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## The Harlem Renaissance, 1919–1935

### American Modernism, Multiple Modernities or Postcolonial Diaspora?

The Harlem Renaissance, the New York-based artistic and literary manifestation of the New Negro movement of the 1920s, belongs without any doubt among the most influential cultural movements in the history of the United States<sup>1</sup>. The Harlem Renaissance, however, was not an autochthonous U.S. American phenomenon, since it was infused with influences that were perceived as deriving from African and African Caribbean origins. Trends and people in Harlem, furthermore, radiated considerable energy that helped to create the French-speaking Négritude movement, which criticized French colonialism after World War II. During the 1920s and 1930s, a small group of black students and scholars from France's colonies and territories assembled in Paris, where they were introduced to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance by Paulette Nardal and her sister Jane. Paulette Nardal and the Haitian Dr. Leo Sajou founded *La Revue du Monde Noir* (1931–32), a literary journal published in English and French, which attempted to be a mouthpiece for the growing movement of African and Caribbean intellectuals in Paris. This Harlem connection was also shared by closely parallel developments in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. It is likely that there were mutual influences as well as connections among these movements, which differed in language, but were in many ways united in purpose<sup>2</sup>.

Centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, the ideas and artistic currents of the Harlem Renaissance drew upon as well as influenced similar intellectual and literary circles in urban centers throughout the United States, especially in the Northeast and the Midwest. Across the cultural spectrum (literature, drama, music, visual art, dance) and also in the realm of social thought (soci-

<sup>1</sup> The term "New Negro" was popularized by Alain Locke in the 1925 anthology *The New Negro*. *Alaine LeRoy Locke* (ed.), *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York 1925).

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, "Murderous Humanitarianism" (1932) was signed by prominent Surrealists including the Martiniquans Pierre Yoyotte and Jean-Michel Monnerot, who developed a relationship especially with *Aimé Césaire*, "Murderous Humanitarianism" by the Surrealist Group of France [1932], in: *Nancy Cunard, Hugh D. Ford, Negro: An Anthology* (New York 1996) 352.

ology, historiography, philosophy), artists and intellectuals found new ways to explore the historical experiences of African Americans and the contemporary experiences of black life in the urban North. Challenging white supremacy and racism, African American artists and intellectuals rejected imitating the styles of Europeans and white Americans and instead emphasized black dignity and creativity. Asserting their freedom to express themselves on their own terms, they explored their identities as black Americans, celebrating the black culture that had emerged out of slavery, as well as blacks' cultural ties to Africa. The Harlem Renaissance had a profound impact not just on African American culture, but also on all the cultures of the African Diaspora<sup>3</sup>.

The Harlem Renaissance reflected social and intellectual transformations in the African American community. Most of the writers and artists associated with 1920s Harlem came from a generation that had lived through the reinvigoration of racism, the emergence of segregation, and other bitter disappointments that followed the collapse of Reconstruction. Sometimes their parents or grandparents had been slaves, but many also had white family members. They had sometimes benefited from their family connections in their efforts to gain a good education. Many artists in Harlem had been part of the Great Migration from the South into the cities of the North and Midwest. Others were people of African descent from very diverse communities in the Caribbean who came to the United States hoping for a better life.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the African American community had established a middle class, especially in the cities. In the nineteenth century, Harlem had been built as an exclusive living quarter for the white upper middle classes, with splendid houses, grand avenues and services such as a polo field and even an opera house. As Italians, Eastern European Jews, and some blacks moved into the neighborhood in the early 1900s, the once fashionable district was abandoned by New York's white middle class. In 1910, when blacks accounted for around 10 percent of Harlem residents, St. Philip's Episcopal Church, one of the oldest and wealthiest black churches, bought the block of homes on 135th Street, with the intention of renting them to parishioners. Such activities attracted more African Americans to the neighborhood during the first Great Migration. The black population increased rapidly after World War I, while white ethnics began moving elsewhere. By 1930, Harlem was around 70 percent black.

Historians disagree as to when the Harlem Renaissance began and ended. It is generally recognized to have spanned from around 1919 until 1935. The pinnacle of this "flowering of Negro literature" is placed between 1924 – the year that Charles S. Johnson, founder of the journal *Opportunity*, hosted a party for black writers in New York's Civic Club that many white publishers attended – and 1929, the year of the stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothea Löbbermann, *Memories of Harlem: Literarische (Re)Konstruktionen eines Mythos der zwanziger Jahre* (Frankfurt a. M. 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Houston 1988) 248. *Molefi K.*

In this essay, I will try to accomplish three things: First, I shall sketch out the problem of modernity within the Harlem Renaissance. Second, I will test the applicability of definitions of modernities by Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. Third, I will probe how far analysis of the Harlem Renaissance and of modernity more generally can profit from the application of post-colonial theory.

## The Harlem Renaissance as a Problem of Modernity

The Harlem Renaissance is a likely candidate for a critical inquiry into the applicability of various conceptualizations of modernity. This movement incorporated aesthetical problems, for example the debate over highbrow versus mass versus folk culture and the impact of Western art on African American art and vice versa. In this sense, the Harlem movement is a problem of modernity, as it is defined in the realm of aesthetic development. At the same time, however, the movement appears to scholars as a problem of modernity in the broader social, cultural, and political senses. How were the aesthetic and the political variations of modernity intertwined within black art and thought during this period? With such matters in mind, Amiri Baraka called the Harlem Renaissance “vicious modernism”, and indeed many observers have claimed it to be part of an aesthetical – as well as intellectual – modernism that reaches from the Occident to the Orient<sup>5</sup>. Others scholars, however, distinguish between American modernism on the one hand and the Harlem Renaissance on the other. This distinction can be useful, but it has the tendency to separate two cultural phenomena that had a lot in common: concerns with alienation, primitivism, and experimental forms<sup>6</sup>. Some observers will posit an almost total separation between predominantly white literary modernism and contemporary black cultural movements. One journal explained this reasoning this way: “Traditionally, black writers have not been considered to be modernist. Invariably, too, they were altogether excluded from the American literary canon.

*Asante, Ama Mazama*, Encyclopedia of Black Studies (Thousand Oaks 2005) 390–391. *Patrick J. Gilpin, Marybeth Gasman*, Charles S. Johnson, Leadership beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow (Albany, N.Y. 2003) x.

<sup>5</sup> *Houston A. Baker Jr.*, Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, in: American Quarterly 39/1 (1987) 84–97, 89. “Harlem is vicious modernism. Bangclash. Vicious the way its made. Can you stand such Beauty? So violent and transforming”. *Amiri Baraka*, The Return of the Native, in: *Arnold Ampersad, Hilary Herbold*, Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry (Oxford, New York 2006) 59.

