/01, K.B. v National Health Service Pensions Agency and Secretary of State for Health, available online at https://eur-lex.europa.eu. See also Sarah Margaret Richards v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2006), MB v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2018).

NOTEBOOK

News from the Hans Arnhold Center

When Berlin health authorities mandated a coronavirus lockdown in late March, most staff members could work from home. Residential fellows, however, could not; the Hans Arnhold Center was their home. Although three spring 2020 fellows had to return to the United States for family or professional reasons, seven remained at the Wannsee villa, where they could continue work on their projects, taken care of by a core team of Academy staff. Here, fellow Liliane Weissberg, of the University of Pennsylvania, prepares to celebrate the beginning of Passover on April 8, in a photo taken by senior coordinator of guest services, Mathias Buhrow. Throughout the lockdown, the spring 2020 fellows continued to contribute to the Academy's program, writing essays for the *Berlin Journal* online, joining podcast episodes, and partaking in online lectures and interviews. For the results of their many generous efforts, please visit americanacademy.de.

All photos: Annette Hornischer

ANGELA MERKEL RECEIVES THE HENRY A. KISSINGER PRIZE

On the evening of January 21, 2020, Chancellor Angela Merkel stepped onto a stage in Charlottenburg Palace to accept the Henry A. Kissinger Prize from the American Academy in Berlin. Awarded annually since 2007 to a renowned American or European figure in the field of international diplomacy, this year's prize recognized Merkel for her moral and political leadership in more than three decades of public service and her steadfast support of the transatlantic relationship. Laudations were delivered by Henry Kissinger, former US president George W. Bush (by video message), and former US secretary of state John Kerry. "Chancellor Merkel set the bar for courage, determination, and boldness in the first decades of her country's history in this century," Kerry said. "Holding Europe together at a time of enormous challenge is forever Merkel's mark—a defender of the liberal order, always pointing her compass towards a more peaceful, prosperous, just, and sustainable future, no matter the odds or obstacles."

Kissinger's laudatio struck a personal tone, noting that he met the future chancellor at the very beginning of her political career, when she was appointed Minister for Women and Youth in the first free election in what was then the GDR. Much has changed since then, he noted, and he has been glad to bear witness: "I am grateful for the many occasions she gave me to follow her rise—from researcher at an East German university to the political leader of a democratic state," Kissinger said. "Unobtrusive about the process, but effective as to substance, she worked for economic and social reforms that would make Germany increasingly competitive within Europe and Europe more competitive internationally. And she had to deal simultaneously with crises emerging outside of Germany that had global significance, such as the refugee problem and the European debt crisis. Angela Merkel managed these challenges with what I have called the Merkel Style. Speculations about the personal motivations did not interest her."

Chancellor Merkel's moving acceptance speech, covered by the international media, paid homage to her longtime friendship with Kissinger, and also seized the opportunity to address an issue of deeply shared concern: How the West should deal with China's increasing weight in global affairs: "We have to build on the basis of fairness," she said. "We have to shape multilateralism so that the same rules apply to everyone; this much is clear. But I don't want us to fall into a new bipolarity. I want us to try to include a country like China in what we have built, in terms of results and experience in multilateralism, and to, at the least, treat them equally." She concluded with a nod to her remaining time in office (until 2021) and also what this prize meant to her. "I will always, wherever I am, and for a while longer as German chancellor, continue to advocate for good, intensive, values-based transatlantic relations, and this award energizes me in this work." □

The Kissinger Prize ceremony was made possible by the generous support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, Robert Bosch GmbH, and Cerberus Deutschland Beteiligungsberatung GmbH.


Academy trustee Wolfgang Ischinger and guest Michael Almond


Academy chairman Sandra E. Peterson and trustee Gerhard Casper


Academy trustees Thomas Chatterton Williams and Kati Marton speak with John Kerry


Henry A. Kissinger, Angela Merkel, Gerhard Casper, and John Kerry


Front row (L to R): Angela Merkel, Henry A. Kissinger, trustees Gahl Hodges Burt and Andrew Gundlach

Monika Queisser, Laura D'Andrea Tyson, Michael Schönstein. Photo: Annette Hornischer

THE 2019 RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE WORKSHOP

The second annual Richard C. Holbrooke Workshop, "The Effects of Automation on Employment, Wages, and Inequality in Germany," acknowledged that while automation holds the promise of higher productivity and efficiency, it also threatens to displace a large percentage of the labor market in the coming decades. Convened by fall 2019 Holbrooke fellow Laura D'Andrea Tyson, of the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, the workshop brought together researchers and policymakers from a variety of academic disciplines, labor and business, and the German federal government to discuss how digital technologies are affecting German workers, how workers' organizations are adapting to the changing landscape—and, crucially, what the US might learn from Germany's strategic management of the digital transformation. The two-day workshop was concluded with a public panel discussion with Michael Schönstein, of the German ministry of labor, and Monika Queisser, of the OECD. Essays stemming from this and previous workshops may be found online in the Holbrooke Forum publication series: americanacademy.de/holbrooke-forum/publications. □

