Editors' Introduction

In contemporary scholarship, discussions of diaspora often begin and end with the topics of migration, dispersal, and mobility.[1] Efforts to think about the meaning of diasporas in more material and political terms tend to focus either on the concept as signifying movements that transcend the nation or on very specific cases in which ethnonationalist movements engage a politics concerned with both the original homeland and the place of the migrant's settlement abroad. African diaspora political movements such as pan-Africanism fit very uncomfortably into both of these definitions, given that the "homeland" under discussion is, centuries after the Middle Passage, more often a landscape of the imaginary than a specific, original nation-state. Such a politics also often seems incommensurable with the contemporary experiences of those new, mobile black populations from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and even Asia who move in response to the forces shaping a global political economy without necessarily challenging or engaging the politics of the nation or nationalism as a whole.

These gaps between how we understand the African diaspora itself and the scholarship on global diasporas more broadly raise one of the generative questions for this issue of the *Radical History Review* titled "Reconceptualizations of the African Diaspora." Can we think of the notion of diaspora as a concept flexible enough to capture not only historical migrations and movements but also the political consciousnesses generated from such movements, especially when they produce populations who fit uncomfortably into the racial boundaries and gendered norms of particular receiving societies and states? In African diaspora studies, we think of diaspora in political terms precisely because centuries of mobilization around racial identity and consciousness are an inescapable part of the histories of slavery and colonialism as forms of state-sponsored structural violence. The series of African migrations into the New World, the explicit labor dimensions of these movements,

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and the rise of racialist thought placed discussions about race and racism at the center of how states both functioned and defined themselves across the region. These discussions then created transnational intellectual exchanges and forms of political mobilization that existed long before the term *diaspora* was coined as relevant for the histories of African Atlantic subjects in the mid-twentieth century.

The coeditors of this issue firmly believe that the essays included here demonstrate how the notion of an African diaspora moves beyond the question of Africa as homeland to encompass centuries of black political work and consciousness raising that are much broader and less bounded. The very irony of black diasporic *political* consciousnesses is precisely that these only transcend national boundaries *as they engage* in intimate conflicts and dialogues with specific nation-states. As a result, despite multiple calls for forms of black globality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some in the realm of real politics, others in the worlds of literary and cultural imagination, African diasporic politics have rarely been invoked for the express purpose of creating a transnational black state. Rather, the language and discourse of a racial diaspora has often been most effectively wielded against specific national politics in particular contexts and times, used by certain diasporic populations in an effort to fight local fights, even as they are aware of other transnational and international movements. In many of the issue's feature pieces, the national becomes the very space in which the intersecting vectors of transnational gender and class formations become visible.

In the three feature essays, the authors demonstrate compellingly how much African diaspora politics have been, historically, simultaneously global and local, and how such politics cannot be accurately assessed without attention to gender, sexuality, the role of the state, and nationalisms. For Anne-Marie Angelo, a local-global-local diasporic consciousness fueled a wave of activism in Britain as African-descended Londoners organized in the 1970s against British state violence and police brutality using symbolisms that originated with the U.S.-based Black Panther Party. Moving backward in time to the 1950s and the period leading up to national independence in the Anglophone Caribbean, Rochelle Rowe argues that Jamaican nationalists used a gendered and racial lens to insist on Jamaican political modernity. The theater of Jamaican hybridity, enacted by a harmonious rainbow of young beauty queens—ten racial "types" from dark to light—was hailed by national leaders as indisputable proof of Jamaican postcolonial modernity, but also as a model of racial advancement by race activists in the United States. For Theresa Runstedtler, popular culture served as an important vehicle for early-twentieth-century black internationalism, and she argues that black boxers migrating to France in the 1900s and 1910s engaged the period's transnational discourses of race and offered a working-class form of masculine, black cultural politics.

The question of violence and its relation to certain gendered and sexual discourses in the formation of black identities and politics is the subject of Deborah

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A. Thomas's interdisciplinary intervention, "The Violence of Diaspora." Thomas addresses most directly the state in the diaspora, a theme long omitted in scholarship but especially important as the postcolonial states in the Caribbean and its U.S. neighbor have routed ideas of black violence through gendered discourses on black poverty, sexuality, and "culture." Thomas examines comparative discourses from the mid-twentieth century and the early twenty-first on the black family in a transnational frame, such as the Moyne Commission Report in Jamaica and the Moynihan Report in the United States. These mid-century discourses, which circulated between North America and the English-speaking Caribbean, constituted a highly gendered and sexualized archive of ideas about blackness, heteronormativity, and their relationship to the state.

The violence of both discursive erasure and state policy continues to resonate in the forum on blackness in Latin America, where three essays on Afro-Bolivian, Afro-Venezuelan, and Afro-Mexican populations take on the question of the place of the African-descended in a Latin American imaginary. Sara Busdiecker, Cristóbal Valencia Ramírez and Anita González speak to important debates in the field concerning the study of the African-descended in Latin America and the place of racial consciousness and activism within and beyond Latin American national identities.[2] They do so, however, in very different ways, using the different conceptual lenses of the geography of memory, political science and the study of organizing and social movements, as well as cultural and performance studies. All three discuss how African identities have been subsumed within or relegated to the margins of conceptions of a specific Latin American nationality even as evidence of everyday awareness and political consciousness of blackness has been imprinted regionally and geographically in the nation to such a degree that the African-descended seem to be both everywhere and nowhere. These forum contributors also suggest that the burden shouldered by black populations in Latin America is centered on the conundrum of having to choose between race and nation, even though definitions of nation may be broadly constructed as radical, anti-imperialist, populist (and highly inclusive), or pro-labor.