<sup>6</sup> “On first impression, the categorical distinction between the Harlem Renaissance and American Modernism seems harmless and, for students of American literature, the separation is assumed. Yet when the distinction is more closely examined, questions arise about the ‘intimate yet multifarious relationship’ ... between the Harlem Renaissance and American Modernism in terms of traditional theories and their relation to ethical literary interpretation.” *Adrienne Johnson Gosselin*, Beyond the Harlem Renaissance: The Case for Black Modernist Writers, in: Modern Language Studies 26/4 (1996) 37–45, 37. *Gosselin* quotes *George Hutchinson*, Mediating “Race” and “Nation”: The Cultural Politics of the Messenger, in: African American Review 28/4 (1994) 531–548, 531.

Most scholars of American literature saw the Harlem Renaissance as simply part of a continuing black literary movement that finally achieved literary recognition only after large numbers of African Americans fled Jim Crow, migrated to New York, and made better lives for themselves in Harlem.<sup>7</sup> On an aesthetic level, I argue, it makes a lot of sense to include 1920s–30s Harlem in the canon of American modernism. The sense of alienation that defines the modern pervades a lot of the texts written by black authors between 1919 and 1935. Among the Harlem Renaissance novels and stories that deal with alienation, I would count Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*<sup>8</sup>, Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies*, and Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel*<sup>9</sup>.

Another topic typical for modernism was primitivism. Fascination with primitivism was a major feature of European and American artistic modernities<sup>10</sup>. In their conceptions of painting, Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso were deeply impressed by the art that came to France from the colonial possessions of the European powers, and they integrated ethnographic artifacts and elements of so-called tribal art in their own creations. In literature, likewise, primitivism exerted a towering impact on writing. Authors like D.H. Lawrence or Joseph Conrad were influenced by a conscious aesthetic primitivism even when they were not writing about colonialism or Africa per se<sup>11</sup>. Composers and musicians like Béla Bartók and Igor Stravinsky expressed fascination with musical primitivism in the early decades of the twentieth century<sup>12</sup>. Primitivism was also a major topic of Harlem Renaissance writers and musicians<sup>13</sup>. It could be argued that primitivism as form and content also appealed to a white public that was looking for erotic exoticism. Carl van Vechten in particular was criticized for pandering to the expectations of white readers by deploying the "sexual tourism" in Harlem in his novel *Nigger Heaven*<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> [Anonymous], The New Modernists: African-American Writers of the Harlem Renaissance, in: *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 28 (2000) 27–28, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Delores S. Williams, Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives, in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1/2 (1985) 59–71.

<sup>9</sup> Adrienne Johnson Gosselin, The World Would Do Better to Ask Why is Frimbo Sherlock Holmes? Investigating Liminality in Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies*, in: *African American Review* 32/4 (1998) 607–619.

<sup>10</sup> Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725–1907* (University Park, Pa. 1995). Helen Gardner, Fred S. Kleiner, Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History (Boston, Mass. 2009) 920. James F. Knapp, Primitivism and the Modern, in: *Boundary 2*, 15(1/2) (1986/1987) 365–379.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bell, *Primitivism* (London 1972) 32–55.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago 2004) 235–237. Julie Brown, Bartók and the Grotesque: Studies in Modernity, the Body and Contradiction in Music (Burlington, Vt. 2007) 167.

<sup>13</sup> Sidney H. Bremer, Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers, in: *PMLA* 105/1 (1990) 47–56, 50. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*.

<sup>14</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840–1930* (Hanover, N.H. 2001) 142–155, quotations 142, 179.

Among the writers who experimented with form and content, it is safe to mention Jean Toomer, whose novel *Cane* was published in 1923<sup>15</sup>. Toomer was fascinated by southern pre-industrial forms of labor and by the music that was produced as an accompaniment to work. Like other authors of the 1920s, he was attracted by the constant changes in this music effectuated by improvisation and interpretation. This preserved a world that was on the verge of disappearing amid a relentlessly modernist society characterized by increasing homogenization achieved through mass consumption, standardization, and industrial production. Ironically, critics praised *Cane* as a stylistically and formally progressive novel<sup>16</sup>, representing in these critics' view the epitome of modernism, whereas Toomer himself conceived it as a swan song, because "the folk-spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert"<sup>17</sup>. Toomer was interested in these musical forms because they created sociability through their call-and-response dynamics, which stood in opposition to modern society<sup>18</sup>. Similar trends can be found in Claude McKay's last novel *Banana Bottom*, published in 1933. The book calls for a return to the roots of African American culture and upholds an antimodern project, despite the fact that McKay was an internationally experienced leftist writer who migrated from Jamaica in order to live in the United States<sup>19</sup>. While taking a clearly antimodernist stance, McKay in his novel provides a careful analysis of a modern globalized economy and of Jamaica's role in it. The rejection of Western values and of Christianity in conjunction with a return to the value system of African-Jamaican peasants constituted, according to McKay, the basis for a successful resistance against the encroachments of global capitalism<sup>20</sup>. David Nicholls has referred to *Banana Bottom* as an example of an alternative modernity<sup>21</sup>. As a caveat, however,

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Webb, *Literature and Lynching: Identity in Jean Toomer's "Cane"*, in: *ELH* 67/1 (2000) 205–228. Webb discusses, among other things, the question, whether Toomer was actually "black".

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence R. Rodgers, *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Urbana 1997) 85.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Toomer, *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer* (Washington, D.C. 1980) 123.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Whalan, *Jean Toomer and the Avant-Garde*, in: *George Hutchinson, The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York 2007) 71–81, 73.

<sup>19</sup> "The facts of the novel's production suggest the international scope of McKay's career abroad: he wrote the book in Tangier and published it in New York for a predominantly American audience ... In his 1937 autobiography, McKay describes himself as an 'internationalist', explaining (with some levity) that 'an internationalist was a bad nationalist'; he was also a self-described 'peasant become proletarian', a description which gave his 'internationalist' label a distinctly Marxian inflection." David Nicholls, *The Folk as Alternative Modernity: Claude McKay's Banana Bottom and the Romance of Nature*, in: *Journal of Modern Literature* 23/1 (1999) 79–94, 79. David Nicholls, *Conjuring the Folk: Forms of Modernity in African America* (Ann Arbor, Mich. 2000) 63. Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (New York 1937) 186, 300.