BEYOND THE LECTURE PODCAST

Since 2016, the *Beyond the Lecture* podcast has featured interviews with Academy fellows and Distinguished Visitors in over 50 episodes. An illustrious list of scholars, artists, musicians, and journalists has joined the program, including Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz, on the future of the euro; journalist Steven Hill, on the impacts of the gig economy; former *New York Times* executive editor Jill Abramson on fake news; musicians Yo-Yo Ma and Wang Lu, on the unifying influence of music; architect Sir David Chipperfield on social responsibility; Claudia Rankine on white privilege; the *New Yorker's* Elizabeth Kolbert on the dire state of the biosphere; and staff writer Masha Gessen on cynicism, doublethink, and the imaginative powers of democracy—among many other guests.

Over the past year, the *Beyond the Lecture* series has gone a step further, fusing the conversational tone of the interview with narrative-based storytelling to provide further definition and broader scope to topics that transcend the standard interview and provide enough material for an hour-long show. These feature-length podcasts have been created with writer Anne Finger, who wanders through Berlin for a show on disability and the politics of memory; with Harvard literary historian Martin Puchner, who walks listeners through a personal history of the Rotwelsch sociolect; with spring 2020 fellow Dominic Boyer, who, with fellow Rice University anthropologist Cymene Howe, takes listeners on a journey to Iceland to cover the death of an Icelandic glacier; and writer Paul La Farge, who created a special fiction podcast script for multiple voice actors.

You can listen to these and other episodes by visiting the Academy website, or head to Spotify, iTunes, or SoundCloud to download them and subscribe to the RSS feed. □


Kent Nagano at the American Academy in Berlin, February 26, 2020. Photo: William Glucroft

AN EVENING WITH KENT NAGANO

Alexander Steinbeis, the managing director of the *Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin,* first met Kent Nagano 15 years ago, when Nagano was in his last season as music director of this Berlin orchestra. Since then, he has become one of the most esteemed conductors in the world, holding various positions, including music director of the *Orchestre symphonique de Montréal* and general music director of the Hamburg State Opera. Over the years, the two men have continued to work together and to maintain a mutual high regard. This camaraderie formed the backdrop for their conversation on February 26, 2020, when Nagano was at the American Academy as a Marina Kellen French Distinguished Visitor.

In front of a packed audience, Steinbeis asked what it took to become Kent Nagano. "I began an unusual career as a scholar of early music, medieval, and Renaissance music," Nagano said. Studying this early work gave him a firm grasp of the "building blocks of our repertoire." He mastered the concepts of polyphony, harmony, counterpoint, modality, and atonality. Thereafter, in Munich, he gained an appreciation for aesthetic boldness, when he joined the *Bayerische Staatsoper*. "I was terrified," he said, describing his initial intimidation. "I was the first long-haired Japanese American to lead the institution." But his recollection of the music debuted there by once-avant-garde composers Mozart and Strauss galvanized the aspiring conductor. He saw himself as working in a place where "courageous thinking beyond the status quo was taking place."

Later, working with the *Orchestre symphonique de Montréal* brought insights into the art of leadership. Though the orchestra was highly capable and technically flawless, Nagano's creativity was required to elicit more nuanced performances from musicians. He smirked as he remembered an instance when he struggled to get the performers to grasp the subtle *Mol* (minor) tone he was striving for in a piece. No matter what he tried in rehearsal, the result still felt major. He asked who in the orchestra had been to see Monet's work on display at the permanent collection of the city's Museum of Fine Arts. "Who looked carefully at how Monet painted the water lilies?" Everyone raised their hand. "Do you remember where the violet dissolves into black? But there's a lot of movement and agitation taking place? That's *Mol*—would you play like that?"

Another key ingredient to Nagano's growth was working with respected musicians and fellow conductors. His tenure as an assistant conductor to the great American opera conductor Sarah Caldwell, at the Opera Company of Boston, was particularly formative. "Sarah Caldwell was a genius," he said, "but geniuses are not always nice people." Nagano recounted the harrowing demands Caldwell put upon her staff. "The nights were short," he said, with a war veteran's nostalgia. Even on days when rehearsals ended at midnight, he would often be awoken at 3 a.m. to come down to the opera house to "work out a problem." While this experience disabused him of any sense of professional glamor, Nagano credits Caldwell with teaching him that the process of creating music demands "endless energy and complete humility." One afternoon, Caldwell told Nagano to compose, fully orchestrate, and hand-write all of the orchestra parts for an aria—in seven hours. "You never really know what you can do until you've been asked to raise your level of performance," Nagano said. Though he managed to complete the task, he had written the brass section of the score in a different key than the rest of the orchestra. When the brass section came in, the dissonance caused the entire orchestra to burst out into laughter. An unamused Caldwell assumed her assistant conductor could not have made the mistake; the problem must be with the trumpets. "'You idiots, can't you sight-read properly?' she yelled, 'Let's do it again.'" The section was repeated; again the trumpets came in a fourth too low. "I was fired that day," Nagano chuckled. "But at three o'clock the next morning, I got a phone call: 'Kent, we need you at the opera house.'" □