If, as cultural and ideological formations, the national and the diasporic appear to have countervailing and irresolvable tensions, what happens when the states under discussion, whether in Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean, are also by the mid- to late twentieth century "black" as often as they are "white?" Lisa Brock, Anthony Bogues, Christopher J. Lee, Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai, and Molefi Mafereka ka Ndlovu all comment on the trajectory and utility of the diaspora concept in the context of contemporary postcolonial, global politics. Together they offer frameworks for thinking about the African diaspora as a contemporary *intellectual* formation and as a lens for viewing the history of the present — a post–Cold War, postcolonial, postapartheid, and, to use Lee's provocative phrasing, "post-diasporic" world.

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The "(Re)Views" section of this issue extends this conversation about the transnational forces shaping black populations within local contexts by covering recent works on the place of the African-descended in France, Britain, and Germany; African Americans' relationships to specific state projects in Ghana and Liberia; and recent revisionist accounts of the central figure of Claude McKay that complicate the lenses of race and ethnicity with insights afforded by postcolonial, gendered, and sexual analyses of his formation as a black diasporic political subject.

Many of the pieces already mentioned wrestle with and respond in their own, case-specific ways to the question: "If nationally based movements understand their relationship to the nation and the nation-state as critical, does this mean these are *not* African diaspora movements?" Prudence D. Cumberbatch's contribution to "Teaching Radical History" explores how one might use the history of transnational conversations about shared black political interests and struggles to create an intraracial conversation between contemporary multiethnic black students across the U.S. academy. From a different angle, Kevin Mumford's contribution to "Teaching Radical History," "Black Global Metropolis: Sexual History," is singular for the author's timely discussion of both some of the challenges prompted by and some of the reconfigurations of history and periodization required for thinking and teaching race and sexuality together in our stories of African diasporic sites and populations.

In "Curated Spaces," diaspora is reimagined as a curated space that still exhibits the black body and the work of diaspora artists in both gendered and provincial terms. For Jacqueline Francis, true diasporic innovation requires a move away from older, gendered, and racialized figurations of blackness to the newer and more conceptual modes of artists such as Kojo Griffin and Laylah Ali. For Leon Wainwright, a turn away from the hegemony of a United States–based cultural politics of black representation requires looking at the other landscapes and ways of seeing blackness that constitute a diasporic world imaginary.

As evident in "Curated Spaces" and many of the pieces throughout, *RHR* 103 foregrounds alongside the role of the state the biopolitics of diaspora; that is, it looks at how we figure the blackness of diaspora in terms of questions of gender and sexuality, race and color. In the minds of the editors, this issue aims to continue the important black feminist project of using intersectional approaches to create greater attention to multiple categories of identity. Yet in the context of African diaspora studies, this approach may explicate as much as blur, complicate, and confuse some of the field's already long-held wisdoms. Perhaps this critically important confusion is best represented by the issue's cover, a photo taken by Agustín Victor Casasola in 1915, at the height of the Mexican Revolution. Titled "La soldadera" ("The Woman Soldier"), the photo makes visible the place that women cleared for themselves—whether they mended clothes or fought and even led battles—in the midst of a civil war that is often recounted in historical records as an almost exclusively male endeavor. "La soldadera" disturbs epistemologies of revolution, radicalism, and

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leadership that permeate what is broadly construed as "political" throughout the diaspora. As Carmelo Esterrich insists,

> The way she defiantly looks straight at the camera erases immediately the image of her as simply a caretaker or a follower. Her medals possibly document a brilliant, recognized strategist. Her body language literally pushes *through* masculinity to render it open, usable, and ultimately malleable. Her gaze stops the penetrating look of the camera. She is not about erasing femininity, but about redefining it. She could be an indigenous woman, but she could also very possibly be part of the community of Afro-Mexicans, perhaps from the region of Veracruz by the Gulf of Mexico. This makes the image even more pertinent: we are before a subaltern woman resisting the photographic record and bringing the racial impressions of Mexico's visual culture to a screeching halt. She makes prescient the complex transformations in the Americas of gender, class and race.[3]

In the same way that one cannot really tell from the photo if this woman is "black" or "Mexican" (as if these were mutually exclusive, or as if this were the most useful question), one cannot unravel the relationship between the cultural space from which such a question may arise — that old bugaboo of so-called identity politics in which race, gender, and sexuality are often subsumed by the lenses of nation and class — and the specific political conditions shaping her uniquely quiet yet physically powerful stance and armed revolutionary image. "La soldadera" serves both as a useful bookend to these introductory comments and as a great point of departure for the different vectors of reconceptualizing radical histories of diaspora that the issue's contributors offer. By joining national discourses of blackness and of color in a transnational arena of geohistory, African diaspora studies as a field can expose some of the blurring of the lines between state borders and national discourses that underlie discussions of black populations and histories.

— Erica Ball, Melina Pappademos, and Michelle Stephens

Notes

1. See such recent collections as Jana Evans Braziel, *Diaspora: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); and Stephane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
2. See, for example, the debate between Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant and Michael Hanchard in *Theory, Culture, and Society* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16 [1999]: 41–58; Hanchard, "Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-imperialism, and the Ethnocentricisms of Pierre Bourdieau and Loïc Wacquant," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 20 [2003]: 5–29).
3. Provided with the kind permission of Carmelo Esterrich at the request of the coeditors. Esterrich is a professor of Spanish and cultural studies in the Department of Liberal Education at Columbia College, Chicago, and is working on a book about the arts produced, distributed, sponsored, and consumed in Puerto Rico during the 1950s.

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