<sup>20</sup> Claude McKay, *Banana Bottom* (New York, London 1933). For a critical analysis, Heather Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Bloomington, Ind. 1999) 74–83.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholls, *The Folk as Alternative Modernity* 83, 94.

it should be emphasized that in the above examples, artistic modernity, nonmodernity and antimodernity cannot be readily distinguished. It seems plausible to assume that the Harlem Renaissance, like other artistic movements, had the inherent tendency to make use of forms and contents of other movements<sup>22</sup>.

Instead of putting the literature of post-World War I Harlem into the box of various modernities, it may be helpful to analyze it as minor literature, or, to describe the matter another way, a literary heterotopia. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argued that “minorities ... often construct a minor literature within a major language. Minor literatures emerge as a source of identity within an immediate political and cultural context”<sup>23</sup>. The Harlem Renaissance was a minor literature as defined by Deleuze and Guattari: a minoritarian literary production flourishing within a majoritarian language<sup>24</sup>. This perspective is important because it undermines the notion of modernity as such, and it stresses the deterritorialized, non-local topos of the Harlem Renaissance and similar movements<sup>25</sup>.

Despite the reference to locality in its denomination, the Harlem Renaissance can also be seen as a heterotopia in Michel Foucault’s sense<sup>26</sup>. The term heterotopia has different meanings, not all of which emerged in the context of the spatial turn in the humanities. As Foucault argued:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and

<sup>22</sup> Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason* 116–117, notes 2, 13; 130, note 57. *Raphael Comprone*, *Poetry, Desire, and Fantasy in the Harlem Renaissance* (Lanham, Md. 2006) 52. *Samuel A. Floyd Jr.*, *Toward a Theory of Diaspora Aesthetics*, in: *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* (1998) 425–467.

<sup>23</sup> *James Martin Harding*, Adorno and “A Writing of the Ruins”: *Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture* (Albany, N.Y. 1997) 101.

<sup>24</sup> *Guido A. Podesta*, *An Ethnographic Reproach to the Theory of the Avant-Garde: Modernity and Modernism in Latin America and the Harlem Renaissance*, in: *MLN* 106/2 (1991) 395–422, 395. “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization.” *Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari*, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis, Minn. 1986) 16.

<sup>25</sup> Without delving too deeply into the discourses of literary criticism, the notion of a minor literature destroys “concepts of identity and identification”, rejects “representations of developing autonomy and authenticity”, and therefore results in a “profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification” such as appear in some versions of modernity. *Amie Elizabeth Parry*, *Interventions into Modernist Cultures: Poetry from Beyond the Empty Screen* (Durham, N.C. 2007) 5. Regarding “minor literature” and Claude McKay see *Michael North*, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York 1994) 103–104.

<sup>26</sup> Although Dorothea Löbbermann never explicitly uses the concept of heterotopia, I owe a lot of what I have to say about the Harlem Renaissance to her discussion of “lieux de mémoire”. *Löbbermann*, *Memories of Harlem* 75–90.

speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy<sup>27</sup>.

Heterotopia, in Foucault's view, may denote "sites that are constituted as incongruous, or paradoxical, through socially transgressive practices" or "sites that are ambivalent and uncertain because of the multiplicity of social meanings that are attached to them, often where the meaning of a site has changed or is openly contested". It may also mean sites that have "some aura of mystery, danger or transgression" or sites that are "defined by their absolute perfection, surrounded by spaces that are not so clearly defined as such". There are two other possible meanings that could also be applied to the Harlem Renaissance: "Sites that are marginalized within the dominant social spatialization" and incongruous "forms of writing and text that challenge and make impossible discursive statements"<sup>28</sup>.

When one considers the Harlem Renaissance from Foucault's perspective, it appears on the same level as other "heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed"<sup>29</sup>. Foucault's concept of the heterotopia is readily adaptable to Harlem's cultural movement, because he insists on the multi-functionality of heterotopias and on their ability to unite contradictions in one place: "The same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another. . . . The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."<sup>30</sup>

Foucault also considers the *heterochrony* of heterotopias: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."<sup>31</sup> This seems an important observation: Alleged antimodernism or premodernism among Harlem's writers and artists can thus be explained by the different timelines coexisting in one space, the temporal rift which threatens to tear a place asunder. A final remark: Not everyone has access to a heterotopia in the same way. As Foucault explains, "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, in: *Diacritics* 16/1 (1986) 22–27, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London, New York 1997) 41. For a discussion of the Foucauldian term see *ibid.* 41–43.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *Of Other Spaces* 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures.”<sup>32</sup>

This certainly appertains to Harlem in the 1920s–30s. White patrons could frequent the bars and speakeasies and occasionally participate in a rent party, but the access of whites was limited to areas which were used for purposes of the consumption of the Harlem Renaissance as a display of the eroticized exotic. African American music drew whites uptown to Harlem clubs and ballrooms. The Cotton Club, Small’s Paradise, the Roseland Ballroom, and other hot spots of Harlem became fashionable for slumming. “On any night”, James and Lois Horton recount, “one might find millionaires and politicians rubbing shoulders with visiting European royalty and enjoying the music of Duke Ellington or dancing the Black Bottom and the Charleston in the Cotton Club.”<sup>33</sup> Ironically, the popularity of black performances with whites could lead to restrictions on African American access, even in Harlem and on Chicago’s South Side. Except on selected evenings and in after-hour jam sessions, extravagant clubs such as the Cotton Club on the corner of 142nd Street and Lenox Avenue or Connie’s Inn on the corner of 131st Street and 7th Avenue admitted African Americans only as musicians and members of staff<sup>34</sup>.

Even the composer of the “St. Louis Blues”, W.C. Handy, was not admitted to a celebration of his music in the Cotton Club in 1926. As white comedian Jimmy Durante explained, “The chances of a war are less if there’s no mixing”<sup>35</sup>. There were a few exceptions – the black-owned Small’s Paradise and the black-managed Savoy Ballroom had an interracial clientele. The Savoy, one of the earliest and largest dance halls, featured two bandstands where large, integrated ensembles played for up to 4,000 patrons, who “danced nightly under the colored spotlights and the watchful eyes of tuxedo-clad bouncers to the music of bands led by such famous musicians as Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Louis Armstrong, Chick Webb, Count Basie and Cab Calloway”<sup>36</sup>.

## A Critique of Modernity? Multiple Modernities according to Eisenstadt

Leaving the field of aesthetics, we could employ the concepts of “oppositional modernity” or “counter-culture of modernity” in a critique of modernity overall<sup>37</sup>. Paul Gilroy criticized Marxist, economical, or philosophical narratives of

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> James O. Horton, Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America* (New Brunswick, N.J. 2001) 90.