PROFILES IN SCHOLARSHIP

ANDREW W. MELLON FELLOWS IN THE HUMANITIES

Laila Amine (Fall 2020)
Assistant Professor of Global Black Literatures, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Amine's project is a monograph entitled *Return Literature, Affect, and the Black Diaspora,* a comparative study that examines the ubiquitous though overlooked motif of return in black Anglophone literature since 1945. By "return literature," Amine refers to literary works and critical discourses that have been cordoned off: the African diaspora returning to an ancestral homeland, immigrants or their descendants visiting familial homes, and exiles rediscovering their country of origin. In Berlin, she will explore African American writers William G. Smith and Audre Lorde's respective engagement with individuals of African descent in Berlin.

Hakim Abderrezak (Spring 2021)
Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies, University of Minnesota
In *"Burning the Sea": Clandestine Crossings in the Mediterranean Seametery,* Abderrezak examines the global refugee crisis through the lens of ethics, aesthetics, poetics, and politics. With a focus on media, art, and literature, he teases out the deleterious implications of misnomers by analyzing dominant narratives and by integrating a crucial southern perspective in the study of migration and refugeeism. In Berlin, he will explore the productions of local German and Middle Eastern artists proposing alternative narratives of tragic sea crossings.

ANNA-MARIA KELLEN FELLOWS

Lois W. Banner (Fall 2020)
Professor Emerita of History, University of Southern California
Combining biography with history and feminist theory, Banner's project concerns the history of beauty by examining the meanings of feminism, fashion, gender, and ethnicity in the life and times of the international film star Greta Garbo.

Robert F. Reid-Pharr (Spring 2021)
Professor of Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality and African and African American Studies, Harvard University
Reid-Pharr's project, "James Baldwin: The Making of an American Icon," delves into the life and career of the American writer and activist James Baldwin, extensively utilizing the recently opened Baldwin Archives held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as well as materials held at Yale University's Beineke Library. The work tracks the development of Baldwin's celebrity status, asking how a desperately poor, black, "queer" New Yorker could rise to become one of the most prominent intellectuals of his generation.

AXEL SPRINGER FELLOWS

Matthieu Aikins (Fall 2020)
Contributing Writer, The New York Times Magazine
Aikins has reported from Afghanistan and the Middle East since 2008. At the Academy, he will be working on a book about the global refugee crisis, based on his experience traveling with Afghans, to be published by Harper in 2021.

Erik Linstrum (Spring 2021)
Associate Professor of History, University of Virginia
Linstrum is a historian of modern Britain in its imperial, European, and global contexts and will be working on his book manuscript, "Age of Emergency: Living with Violence at the End of Empire," which explores how British society responded—and failed to respond—to the brutality of colonial wars after 1945. In mapping the networks of activists, soldiers, journalists, missionaries, and novelists who exposed the dark side of these conflicts, the book asks why the same mechanisms that eroded secrecy about violence also undermined action to stop it.

BERTHOLD LEIBINGER FELLOW

Nathalie Peutz
Associate Professor of Arab Crossroads Studies, New York University Abu Dhabi
Peutz's new book project, *Gate of Tears: Migration and Impasse in Yemen and the Horn of Africa,* examines the ramifications of the UN's Global Compact on Refugees in an era of gated nations and shrinking humanitarian spaces. Based on ethnographic research in a refugee camp in Djibouti between 2016 and 2020, the project analyzes a complex set of displacements in a geopolitically sensitive region where encamped Yemeni refugees come into direct daily contact with Ethiopian migrants walking toward Yemen—thereby unsettling boundaries between refugees and migrants, Africans and Arabs, and states of captivity and abandonment among those crossing the Red Sea.

DAIMLER FELLOW

Nora M. Alter (Spring 2021)
Professor of Film and Media Arts, Temple University
Alter is completing her book *Harun Farocki: Forms of Intelligence,* which examines the work of the late Berlin-based artist, filmmaker, and writer. Alter will provide a conceptual lens through which to understand Farocki's media production, from his early films of the late 1960s through his television work of the '70s and '80s to his recent contemporary art installations in the new millennium.

DIRK IPPEN FELLOW

Amy Kurzweil (Fall 2020)
Cartoonist
Kurzweil is working on her second graphic memoir, *Artifical: A Love Story,* which explores her father's ambition to "resurrect"—through a marriage of machine learning and the documents saved in a storage unit—the identity of his own father, a Viennese musician who narrowly escaped the Holocaust and died of heart disease fifty years ago.

ELLEN MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS

Susan Bernofsky (Fall 2020)
Associate Professor of Writing, Columbia University
Bernofsky is newly translating Thomas Mann's classic novel *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain, 1924), set in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Davos on the eve of World War I.

