

Russell Duncan and Clara Juncker, eds., *Transnational America: Contours of Modern U.S. Culture*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004. 276 pages; ISBN 87-7289-958-1.

The present collection of thirteen essays investigates the impact of today's globalization upon American culture and, indirectly, the discipline of *American Studies*. While the concept of the nation is still contained in the general title, it is being challenged and redefined in all fields, from politics and labor relations to religious, literary and gender studies. Perhaps this is why the contributors, mostly Scandinavian by birth or professional affiliation, pay special attention to the discursive qualities of identity. Though such focus may seem more appropriate to the ideological needs of the US at its inception and to have become less urgent after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a nationalist rhetoric often remains in force, and not just in the presidents' highly symbolic inaugural addresses, some of which Marie Andersen has subject to scrutiny (43-56), or in expressly proselytizing initiatives like the evangelical videodramas used in Nigeria and analyzed by Obododimma Oha (27-42). The latter phenomenon may not be that marginal given Bush's revivalism and the evangelical support for his 2004 reelection, or his export of democracy *manu militari*. But as Paul Levine reminds us in the recapitulative opening essay (13-26), fears and protests against military, cultural and economic imperialism have led to a confusion of globalization with Americanization. Underlying this confusion lies the fear of modernization and resistance against the forces of late capitalism, forces to which the world at large is subject, whether the Third World countries to which the production of American companies is outsourced (often in denationalized export zones), or the US. at home, through the legal and illegal immigrants working in entry-level jobs, domestic service or the sex industry, whether the American enterprises opening franchises all over the world, or the countries merely copying these companies' marketing methods (blinis substituting for hamburgers).

Carl Pedersen (57-76) in this regard warns against the contemporary slavery of cheap contract labor and calls for a legislation allowing the free flow of people as well as capital and goods, including goods from the Third World. His belief in a cross-ethnic solidarity may be exaggerated, though, given his own admission that immigrants have been known to rewrite history when confronted with new arrivals jeopardizing their economic interests. The more since ethnic-specific ties are strengthened by the greatly facilitated means of communication with the home country. Some of these, like the internet, according to Erik Åsard (79-94), have greatly contributed to the 1990s revival of conspiracy theories, a phenomenon which throughout US history and across the political spectrum and social hierarchy has led to movements, even the establishment of parties. And while the more traditional position has been to consider these theories a threat to democracy, cultural studies specialists now treat them as a barometer of the social and political condition, even a symptom of democracy's flawed operation. The same ambiguous relation to democracy has been said to govern the legislation passed in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Which goes to show that even though the same

phenomenon can receive opposite explanations, this does not necessarily amount to "contradictions," a word Åsard occasionally, yet needlessly, falls back on in his assessment of the scholars he reviews (85, 89).

If the 1990s surge of conspiracy theories received a boost from the internet and international terrorism, the latter in turn demonstrably depends on media images and icons (like the Statue of Liberty), and with much the same risks involved. According to Claudia Egerer (95-110), Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991) and its response, Paul Auster's *Leviathan* (1992) (dedicated to DeLillo), explore the threat that the visual mass media and terrorism's exploitation of them pose to the American individual, his freedoms and his capacity to think and act. But whereas Baudrillard ascribes the terror of images to their abstraction of reality under the pretense of immediacy, Lyotard relegates terror to the state when it denies dissension and castigates the Other as terrorist. This is the moment when Hobbes's Leviathan or commonwealth turns monstrous and requires a Thoreau-like civil disobedience, not to be brought down by it. The US conflict against Vietnam provides a case in point, illustrating how postcolonial subjects were turned into communist terrorists or guerilla fighters, whose slaughter fortunately was opposed by draft dodgers and by journalists and camera men risking their lives when smuggling film footage out of the country. If this already brought the conflict home, so did the veterans, whose deeper traumas internalized the Other. The soldiers' personal experiences, in all their psychic, bodily and material dimensions, very much defy visual and verbal expression, and is certainly at odds with history's official record. That is the predicament Clara Juncker (111-124) identifies in Tim O'Brien's metafictional novels, blurring fact and fiction, the autobiographical and the public, the story that must, yet cannot be told once and for all, providing still another inflection of transnational America. To Juncker O'Brien's tentative style approximates feminine writing. Add to this the girl-friend turned savage killer in his story "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," and the novelist is successfully shown to disprove feminist allegations of an exclusively male perspective on war. Hillary Rodham Clinton's equally conscious engagement with gender roles has confounded feminists and popular media alike, whether in the US or Estonia, the comparative perspective from which Raili Põldsaar views her (151-171). That the First Lady received as much criticism for playing the wronged wife standing by her philandering husband during the Monica Lewinsky trial, as for her unseemingly assertive public role exposes the lingering gap, in Eastern Europe and the US, between the official rhetoric about women's equality and everyday practice. Ironically, Jørn Brøndal's contribution on American and Scandinavian-American immigrant women during the latter half of the nineteenth century (174-188) makes for instructive collateral reading. While this essay fits into the tradition of (mostly male) travel writers' reports (one exception being Fredrika Bremer), and the period focused on appears to make it less relevant to the current transnational context, these travel writers praised the New Woman's emancipation as well as regretted the loss of morals and domestic virtues, trapping the Scandinavian newcomers somewhere in-between, short of excluding them from the social progress. Going by Brøndal, that fate was definitely reserved for the African-American women, who received no attention, not even from the likes of Bremer.