<sup>34</sup> Connie’s Inn was founded in 1923 by Connie Immerman, a recent German immigrant and bootlegger, which may explain the establishment’s racial policies.

<sup>35</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York 1989) 209.

<sup>36</sup> Lois E. Horton, *The Harlem Renaissance*, in: James Oliver Horton, Lois E. Horton (eds.), *A History of the African American People* (New York 1995) 126–127.

<sup>37</sup> “Counterculture of modernity” is the title of the first chapter of Gilroy’s book, *The Black*



modernity as depicting a self-contained European process that rested on principles of rationality, equality, universalism and wage labor. Slavery – according to Gilroy – was necessary and fundamental for the emergence of modernity. Racial terror was the heart of modernity<sup>38</sup>. In contrast to some post-modern approaches that repudiate modernity altogether because of its alleged genocidal tendencies, Gilroy does not reject modernity completely, but he does insist that slavery represents the hidden shadow of modernity. The juxtaposition, however, of dichotomies such as freedom and coercion or reason and terror does not lead to a reformulation of modernity. “Racial slavery was integral to western civilisation.” Gilroy argues. “The master/mistress/slave relationship [is] foundational to both black critiques and affirmations of modernity ... the literary and philosophical modernisms of the Black Atlantic have their origins in a well-developed sense of the complicity of racialised reason and white supremacist terror.”<sup>39</sup>

In a way Paul Gilroy and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt share certain convictions. According to Eisenstadt:

The notion of “multiple modernities” denotes a certain view of the contemporary world – indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era – that goes against the views long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the view of the “classical” theories of modernization and of the convergence of industrial societies prevalent in the 1950s, and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and (to a large extent) even of Weber, at least in one reading of his work. They all assumed, even if only implicitly, that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies; with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world<sup>40</sup>.

Eisenstadt attacks this understanding of modernity with good reasons, since actual developments in Western and non-Western societies have rebutted the homogenizing and hegemonic postulations of the Western program of modernity. He writes, “While a general trend toward structural differentiation developed across a wide range of institutions in most of these societies – in family life, economic and political structures, urbanization, modern education, mass communication, and individualistic orientations – the ways in which these arenas were defined and organized varied greatly.”<sup>41</sup> “Such patterns were distinctively modern”, the sociologist continues, “though greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences. All developed distinctly modern dy-

*Atlantic*. He does not use the term “oppositional modernity” but instead speaks of “oppositional consciousnesses”. *Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass. 1993) 1–40, 9. Potter refers to Gilroy in his support of his own formulation of the concept. *Russell A. Potter, Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, N.Y. 1995) 4. The expression, however, is much older and goes back to Harold Bloom. *Orrin Nan Chung Wang, Fantastic Modernity: Dialectical Readings in Romanticism and Theory* (Baltimore, Md. 1996) 147.

<sup>38</sup> *Gilroy, The Black Atlantic* X, 9–12, 27, 39.

<sup>39</sup> *Gilroy, The Black Atlantic* X.

<sup>40</sup> *Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Multiple Modernities*, in: *Daedalus* 129/1 (2000) 1–29, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 1–2.

namics and modes of interpretation, for which the original Western project constituted the crucial (and usually ambivalent) reference point.”<sup>42</sup>

Eisenstadt contends that the idea of multiple modernities presumes an understanding of the world and an explanation of the history of modernity as a narrative of diverse cultural programs that are continually constituted and reconstituted. Among the cultural programs we find multiple institutional and ideological patterns which are implemented by specific social actors in close connection with activists and by social movements<sup>43</sup>.

Numerous scholars have raised objections to Eisenstadt’s conception of multiple modernities. Matthias Koenig criticizes Eisenstadt for his tendency to contemplate civilizations as hermetically closed units, neglecting cultural transfer between them and the entangled histories of their development – including dependence, colonial rule and war<sup>44</sup>. This is even more substantial since the old assumption of the “West and the Rest” seems to be preserved in Eisenstadt’s definition of the axial civilization<sup>45</sup>. Eisenstadt is deeply indebted to Karl Jaspers for his concept of the axial time. For Jaspers axial time is a time “for which all that precedes seems to be nothing but a preparation, to which everything that follows related in fact and often in bright consciousness. Global history of humanity derives its structure from here.”<sup>46</sup> Jaspers explicitly located this axial time between 800 and 200 B.C. and postulates that it occurred in China, India, and the West simultaneously. Jaspers insists on the synchronicity and independence of axial societies in several areas of the world. According to the philosopher, man distances himself from himself and the world, the result of which is the sovereignty of thought, which reflects upon itself. “There occurs a transcendence [*Übergang*] from the mythical into the reflected world, a kind of enlightenment: Man dares to think anything that seems to be possible, grasps every real empiricism, in order to confront the empirical and mental experiences critically.”<sup>47</sup> “The step toward the rational is taken in these three locales of earth [i.e. India, China, Europe], by itself only here. A methodical way of philosophy begins for the first time, and with it a

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Matthias Koenig, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, in: Dirk Kaesler (ed.), *Aktuelle Theorien der Soziologie: von Shmuel N. Eisenstadt bis zur Postmoderne* (München 2005) 41–63, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics*, in: *European Journal of Sociology* 232 (1982) 294–314; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany, N.Y. 1986). The expression “The West and the Rest” has been in use since the 1970s. Chinweizu Ibekeve, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers, and the African Elite* (New York 1975). Angus Maddison, *The West and the Rest in the World Economy: Growth and the Interaction in the Past Millennium* (Washington, D.C. 2004). Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Wilmington, Del. 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zürich 1949) 324. Quoted in Gabriel Simon, *Die Achse der Weltgeschichte nach Karl Jaspers* (Rom 1965) 18. Translation by Norbert Finzsch.

<sup>47</sup> Simon, *Die Achse der Weltgeschichte* 20. Translation by Norbert Finzsch.

leap occurs.”<sup>48</sup> For Jaspers, axial time and axial societies occur independently of the West’s alleged leading role. Eisenstadt fully acknowledged Jaspers’s leading role in the formulation of axial time, but he modifies Jaspers’s position by stretching the period under discussion from 800–200 B.C. to “the first millennium” and by limiting his concept to a tension between the transcendental and the mundane, thereby effectively killing the impact Jaspers might have had on an assessment of non-Western civilizations<sup>49</sup>.