Tony Cokes (Spring 2021)
Professor of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University
Cokes is producing a series of essays and quotations that will become the basis for his new video text and sound animations. The works will critically reflect on figurations of the artist, her/his creative activities, spatial contexts, and roles in relation to political, social, and economic power.

GERHARD CASPER FELLOW

Allison Blakely (Spring 2021)
Professor Emeritus of European and Comparative History, Boston University
Blakely's project, "The African Diaspora in Modern Europe: an Interpretive History," is a continuation of a book project treating the presence, status, and social agency of people of Black African descent in selected European societies, the prevalent attitudes toward them expressed by white Europeans, and the impact of the current wave of mainly Asian immigration on all of this.

HOLTZBRINCK FELLOWS

Mosi Secret (Fall 2020)
Writer; Investigative and Literary Journalist
Secret is writing a narrative history called *Teaching Them: The 1960s Experiment to Desegregate the Boarding Schools of the South,* about a little-known group in North Carolina called the Stouffer Foundation, which in the late 1960s and early '70s financed the racial integration of boarding schools. The foundation's effort was an ambitious social experiment that sought to test whether elite white children would become more racially tolerant after being exposed to talented black scholarship students.

Naghmeh Sohrabi (Spring 2021)
Charles (Corky) Goodman Professor of Middle East History; Director for Research, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University
Sohrabi is working on her next book project, *The Intimate Lives of a Revolution: Iran 1979.* Based on several years of ethnographic interviews with former revolutionaries, her book is a reconstruction of the intimate lives that were folded into the vastness of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. In doing so, it illuminates the small-scale experiences that together—and after the fact—came to define "revolutionary experience."

INGA MAREN OTTO FELLOW IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

Anna Webber (Spring 2021)
Composer, Flutist, and Saxophonist
Webber is a flutist, saxophonist, and composer whose interests and work lie in the overlap between avant-garde jazz and new classical music. At the Academy, she will pursue a new project focused on a study of just intonation and tuning theory.

JOHN P. BIRKELUND FELLOWS IN THE HUMANITIES

James N. Green (Fall 2020)
Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Professor of Latin American History, Brown University
Green is engaged in a new book project, "The Crossroads of Sin and the Collision of Cultures: Entertainment, Commerce, and Pleasure in Rio de Janeiro (1860–1930)," which examines the transformations in Brazil's capital that reflected reconfigurations in Brazilian society and urban life at a time of transition from slavery to freedom, mass immigration from abroad, migration from the hinterland, and a revolution in gender norms.

Lawrence Douglas (Spring 2021)
James J. Grosfeld Professor of Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought, Amherst College
Douglas is working on a book entitled *Aggression, Atrocity, and the* "Verbrecherstaat," which offers a historical and conceptual look at how law has sought to gain dominion over the most extreme crimes. It aims to show how these efforts have unmoored the law's traditional anchors to time and place, altered the law's relationship to victims and victim groups, and volatized the basic distinction between war and policing.

MARY ELLEN VON DER HEYDEN FELLOW IN FICTION

Ayana Mathis (Fall 2020)
Writer
Mathis is working on her second novel, *A Violent Woman,* the story of a retired itinerant Blues singer in rural Alabama and her estranged daughter's involvement in a radical political group a thousand miles away, in Philadelphia. The novel explores the complexities and heartbreak of familial love as well as South/North migration, women and rage, and the racial and political climate of 1980s Philadelphia. The political group in which the protagonist becomes involved is inspired by MOVE, a radical separatist group active in Philadelphia from the 1970s to the present day.

NINA MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS IN HISTORY

Alice Goff (Spring 2021)
Assistant Professor of German History and the College, The University of Chicago
Goff is completing a monograph on the upheaval of cultural property in German states during and after the Napoleonic wars. Working at the hinge between intellectual and cultural history, the book follows the stories of royal and religious collections and their custodians to explore how the intimate and profane world of art objects challenged ideal visions of art's transformative powers in the social and political order during an age of liberal revolution.

Nandini B. Pandey (Spring 2021)
Associate Professor of Classics, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Pandey's project explores ancient Roman ways of envisioning and practicing ethnic pluralism, with particular interest in the spaces where consumers collected tokens of their empire's variety. By tracing historical links between imperial exploitation and the commodification of difference, her project seeks to write a new chapter in the history of diversity with relevance to modern social thought.

Fall 2020 Distinguished Visitors and Speakers

AMERICAN ACADEMY LECTURER

David W. Brady
Professor Emeritus of Political Economy, Stanford University; Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution and Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research

DAIMLER LECTURER

William J. Burns
President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

JOHN W. K LUGE DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Susan B. Glasser
Staff Writer, The New Yorker

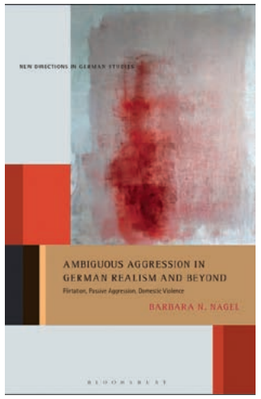
AIRBUS DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Nicholas Schmidle
Writer, The New Yorker

LLOYD CUTLER DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Jeffrey Sutton
Judge, US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit

BOOK REVIEWS



AMBIGUOUS AGGRESSION IN GERMAN REALISM AND BEYOND: FLIRTATION, PASSIVE AGGRESSION, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

BY BARBARA NATALIE NAGEL

Bloomsbury Academic
October 2019, 176 pages.