In sharp contrast stands the high visibility of Muhammad Ali, whose feats as heavy-weight boxing champion gave him a global media coverage. Even so, this celebration, as Stuart Kidd demonstrates in his excellent contribution (189-214), involved a systematic erasure of Ali's Southern racial roots, incidental as these were to the social causes he spoke up for. In that regard Ali's conversion to Islam and accompanying name change (from Cassius Clay, the slave name of his great-grandfather) only emphasized his un-American Otherness. However, Ali's critique on a forced assimilation, while inspired by Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, instead of being a return to an outdated segregationism, can also be seen as a foreshadowing of the cultural pluralism now evident elsewhere in the South.

The mixed sources of Ali's public performances provide a case in point of this pluralism, one neatly developed by Kidd. Turning his boxing bouts into morality plays, Ali strategically distanced himself from his black boxing opponents by accusing them of racial collaboration in playing "Uncle Toms" or "The Great White Hope." As Norman Mailer and A.B. Giamatti have remarked, Ali adopted the plantation owners' racial control strategies and insisted on his ethnicity much more than his darker skinned and poorer opponents, to the point that his racial performance started resembling that of a minstrel show. Similarly, his "braggadocio" is said to derive from vaudeville and from models like wrestler Gorgeous George and theater promoter and songwriter Billy Rose. On the one hand, Ali could posture as "faux naïf" to subvert received racial opinions, which allows Kidd to compare him to the Jewish stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce. On the other hand, Ali's art of verbally insulting opponents (a.k.a. the "Dozens" or "signifying"), fine-tuned in urban America, had its roots in the antebellum rural South of the US and in West Africa, and Ali expertly practiced that art on the page in his poems (or "toasts") and in his media appearances, using a narrative persona that fused the African-American trickster with the bad man. And as in African-American folktales, Ali turned his opponents into allegorical animal figures, which gave him the psychological advantage in the promotional fight preceding the actual one. At the same time, his performative repertoire was extended by the southern Protestant antiphonal structure of call and answer, used by the evangelical, revivalist preachers and promoted through Ali's assistant trainer, Drew "Bundini" Brown, who hailed from Florida (206-207). All of which amply testify to Muhammad Ali's mixed Southern roots.

Traditionally a region that tried to set itself apart from the North and the nation as such, the South has become rather representative of the current globalization. Two articles chart in more detail its "transnational turn." Russell Duncan's contribution to the volume (237-255) does so literally in figures demonstrating how Atlanta has become the model of the 21st century boomtown, thanks to corporate investments and a massive immigration from Latin America. The new ethnic group and its sheer size have radically disrupted the traditional Southern antagonism between black and white, which calls for a reconfiguration of an American Studies discipline whose self-limitation to this antagonism has hindered any acknowledgment of the new multicultural reality, benefiting the US and the Latin American home countries to which hard

earned cash is rerouted. If the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represents recognition of the new transnational geography, the risk run by a reconfigured American Studies discipline acknowledging the cultural logic of global capitalism, Martyn Bone points out (217-35), is that of underwriting corporate and governmental interests. The alternative, a return to the traditional regional or neo-national focus, as advocated by (neo-)Agrarians, is no longer viable. Any regional focus on the South's self-sufficiency has always been largely discursive. The marketing of Atlanta on the occasion of the 1996 Olympic Games by look-alikes of Scarlet O'Hara, was just that: a commodification of a past, possessing only an imaginary existence, yet in the all-too familiar manner of Southern boosterism. In a similar manner, Canada's self-identity of a rural, northern country requiring what Northrop Frye called a "garrison mentality" to survive, is an artificially maintained metanarrative, serving to differentiate the North from its Southern neighbor. As Justin Edwards (257-271) argues, Canadian writers like Brad Fraser and Russell Smith have come to rely on a post-industrial American imaginary to signify an urban Canada usually situated beyond its borders. Unlike with the American South's artificial antagonism to the urban North, novels like Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* demonstrate the incorporation of city and forest. In the conflict between a restaurant chef specializing in local produce and its main investor, the owner of a transnational chain of coffee bars, the novel demonstrates how cultural specificity threatens to be absorbed by late capitalist forces, yet can also be reconstituted (268-9), albeit in a process of constant negotiation.

To conclude, this is a rich and most satisfying collection of essays, whose coherence turns the reading experience into another dynamic, as each argument harks back or points ahead to others. The photo essay (125-153) in the middle of the book further adds to this dynamic, though readers will wonder who wrote the commentary: the editors alone, in collaboration with the other participants, or selective participants, to the extent that the pictures dovetail with the essays.

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Judith Misrahi-Barak, ed., *Revisiting Slave Narratives/Les avatars contemporains des récits d'esclaves*. Montpellier: Coll. "Les Carnets du Cerpac" 2, Université Montpellier III, 2005. 574 pages; ISBN 2-84269-648-4; € 20.

Conference proceedings are usually not very prestigious publications, yet *Revisiting Slave Narratives/Les avatars contemporains des récits d'esclaves* proves to be an exception. Deriving from a 2003 international conference held at Paul Valéry University, Montpellier III, France, this bilingual volume in English and French features, among others, prominent writers and critics like Fred D'Aguiar, Caryl Phillips, and Ashraf Rushdy. It would be unfair to ascribe a predominantly high quality of the volume to the mentioned names only; a number of scholars have delivered excellent