Eisenstadt is utterly vague in his definitions of axial societies. He mentions societies such as Japan in his categories of pre-axial and non-axial civilizations, despite the fact that Karl Jaspers had specifically included Buddhism and Confucianism in axial civilizations, and Japanese culture definitely has absorbed both elements in depth<sup>50</sup>. Scholars who adopted the concept of axial civilizations do not hesitate to postulate modernity as a new axial society, thereby making modernity pre-modern<sup>51</sup>. Summing up current research in 2006, one author remarked: “Scholars who belong to what might be called the ‘multiple modernities’ camp are ... interested in transcending a reified East-West binary, though they typically do not call for a wholesale repudiation of the established narrative of Europe’s developmental dynamism, nor do they discount the role of institutional and cultural differences in the shaping of the distinctive trajectories that collectively comprise world history.”<sup>52</sup> Without further investigation of the strange things that happened to axial time on the way from Jaspers to Eisenstadt, it is fair to state that the

<sup>48</sup> *Simon*, *Die Achse der Weltgeschichte* 21. Translation by Norbert Finzsch.

<sup>49</sup> “The origins of ideological politics can be found, in different places on our globe, in that rather long-stretching period which the Swiss-German philosopher Karl Jaspers has termed as the Axial Age, i.e., the period of the first millennium B.C., when there emerged and became institutionalized in some of the major civilizations ... a conception of a basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders.” *Shmuel N. Eisenstadt*, *Cultural Traditions and Political Dynamics: The Origins and Modes of Ideological Politics*. Hobhouse Memorial Lecture, in: *The British Journal of Sociology* 32/2 (1981) 155–181, 156–157. Compare his summary of Jaspers’s chronology with the one by *Lambert*, “La notion ‘d’âge axial’ stricto sensu a été appliquée à la période qui a vu l’émergence de l’universalisme, de la philosophie, des grandes religions et de la science antique ... En sa phase-clé, il s’agit des Ve–VIe siècles av. J.-C., lesquels ont constitué un tournant décisif: second-Isaïe, siècle de Périclès, expansion du zoroastrisme, Upanishads, Jain, Bouddha, Confucius, Lao-Tseu, début de transformation du védisme en hindouisme.” *Yves Lambert*, *Religion, Modernité, Ultramodernité: Une Analyse en Terme de “Tournant Axial”*, in: *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 45/109 (2000) 87–116, 90.

<sup>50</sup> *Shmuel N. Eisenstadt*, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity* (Cambridge, New York 1999) 12. *Tu Weiming*, *Toward a Dialogical Civilization* (<http://www.iop.or.jp/0616/weiming.pdf>, accessed April 2nd, 2009) 96–97. *Karl Jaspers*, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zürich 1949) 47.

<sup>51</sup> *Yves Lambert*, *Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?* In: *Sociology of Religion* 60/3 (1999) 303–333. *Carlton H. Tucker*, *From the Axial Age to the New Age: Religion as a Dynamic of World History*, in: *The History Teacher* 27/4 (1994) 449–464.

<sup>52</sup> *Joseph M. Bryant*, *The West and the Rest Revisited: Debating Capitalist Origins, European Colonialism, and the Advent of Modernity*, in: *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie* 31/4 (2006) 403–444, 411, note 3.

concept of multiple modernities, which – according to Eisenstadt – result from different traditions of negotiation between the transcendental and the mundane, is useless for an analysis of the Harlem Renaissance, because Eisenstadt privileges a narrative that gives the West credit for the invention of modernity<sup>53</sup>.

## The Harlem Renaissance as Modernity according to Postcolonial Studies

Rather than conceiving of the Harlem Renaissance as a modern moment that is somehow influenced by Western concepts of modernity or antimodernity, one should emphasize the heterotopic quality of the Harlem's cultural movements in the 1920s–30s. Numerous scholars have interpreted the Harlem Renaissance as a form of artistic modernism, albeit one which at times took on a decidedly antimodern tone. Nevertheless, an interpretation of Harlem's writers and artists along the chiliastic lines of antimodern modernity or modern antimodernity falls short of explaining the entangled history of that place in those years. The apparent contradiction can only be resolved if we undertake to understand the Harlem Renaissance as a rhizomatic network of people that originated in different locales, but many of whom came together in one place. It does not take the obvious reference to the spatial turn in historiography to understand the meaning of Harlem as a place in the construction of the Harlem Renaissance. Whereas questions of home and belonging seem to be pervasive elements in the literature that emanated from Harlem, scholars differ, as Justin Edwards notes, “on what Harlem-as-home signifies. Alain Locke, for example, conceives of the ‘mecca of the New Negro’ as a space that would produce great African American art that would be both ‘classical’ and ‘masculine’ .... For Rudolph Fisher, Harlem-as-home means a refuge from the American racism that threatens African American life. And Nella Larsen's depiction of Harlem presents it more as a temporary abode in the never-

<sup>53</sup> “As the civilization of modernity developed first in the West, it was from its beginnings beset by internal antinomies and contradictions, giving rise to continual critical discourse and political contestations. The basic antinomies of modernity constituted a radical transformation of those characteristics of the axial civilizations. Centered on questions unknown to that earlier time, they showed an awareness of a great range of transcendental visions and interpretations. In the modern program these were transformed into ideological conflicts between contending evaluations of the major dimensions of human experience (especially reason and emotions and their respective place in human life and society). There were new assertions about the necessity of actively constructing society; control and autonomy, discipline and freedom became burning issues.” “Modernity first moved beyond the West into different Asian societies – Japan, India, Burma, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia – to the Middle Eastern countries, coming finally to Africa. By the end of the twentieth century, it encompassed nearly the entire world, the first true wave of globalization.” *Shmuel N. Eisenstadt*, Multiple Modernities, in: *Daedalus* 129/1 (2000) 1–29, 7, 14. *Wolfgang Knöbel*, Die Kontingenz der Moderne: Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika (Frankfurt a.M. 2007) 86.

ending search for identity and belonging.”<sup>54</sup> Such a Harlem was both a physical and a mythical space, “a space that is simultaneously there and not there”, hence a heterotopia<sup>55</sup>.

Postcolonial studies turn the relationship of power and rationality in colonial societies upside down. This approach asks how colonies and post-colonial societies have influenced and permeated the West, which distorted forms western rationality had to assume in order to produce both racism and imperialism, and how, in the formulation of Dipesh Chakrabarty, the belief in development and progress as a result of the Enlightenment has defined certain locales and spaces as “not yet” and others as “now”<sup>56</sup>. Despite Eisenstadt’s assertion of the extreme violence connected with the emergence of European modernity and Europe’s ensuing expansion, this line of reasoning remains heuristically ineffective because it insists on the systemic closure of various modernities. In Eisenstadt’s understanding, the violent and barbaric flipside of European modernity does not reflect the transcultural and hybrid processes of exchange between “The West and the Rest”<sup>57</sup>.