A review by Liliane Weissberg

The #MeToo movement began by charging a male Hollywood producer with rape and aggressive behavior toward women; by late 2017, it had spread beyond the American film industry. Such male behavior had been in place for a long time, of course, but the outcry now seemed universal. Yet on January 9, 2018, the *New York Times* reported on an open letter from Paris that took many by surprise. Catherine Deneuve, together with around a hundred additional female signers, protested the #MeToo movement by declaring #BalanceTonPorc (call out your pig). While refusing to condone overtly aggressive behavior, these women criticized American puritanical morals, and warned of a witch-hunt against men that would threaten sexual freedom. "The liberty to seduce and importune was essential," Deneuve declared. "Rape is a crime. But insistent or clumsy flirting is not a crime, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression." A macho man's behavior may be improperly aggressive, but a gentleman should be allowed to flirt.

Barbara Natalie Nagel, an assistant professor of German at Princeton University, has published widely on the topic of flirtation, a subject that also occupies the center of her recent, intellectually ambitious book, *Ambiguous Aggression in German Realism and Beyond: Flirtation, Passive Aggression, Domestic Violence.* Nagel is not interested in preserving a gentleman's freedom to touch a woman, wink at her, or engage in suggestive banter. If Deneuve views flirtation as harmless, Nagel argues that it is not at all harmless. For her, it is a powerful and subversive concept—and in that she is not alone. Walter Benjamin too, was interested in flirtation as an exchange of undecided outcome. He described it as an implicit critique of the capitalistic system, since capitalism relies on ownership and on clearly delineated and stable power-relationships.

Benjamin's remarks were but brief. The most prominent early German theorist of flirtation was Georg Simmel, who also insisted on flirtation's subversive nature. Following Plato, he described it as a middle ground between having and not having. In 1909, Simmel devoted a whole essay to the subject, "Psychologie der Koketterie," published in English as "Flirtation." Simmel wrote it not for a scholarly publication, but rather for the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag,* which was billed as a "modern illustrated journal." Moreover, he did not write as an academic sociologist—a field quite new at that time—but as a public intellectual. His main audience was probably neither macho men nor gentlemen, but female readers. The title of the essay is important. While the English translation, "Flirtation," can be viewed as gender neutral, *Koketterie,* like the French word from which is derived, is anything but. A *coquette* is a woman, and one whose reputation may be at stake.

In her own study, Nagel is eager to consider the gender of the person who flirts and the one who receives the attention. Flirtation can be unsettling, she claims, because women can flirt as well as men. Nagel focuses on flirtatious women, although, importantly, her examples are female characters in the works of male authors. Even the "young maiden" in Theodor Storm's novella *The Rider on the White Horse* seems to be able to flirt without much previous instruction. Storm is, of course, a writer of the nineteenth century and a canonical author of German Realism. If the early period of a theoretical reflection on flirting can be located in the turn of the twentieth century, Nagel chooses her examples from an earlier time; theory catches up with fiction.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, bourgeois values were firmly established, and Nagel does not look for examples among poor miners or factory workers, but rather among this new middle class, which would self-confidently settle on "love" as a precondition for marriage, while transforming older court rituals into a casual language of gestures and winks. In literature, prose ruled, and authors were no longer eager to depict ideal beauty and elusive ideals of love; they instead strove for the interesting—or even the ugly. Flirtation and human aggression, whether ambiguous or not, turned into an acceptable literary subject.

Nagel chooses primarily German, but also Austrian and Swiss, examples for her study, and in the work of Storm, Theodor Fontane, Gottfried Keller, and others, she finds poignant cases of flirtation that drive the plot and at times unsettle deeply held moral convictions. She dedicates the first chapter to a discussion of flirtation and dedicates two further chapters to a discussion of passive aggression and domestic violence. Still, her interest in flirtation dominates, and passive aggression and domestic violence, cases that she subsumes to the notion of "ambiguous aggression" as well, take a bit of a back seat.

Aesthetically argued, passive aggression is an issue between *Sein* and *Schein,* "being" and "appearance." A person presents herself in a weaker position while simultaneously using it to manipulate her counterpart. As in the case of flirtation, passive aggression offers women the opportunity to conform to expected behavior on the surface but aim for something else underneath. While flirtation may or may not result in a sexual encounter, the aim of passive aggression may have other goals. (It is also a medical term and may be assigned to a mental disorder.) Nagel discusses the exchange of letters between Fontane and his wife, Emily, but she moves into the twentieth century as well, by offering the reader glimpses from Franz Kafka's epistolary exchange with Felice Bauer. In both cases, it is once again the man who is seeking to keep his upper hand in the relationship, and he uses the letter as an instrument of domestication.