Even before systematic research has been undertaken into the relationship between different axial societies, Eisenstadtians already know that there is nothing to be found: “Every world region has in one way or another struggled with modernity. So far, however, these regional debates have scarcely engaged with each other.”<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, the only association that is evoked under the concept of hybridity is the refutation of an “optimistic account that describes the future as moving in the same direction”<sup>59</sup>. Out of the understandable tendency not to equate modernization with Westernization, scholars who apply the “multiple modernities” paradigm overlook that globalization processes of the last 500 years are as much about the provincializing of Europe as they are about the Westernization of the “rest”. If, following Edward Said, “all history is basically a history of

<sup>54</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840–1930* (Hanover, N.H. 2001) 160.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J. 2000) 8–12.

<sup>57</sup> Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Wilmington, Del. 2003). “The crystallization of European modernity and its later expansion was by no means peaceful. Contrary to the optimistic visions of modernity as inevitable progress, the crystallizations of modernities were continually interwoven with internal conflict and confrontation, rooted in the contradictions and tensions attendant on the development of the capitalist systems, and, in the political arena, on the growing demands for democratization. All these factors were compounded by international conflicts, exacerbated by the modern state and imperialist systems. War and genocide were scarcely new phenomena in history. But they became radically transformed, intensified, generating specifically modern modes of barbarism.” Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* 12.

<sup>58</sup> Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Multiple Modernities – The Concept and Its Potential*, in: Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Jens Riedel, Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Leiden, Boston 2002) 42–67, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 63.

relations”, one would assume that historians go out of their way to establish the history of mutual relations instead of claiming a unique role for the West<sup>60</sup>. Instead, at least in German historiography, historians endeavor to explore “how on-the-ground modifications of universalizing systems of organization shape the strategies of both the powerful and the less powerful”<sup>61</sup>.

As an alternative to theories of multiple modernities or “negotiated universals”, I propose an interpretation which assumes that forces of modernization under the conditions of colonialism create a network of postcolonial power relations, which have been shaped by expanding markets, mass media, technological innovations, hegemonic ideologies, different local cultures and strategies of resistance. The influence thus exerted did not flow in one direction – from the West to the rest. Rather, influence spread within the network while being adapted to the cultural specificities at hand.

Only if one provincializes the United States, only if one writes American history as the history of a space in which hybrid cultures have inscribed themselves in an imagined national hegemonic culture, can one hope to overcome the hierarchical and leveling concept of modernities. The United States is no crucible, no “glorious mosaic”, and certainly no callaloo<sup>62</sup>. U.S. culture more precisely resembles the scarred skin of a slave that has been broken several times by the plantation overseer, only to heal again and again. The scars are still visible, disfiguring to some, but they are a living evidence of the violence and the healing at the same time. This “hegemonic suture”, appropriating a concept from Antonio Gramsci, refers to the connection between the totalizing national narrative and postcolonial reality<sup>63</sup>. A postcolonial reading of American history therefore aims at pointing at the sutures and naming the wound that lies underneath it. By an analysis of its genealogy, the hegemonic national narrative can be understood as a retotalizing effect: Something constitutively heterogeneous has to be present in a social system in order for a hegemonic articulation to happen<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> *Wolf Lepenies*, *Entangled Histories and Negotiated Universals: Centers and Peripheries in a Changing World* (Frankfurt a. M., New York 2003) 11.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>62</sup> *John R. Baldwin*, *Redefining Culture: Perspectives across the Disciplines* (Mahwah, N.J. 2006) 79. *Jahan Ramazani*, *The Wound of History: Walcott's Omeros and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction*, in: *PMLA* 112/3 (1997) 405–417, 410. American culture is sometimes compared to a tossed salad or a callaloo. A callaloo is “a popular dish in the Caribbean in which a number of distinct ingredients are boiled down to a homogeneous mush”. *Viranjini Munasinghe*, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca, N.Y. 2001) 22.

<sup>63</sup> Gramsci proposed this concept in order to demonstrate, how hegemony is possible without widespread violence and domination. “The old landowning aristocracy is joined to the industrialists by a kind of suture which is precisely that which in other countries unites the traditional intellectuals with the new dominant classes.” *Quintin Hoare*, *Geoffrey Nowell-Smith* (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London 1971) 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ernesto Laclau*, *The Politics of Rhetoric*, in: *Tom Cohen* (ed.), *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* (Minneapolis, Minn. 2002) 229–253, 230–231. *Nancy Arm-*

Talking about the Harlem Renaissance presupposes talking about the blatant racism, the culture of lynching in the South between 1877 and 1930, and “redemption” after Reconstruction, which among other things produced a caste system that left for African Americans the precarious existence of sharecroppers under a new system of unfree labor. As a result of this direct and structural violence, hundreds of thousands African Americans left the South and went to the urban centers in the North. Between 1870 and 1960, more than five million African Americans migrated to the cities in the North, 900,000 of whom went north between 1920 and 1930<sup>65</sup>. Of New York’s population roughly 40 percent had been born outside the United States in 1880, but the proportion of African Americans was lower than 2 percent. Chicago had almost identical numbers<sup>66</sup>. Before 1900, 90 per cent of the African American population lived south of the Mason-Dixon Line. With the end of Reconstruction and the increasing political oppression of African Americans came individual and collective acts of violence that aimed to put blacks into their place in southern society, i.e. at the bottom of the social ladder. The Great Migration to the North was one result, though numerous rural migrants also sought better opportunities in southern cities. During the first decades of the twentieth century, more than two million blacks were driven from the southern countryside by violence, agricultural mechanization that reduced the value of their labor, and infestations of the cotton-destroying boll weevil. Those who went north settled especially in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York City, which by 1920 was the home of more than one in every four black northerners. Though blacks were still only a tiny minority of the total northern population in 1920, their continued migration was encouraged by family and friends, as well as by segments of the black press, for example Robert S. Abbott’s *Chicago Defender*, whose descriptions, at times overstated, of migrants’ prospects for jobs and freedom contributed to the rapid enlargement of northern black communities. Between 1910 and 1920, Chicago’s black population increased from just over 41,000 to over 230,000 and New York’s from 90,000 to over 325,000<sup>67</sup>.

Even if social relations between whites and blacks had been almost harmonious in the cities of the North before 1900, the influx of rural African Americans and their integration into a contested labor market was by no means easy. The Great Migration to the North significantly changed African American life and culture, as former agricultural laborers found employment in factories, warehouses, construction, and other urban, working-class occupations. Blacks filled over 500,000 factory jobs in 1910 and more than double that number by the end of the 1920s. A

*strong*, Leonard Tennenhouse, History, Poststructuralism, and the Question of Narrative, in: Narrative 1/1 (1993) 45–58.