In the case of domestic violence, no partner disguises his or her intentions. If something remains hidden, it is the nature of the relationship itself that the protagonists want to hide from the outside world. Domestic violence may involve two adults, but also more than two, and perhaps even children. Neither passive aggression nor domestic violence necessarily rely on the existence of an erotic relationship. Still, Nagel has chosen examples involving heterosexual couples, and her book turns into an unveiling of sorts, one in which the partners' behavior reveals increasing violence as the ambiguity of what is unseen diminishes.

Nagel does not embed her subtle overall argument in a historical context; she transforms literature into a set of data as her analysis of writers and their letters competes with that of the fictional characters they create. Just a few years before Simmel's publication of "Flirtation," Sigmund Freud had analyzed Wilhelm Jensen's story "Gradiva" to learn about human desire. Nagel takes fictional characters similarly seriously—not by putting them on a couch but by entering them into a study of the psychology of emotions. She cites theory and writes about literature, but she is not a literary theorist. In the end, she is a deft cultural critic: she wonders what these texts can mean for us today—not for German readers of the past but for American readers now—and if a reflection upon them could contribute to contemporary discussion of the broader meanings of #MeToo. In this way, Nagel has provided us with her own open letter. □

MY RED HEAVEN

BY LANCE OLSEN

Dzanc Books
January 2020, 200 pages

A review by Veronika Fuechtner

From the Netflix series *Babylon Berlin* to the exhibits celebrating one hundred years of the Bauhaus, Weimar Republic Berlin is enjoying a moment. As we witness the fragility of democracy around the globe, the economic uncertainty caused by the Corona crisis, and violent expressions of racism and anti-Semitism, we look to Germany between the two world wars for answers. How did people cope with dramatic historical and economic upheaval? Where did the slippery slope of fascism begin? And what are the afterlives of this incredibly rich political, cultural, and scientific "laboratory of modernity"—as Weimar Germany is often referred to by its scholars and aficionados?

When writing about Weimar Berlin, it's all too easy to slip into the well-established shorthand of "glitter and doom," the narrative of an unbound hedonism that contributed to its eventual brutal suppression. Lance Olsen's latest novel, *My Red Heaven,* masterfully steers clear of those clichés. Instead, it patiently explores a multitude of everyday lives on a single day: June 10, 1927. It pays homage to the idea of Weimar as a laboratory; the ingredients are a mix of genres, media, citations, avant-garde movements, and characters—historical, literary, and entirely fictional. Reminiscent of Wim Wenders's iconic 1987 Berlin film *Wings of Desire,* readers follow the words, images, and sounds on the pages of *My Red Heaven* as they lead from one story and location to the next. As the murdered politician Rosa Luxemburg is thrown into the Landwehrkanal, her consciousness settles on a butterfly on Pfaueninsel (peacock island), which is immediately crushed by the boot of retired sommelier Anton, who "doesn't register the dainty crunch one hundred and seventy-two centimeters below his current thoughts." Anton and his love, Julius, buy a bratwurst from Carl Fischer, who turns out to slaughter people in the privacy of his home bathtub—"the concept being economy"—evoking the violence of WWI that continued to haunt streets and homes after soldiers returned. Fischer's last thought is inadvertently picked up by Albert Einstein, as he recalls anti-Semitic attacks on his "Jew science" and relives a traumatic childhood tonsillectomy: "I sat there stifling a cyclone, thinking about my school, my teachers, how now they were inside me, too—." The reader then returns to the bratwurst hut and spies on young Erika and Klaus making out in the woods, where they are surprised by philosophers Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, who are carrying on their famous affair by

peacefully collecting mushrooms in the Düppeler forest. In exile in Lisbon, Arendt will recall how that day ended at the Arnhold Villa on Lake Wannsee, where "people pour out to smoke cigars" on the veranda "and watch the sunsets last forever."

And so it continues, from Marlene Dietrich's laughter to Alban Berg's music, from Werner Heisenberg's and Niels Bohr's exploits in physics to the sexual exploits of two pickpockets, from Käthe Kollwitz losing track of time in her studio to her maid keeping track of to-do lists. In these many "daymares" and moments of arresting beauty, we catch glimpses of the characters' childhoods, but the narrative also momentarily speeds up like a film reel to reveal their deaths. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, the readers turn their faces toward the past, while being violently propelled into the future, the wreckage of history piling before their helpless eyes.