<sup>65</sup> C. Horace Hamilton, The Negro Leaves the South, in: Demography 1 (1964) 279. Quoted in William J. Wilson, The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions (Chicago 1980) 66.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, The Declining Significance of Race 63.

<sup>67</sup> Mary E. Pattillo-McCoy, Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class (Chicago, Ill. 1999) 32.

widening war in Europe and U.S. entry into World War I in 1917 increased the demands on industry and hastened blacks' move into employment in manufacturing. As the need for soldiers drained away northern factory workers, and the war in Europe cut off the supply of European immigrant workers, the need for industrial labor drew additional tens of thousands of African Americans northward. Male African Americans found jobs in steel mills, the meat industry, railroads, and shipyards, while black women worked as domestic workers in white middle-class homes and service workers in hotels.

New York was also the site of heavy immigration by Afro-Caribbeans after 1920. Relations between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were at times tense. Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, and Rudolph Fisher wrote about the problems between these two groups. Especially between 1922 and 1923, the tension was palpable in the conflict over Marcus Garvey, leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)<sup>68</sup>. The UNIA had secured an international following of over one million people in more than thirty countries by 1920. Marcus Garvey had come to the United States from his native Jamaica and established his organization just before World War I. In 1920, Garvey led a parade of 50,000 African Americans in Harlem and convened a national convention with 25,000 delegates in Madison Square Garden. The UNIA was formed as a model of "Black capitalism": It was a black-owned corporation that operated a chain of businesses, groceries, hotels, restaurants, laundries, small factories, and a shipping company called *The Black Star Line*, and it became a multi-million-dollar corporation. It was both an impressive capitalistic venture and a cultural movement expressing African American pride and employing the rhetoric of social protest. The charismatic Garvey appealed to African Americans with denunciations of racial discrimination and arguments against the degradation brought about by white supremacy. He urged blacks to greater accomplishments and bigger dreams, and encouraged them to raise themselves to their rightful status as an incomparable people with a common past and homeland in Africa. He spoke with a power and resolve that few could ignore: "If Europe is for the Europeans, then Africa shall be for the black people of the world, we say it; we mean it . . . up you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will."<sup>69</sup>

The success of Garvey's message was part of a long tradition among African Americans, a tradition carried on by generations of black people whose frustration and despair convinced them that they had no future in America. Like those in the early nineteenth century who signed on with Paul Cuffe for the voyage to Sierra Leone, those in the 1850s who migrated to the newly independent Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, or the followers of Bishop Henry McNeil Turner around the turn of the twentieth century, many

<sup>68</sup> Paul Finkelman, Cary D. Wintz (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York 2004) 2 vol., vol. 1, p. 36.

<sup>69</sup> Edmund David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison 1969) 65, 70.



Garveyites looked to Africa as an ancestral homeland where they dreamed of finding the freedom that America would not grant to them<sup>70</sup>.

In addition to the Great Migration and the impact of Afro-Caribbeans in New York, African American participation in World War I also helped give rise to the Harlem Renaissance. Of the black men in military service in the war, more than 200,000 fought in France and elsewhere in Europe. Four black regiments received the *Croix de Guerre* for heroism. Despite blacks' demonstrated military proficiency and bravery, white American soldiers constantly insulted and harassed black soldiers abroad, establishing an American Jim Crow system in France in so far as they could. As one black soldier put it, "There was extreme concern lest the Negro soldiers be on too friendly terms with the French people."<sup>71</sup> White Americans were especially incensed when French people did not seem to share their racial prejudices. Some white commanders prohibited black soldiers from walking or talking with French women, and the white military police enforced the order. In a special directive from General John Pershing's office, "Secret Information Concerning the Black American Troops", French military leaders were warned against allowing their soldiers to treat black troops as equals. They "must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside the requirements of military service", the document requested<sup>72</sup>. The French were also cautioned against "commend[ing] too highly the [black] American troops, especially in the presence of [white] Americans" and were advised against "spoiling the Negroes"<sup>73</sup>.

The war lasted fewer than eighteen months after the United States entered, but experience abroad changed the lives of thousands of black soldiers, despite the restrictions the army tried to place upon them. For many, their time in Europe and their association with Europeans was their first taste of racial equality. Having risked their lives for democracy abroad some returned willing to do the same at home. In an editorial for *The Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois called America a nation that lynched, disfranchised, stole, and encouraged ignorance among blacks and announced, "We return from fighting ... fighting"<sup>74</sup>. There was a "New Negro" returning to America, activists insisted, a younger, more militant, more northern, more urban African American coming of age. Fearful of the precipitous rise in the number of African Americans in northern cities and alarmed by the determined

<sup>70</sup> Norbert Finzsch, Die Kolonisierungsbewegung von African Americans in Liberia bis zum amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg, 1816–1866, in: Laurence Marfaing, Brigitte Reinwald (eds.), Afrikanische Beziehungen, Netzwerke und Räume (Münster, Hamburg, Berlin 2001) 39–59.

<sup>71</sup> William Loren Katz, Eyewitness: A Living Documentary of the African American Contribution to American History (New York 1995) 366.

<sup>72</sup> Timothy C. Dowling, Personal Perspectives (Santa Barbara, Cal. 2006) 12.

<sup>73</sup> James Oliver Horton, Lois E. Horton, Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America (New Brunswick, N.J. 2001) 76.

<sup>74</sup> The Crisis 18/1 (1919) 13–14. Quoted in Manning Marable, Leith Mullings, Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal. An African American Anthology (Lanham 2000) 244–245.

attitude of blacks returning from the war, many white Americans resorted, once again, to racial violence during a wave of race riots in 1919<sup>75</sup>.

A fourth factor had a deep impact on the Harlem Renaissance: Outside of the United States, pan-Africanism constituted a major intellectual force between the wars. Pan-Africanism developed over a long period as an amalgamation of various cultural influences<sup>76</sup>. Beginning in Liberia and Sierra Leone, both quasi-colonies settled by ex-slaves in the nineteenth century, Pan-Africanists rapidly integrated other influences from the United States and the Caribbean. The first Pan-African congress had taken place in London in 1900, organized by the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams<sup>77</sup>. Another source of inspiration for early Pan-Africanism was Edward Wilmot Blyden, a black minister and politician, originally from the Virgin Islands, who was active in both Liberia and Sierra Leone<sup>78</sup>. Pan-African congresses met four times between 1919 and 1927, each time convening in the metropole of one of the colonial powers (Paris, London, Lisbon, and New York). Although the 1919 congress met in Paris, it was obvious that the driving force in its organization was Marcus Garvey's major opponent, Du Bois<sup>79</sup>. The editor and scholar acted as president of the 1921 congress, which had sessions in London as well as Brussels and Paris and authored a "Declaration to the World", which insisted on the absolute equality of the races. The document condemned the colonial policies of England, France, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal, as well as American racism. The declaration set forth eight demands on behalf of Africans and of people of African descent, among which were education, religious, political and cultural freedom and common ownership of the land<sup>80</sup>.