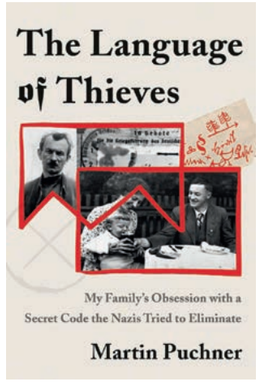
My Red Heaven is profoundly indebted to modernist works like Alfred Döblin's cinematic novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and modernist techniques such as multi-perspectivity, but it is still decidedly contemporary; Olsen's very own "laboratory of modernity" percolates with the addition of Michael Kroetch's photos of empty ruins in contemporary Berlin. The results are hauntingly poetic, as the images and words simultanously explore the void that the silencing of the work of Billy Wilder, Magnus Hirschfeld, or Otto Dix left behind. *My Red Heaven* also gives space to voices silenced by their peers even before National Socialism, for example that of Bertolt Brecht's co-author Elisabeth Hauptmann, or that of the artist Hannah Höch. Peers such as Hans Richter belittled Höch's work and praised only the sandwiches she made and served. "The manifesto hannah höch never wrote" is one of the most touching and powerful passages of Olsen's novel: "The grammar of art, I wanted to prove, is doubt." This intervention points to the fact that the Weimar avant-garde might not have been progressive in all the ways we still might like to see it today. *My Red Heaven* is thus also a novel about our contemporary desire for Weimar Berlin and its fallacies. It would be completely beside the point to look for historical accuracy, even though many details relating to biographies, locations, or fashions are meticulously researched and lovingly animated. While Hannah Arendt never accompanied Walter Benjamin on his flight across the Pyrenees, she was surely there in spirit "taking in this information" with "an empty face" that the group of refugees had to prepare for deportation back to Germany, just as they believed they had reached safety.

Towards the end of the book, the mystery of its title is revealed. The painter Otto Freundlich steps out of the subway at Kurfürstenstrasse and ponders painting a new abstract work, *My Red Heaven.* It was branded "degenerate art" shortly after its completion a few years later, and Freundlich was murdered on a train to Majdanek. Horizontal swaths of squares, different reds towards the top, blues and whites in the middle, and black squares towards the bottom curve along the canvas—surely an evening sky but maybe also its deconstructed, glossy reflection on city street cobble stones. Weimar surfaces are everywhere in this novel, and the sky reflects the agony of what is below.

Death bookends the narrative: it begins with the dead assembling in their very own avant-garde version of heaven on the rooftops overlooking Berlin. Led by the flying red mane of the dancer Anita Berber, the dead raise "their faces to the first marigold traces threading the sky." It ends with an airplane leaving Berlin behind, leaving in its wake burnt kerosene and the foreboding smoke of total destruction that fascism will bring upon the city and that reaches into the future to blacken the last pages of the book the reader is now holding. This Weimar laboratory goes up in flames.

Here, *My Red Heaven* executes the stated literary program of one of its characters, journalist Kurt Severing, based on the famous critic and publisher Siegfried Jacobsohn and borrowed from Jason Lutes's ingenious 1996 graphic novel *Berlin: City of Stones.* Severing writes in *My Red Heaven* that the most any novel can accomplish, despite its best intentions, "is to confirm that everything is made to be broken." From his ideal novel he demands that they "know they can't do anything and yet try to do it anyway." *My Red Heaven* leaves the reader with the certainty that in contrast to its last legible, ambiguous, and unfinished lines, "everything will be all-."

But nothing, absolutely nothing is going to be alright, certainly not for the characters of this novel, and probably not for its readers. The experience of reading this novel also confirms that there is something left of Weimar Berlin that still speaks to us immediately—and that also remains unbroken. □



THE LANGUAGE OF THIEVES: MY FAMILY'S OBSESSION WITH A SECRET CODE THE NAZIS TRIED TO ELIMINATE
BY MARTIN PUCHNER

W. W. Norton
October 2020, 288 pages

A review by Paul Reitter

Late in the summer of 1994, I found myself in Berlin's main train station with a long trip in front of me and nothing to read in my bag. I also didn't have much time, so I dashed into a bookstore and scanned the shelves for one of the great literary doorstoppers a person heading to graduate school in German studies should be able to talk about. Instead, the acclaimed essay collection *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne,* by the Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, caught my eye. It proved to be a good choice. I remember standing on a very noisy platform—backpackers, beer, sandals—astonished by the essay "Torture" and the quiet force of its first pages. Some of that force eluded me, however, because I couldn't make sense of a word Améry uses toward the end of the opening paragraph: *Rotwelsch*. I knew that *Welsch* could be combined with other words to form a term meaning "incomprehensible dialect," as in *Kauderwelsch.* And the context here—Amery's phrase is "in the *Rotwelsch* of the Third Reich"—suggested a dig at Nazi-speak. But "Red Welsh"? What in the world was that?

In *The Language of Thieves,* Martin Puchner—a professor of comparative literature at Harvard University and general editor of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*—answers this question with admirable insight and erudition, wielding his knowledge with a light touch. But he does more than offer an account of a dialect (or more precisely, a sociolect); he also relates a fascinating family memoir whose mysteries circle around the Third Reich and the study of language. In the nineteenth century, German scholars such as Karl Lachmann pioneered a "genealogical" method of philology that involved working back to a lost original text, the archetype, by identifying how different textual variations had been passed down in what amounted to manuscript families. In a poignant twist, Puchner, who was born and raised in Bavaria, tracks his own family's elusive history through the philological activities and obsessions of his uncle, great uncle, and grandfather.