A fifth and very important contributing factor for the emergence and durability of the Harlem Renaissance was the white public in cities like New York and Chicago, always eager to go to Harlem or the South Side to enjoy music and dance in black clubs, to buy books and records by black musicians and, for a few well-to-do patrons, to support black artists and writers through financial assistance. Many black authors like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston had a network of white supporters<sup>81</sup>. Without Ernestine Rose, the white librarian of the New York

<sup>75</sup> *Nell I. Painter*, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York 2006) 183.

<sup>76</sup> *J. D. Fage, Roland A. Oliver*, *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, New York 1975) 8 vols., vol. 6, p. 222–223.

<sup>77</sup> *James R. Hooker*, *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist* (London 1975).

<sup>78</sup> *Hollis R. Lynch*, *Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist*, in: *The Journal of African History* 6/3 (1965) 373–388.

<sup>79</sup> *H. F. Worley, Clarence G. Contee*, *The Worley Report on the Pan-African Congress of 1919*, in: *The Journal of Negro History* 55/2 (1970) 140–143. *Clarence G. Contee*, *Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan-African Congress of 1919*, in: *The Journal of Negro History* 57/1 (1972) 13–28.

<sup>80</sup> *Juguo Zhang, W. E. B. Du Bois: The Quest for the Abolition of the Color Line* (New York 2001) 99–100.

<sup>81</sup> *Cary D. Wintz*, *The Harlem Renaissance, 1920–1940* (New York 1996) 7 vols., vol. 6: *Analysis and Assessment, 1940–1979*, p. 390–391. *Cary D. Wintz*, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Houston, Tex. 1988) 154, 177–179.

Public Library branch on 135th Street, the Harlem Renaissance might not have thrived so well<sup>82</sup>. Wondering why the Harlem Renaissance did not endure beyond the mid-1930s, Du Bois suggested, as Malcolm Cole explains, “The audience for the art and its producers were both different from and socially distant from each other. African American artists thus depended on white patrons rather than on ‘a real Negro constituency.’” Du Bois summed up the predicament of the Harlem Renaissance: “White patronage enabled African Americans to produce their work, but it guaranteed that they could not produce that work authentically”<sup>83</sup>. The Great Depression and World War II deflected interest from the Harlem movement and contributed to its demise. But it left traces even as far as the Weimar Republic and Austria<sup>84</sup>.

## Conclusion

Taken together, the experience of the Great Migration, the presence and influence of Afro-Caribbeans in Harlem, the participation of black soldiers in World War I, the pan-African movement and the patronage of a white public are among the factors that account for the multi-faceted image of the Harlem Renaissance. This movement defies classification as modern, anti-modern, or multiply modern. The many contributing influences on the cultural flowering in Harlem account for its intersectionality, its character as a cultural fold with temporal and spatial singularity. The Great Migration brought a sense of unity, based on the common experience of migrating from the Jim Crow South to escape racism and constrained opportunities. Afro-Caribbeans introduced the notion of self-reliance and difference. The experience of World War I, the quest for recognition for military service, and the post-war race riots amplified the necessity to overcome new forms of exclusion and racism encountered in the North. Pan-Africanism strengthened notions of a common, even if fetishized homeland. White patrons helped to underwrite Harlem’s cultural explorations. Even if the Harlem Renaissance ended more or less abruptly in 1935, its influences were felt around the world: Négritude and the anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s and 1950s referred to Harlem as a heterotopic site of the black freedom struggle<sup>85</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah A. Anderson, “The Place to Go”: The 135th Street Branch Library and the Harlem Renaissance, in: *The Library Quarterly* 73/4 (2003) 383–421.

<sup>83</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson, Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life (Philadelphia 2005) 159–160. I would replace the word “authenticity” by “independence”. Almost no artworks emerge as expressions of organic folk cultures in total separation from outside influences.

<sup>84</sup> Malcolm S. Cole, “Afrika singt”: Austro-German Echoes of the Harlem Renaissance, in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30/1 (1977) 72–95.

<sup>85</sup> “The Harlem Renaissance was known to black students in Paris, in part through the literary and artistic salon of the four Nardal sisters, Martinicans, and the *Revue du Monde Noir* (1931–1932), which Paulette Nardal organized in collaboration with a Haitian, Dr. Sajous.”

## Summary

Die Harlem Renaissance, eine kulturelle Bewegung der Afroamerikanerinnen und Afroamerikaner zwischen 1919 und 1935, die vor allem in den Großstädten des Nordostens und des Mittleren Westens florierte, wurde zu Unrecht lange als ein US-amerikanisches Phänomen wahrgenommen. Weite Teile der Strömung hatten ihren Ursprung in der Karibik, und der Einfluss der Harlem Renaissance reichte bis nach Europa, wo die Negritude-Bewegung Frankreichs die Diskussion um den französischen Kolonialismus beflügelte. Die Harlem Renaissance ist in der Forschung immer wieder als Beleg dafür gesehen worden, dass auch die kulturelle Produktion von African Americans sich den nivellierenden Kräften der Moderne nicht entziehen könne. Der Beitrag setzt sich mit diesem Zugang kritisch auseinander, indem er den Begriff der kulturellen Moderne auf westliche hegemoniale Entwicklungskonzepte zurückführt und damit post-kolonial hinterfragt. Auch die Versuche Shmuel Noah Eisenstadts, den Begriff der Moderne zu retten, indem man ihr unterschiedliche historische Entwicklungspfade zuweist, werden explizit zurückgewiesen. Stattdessen wird für eine stärkere Berücksichtigung post-kolonialer und poststruktureller Theorien zur Beurteilung von transnationalen und interkulturellen Bewegungen wie der Harlem Renaissance plädiert. Konkret schlägt der Autor hier das Konzept der „minor literature“ in Anlehnung an Gilles Deleuze und Felix Guattari und der Heterotopie der Abweichung nach Michel Foucault vor.

A. *James Arnold*, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) 11.