Puchner became interested in Rotwelsch when he was still a child. He heard it spoken by men who wandered through his town and seemed out of place in its tidy bourgeois milieu. Not only that, he saw the symbols—carved into trees—these men left for their fellow travelers. As a boy with dyslexia, Puchner felt an easy affinity for a language that is mostly oral and partly pictorial. It also helped that his charismatic uncle Günter was a kind of independent scholar of Rotwelsch. Günter imparted to him a sense of the linguistic elements of the sociolect—Yiddish, Hebrew, German, and more—as well as some knowledge of its history. Puchner was only 12 when Günter died, unexpectedly. And it was only later that he would develop a deep understanding of the embattled status of Rotwelsch—its reputation for being the language of thieves.

It's not clear when Rotwelsch became a functioning sociolect, a sort of secret argot of beggars and vagabonds in territories where German was spoken during the Middle Ages. By Martin Luther's day, it was associated with criminality and Jews. (Améry thus turned the tables on the Third Reich and broadened the significance of the term "Rotwelsch" when he used it to describe the Nazis' language.) Luther, one of the first to use the word, strengthened such associations. When he republished the anonymously authored *Book of Vagrants,* in 1521, he added 225 words of Rotwelsch, while making evident his distaste for it. As a scholar of the Bible, Luther was able to recognize the influence of Hebrew, which, along with his general antipathy toward Jews, led him to conclude, erroneously, "Es ist freilich solche rotwelsche Sprache von den Juden gekommen" (It is clear that the Rotwelsch language comes from the Jews).

This layer of context helps explain the appeal of Rotwelsch for Puchner's uncle Günter. It made embracing Rotwelsch a political act, one very much in keeping with the kind to which Günter seemed drawn. A member of the generation that "came after," Günter partook of a collective desire to break out of social and cultural patterns in postwar Germany thought to be continuous with the country's fascist past—authoritarianism, the marginalization of difference, and so on. He and Puchner's father lived for a time in a commune, where they worked together on a journal with a distinctly absurdist aesthetic. When Puchner goes through Günter's papers looking for information about the family and the language of thieves, he finds that Günter made some attempts to translate the New Testament into Rotwelsch. Luther would not have been amused.

As it turns out, moreover, Günter's own father was a Nazi, a fact he did not learn until the 1960s. Puchner himself doesn't find out about it until 1995—in, of all places, Harvard's Widener Library. Then a graduate student spending a lot of time in Widener, he happens upon an article his grandfather wrote about Rotwelsch and Jewish names. It bears the inauspicious date of 1937, and both relies on and bolsters anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jewish linguistic deviance and disguise. A prominent notion in German anti-Semitic culture was that the Jews' otherness comes to light in their use of German and language generally, but that, at the same time, Jews are able to use the language to cover over their otherness. This is why the Nazis' practice of insisting that books written by Jews in German carry the label "Translated from the Hebrew." It isn't hard to see how Rotwelsch might be invoked by someone looking to prop up such ideas.

Having joined the Nazi Party several years before Hitler became chancellor, in 1933, Puchner's grandfather made a career for himself during the Third Reich as a racist philologist. At first, Puchner knows only about the one article. The revelation has left him stricken, though he acknowledges that, for all its drama, it is hardly unique. When Puchner's father comes to Cambridge for a visit, he confronts him about it in an Irish pub, and a conversation begins—only to be cut off abruptly, forever: Puchner's father dies in a boating accident not long after returning to Bavaria. In his quest for more information about the family, Puchner must rely mostly on his research skills. He visits archives in Germany and learns more about his grandfather's career. He also discovers that his great uncle Otto enjoyed a similar livelihood.

Puchner speaks of the weight of the German past and the shame it has caused him to feel, but he isn't a self-lacerating or handwringing writer, at least not in this book. In fact, his tone is so evenhanded that it can be a little hard to imagine him experiencing the emotional unrest he describes. Here Puchner seems to resemble his father, whose life he also looks further into in this book. Underneath the staid exterior of his father's mature years, there were powerful longings for escape—escape, that is, from the thoroughly bourgeois life he created for himself as a respected architect and professor. This situation is, of course, a commonplace of midlife, but Puchner suggests that his father experienced it with an unusual intensity that may run in the family: the ancestor after whom Puchner is named had abandoned his wife and children without warning and hit the road as a traveling musician. "Perhaps he was even inducted into Rotwelsch," Puchner writes.

In reflecting on the deep roots of his family's connection to Rotwelsch, Puchner muses that this tendency to flee also played a role. Rotwelsch abounds with wonderful ways to express the idea of just taking off ("make a rabbit," for example). Fittingly, one of the neat "Rotwelsch lessons" Puchner offers at the end of each chapter carries the heading "How to get away in Rotwelsch." But you don't need to feel tempted to chuck everything to be drawn to the language of thieves; it's really, in many ways, a language of the open road. Given how hard travel has become these days, that should resonate with us all. □

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