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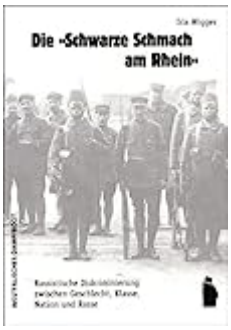


**Iris Wigger.** *Die "Schwarze Schmach am Rhein": Rassistische Diskriminierung zwischen Geschlecht, Klasse, Nation und Rasse.* Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006. 347 pp. EUR 29.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-89691-651-8.

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## "Black Horror" and the "White Race"

In one of the more infamous episodes of the post-World War I era, German grassroots organizations campaigned against the presence of "black" occupation troops from the French colonies. Their presence spawned tales of sexual violence against German, bourgeois, white women that often bordered on the pornographic. These rumors served opinion-makers in their portrayal of the "hereditary enemy" beyond the Rhine as a vengeful victor unwilling to overcome the grievances of four years of total war for the sake of postwar reconciliation. The stationing of French African troops thus became a welcome propaganda tool in the German government's quest to revise the Versailles peace settlement. For many ordinary Germans, it also unleashed a rhetoric of racism, violence, and radical nationalism that, as some scholars have argued, laid the groundwork for widespread support for the various racial projects of the Nazi regime. In recent years, the campaign against "the black horror on the Rhine" has received a fair amount of scholarly attention. Some studies have been more concerned with its military and diplomatic aspects, some with the episode's role in Germany's decolonization process, and others–perhaps the majority–with its consequences for the country's descent into dictatorship, war, and genocide.[1] Iris Wigger's new, primarily synthetic study must therefore situate itself in a sizable field of scholarship.

While Wigger duly acknowledges the findings of other authors, she claims that her book is the first to explore "the exact relationship of ... gender, race, nation, and class [in the "black horror" campaign] as categories of inclusion and exclusion" (p. 27). She aims to show "that in the social construction of 'black disgrace,' ideas of gender, race, nation, and class interlock, include, and exclude on multiple levels, and, as mutually constitutive contexts of discrimination, form a racist conglomerate" (p. 31). To this end, she employs a vast array of refreshingly heterodox "quotidian materials"–from propaganda pamphlets and speeches to pulp fiction, from government documents to coins and stamps, from the textual to the visual–for a "historiographically-oriented discourse analysis from the perspective of the critique of ideology" (p. 31) of a phenomenon that, in her reading, decisively

shaped the (re)construction of an imagined German national community in the wake of a devastating, even humiliating, defeat.

In the two main parts of her book, Wigger approaches the subject from two angles. In the first, she seeks to demonstrate how the process of renegotiating Germanness in the face of the occupation was not merely a national, but an international endeavor. It should not be separated from the crisis of colonialist *mentalitÃ©s* after World War I that enveloped the entire western world. She therefore follows the political and intellectual careers that led three non-Germans–British socialist E. D. Morel, liberal former Italian prime minister Francesco Nitti, and radical conservative American actress and Germanophile activist Ray Beveridge–to become high-profile protagonists in the vitriol against France and its colonial soldiers. These activists illustrate the "broad ideological spectrum" of the campaign (p. 34). Wigger does a fine job of delineating the intellectual journey that brought each figure into the limelight. Despite the remarkable differences in their backgrounds and worldviews, these international figureheads converged around a shared fear that the deployment of black troops–alternately described as animal-like savages or immature children, exploited by their French masters–would undermine global power relations and herald the end of white predominance. Morel, Nitti, and Beveridge certainly differed in tone. Beveridge's sensationalist utterances, for example, were often so rabidly exaggerated that German campaign organizers feared she might become a liability. Nonetheless, they agreed in their pessimistic assessment of the situation and its alleged implications for the imperialist world order. For all three, the fate of Germany, vanquished and humiliated, presaged the end of the white race, since what was happening to Germany might soon befall the remaining colonial powers. The soiling of white prestige in the eyes of the world's "lesser races" could lead to anticolonial revolts and, once the floodgates were opened, miscegenation and the degeneration of western societies. They therefore exhorted Germans to resist the onslaught of the "wild hordes" from Africa and defend the purity of the white body politic at all costs. At the same time, they proclaimed that everyone should make the plight of the Rhinelanders a personal and social concern.

Wigger follows this section with a close reading of the commercially successful novel, *Die Schwarze Schmach: Der Roman des geschÃ¤ndeten Deutschlands* (1921), by pulp fiction writer Guido Kreutzer. Her reading seeks to illustrate how the various elements of the international discourse about the occupation troops crystallized into a coherent national narrative of violation and redemption. According to her interpretation, the novel contains all the major elements that figured prominently in the (re)construction of German national identity during the early 1920s: sexual and racial violation of the German nation allegorized in the figure of an innocent German maiden; redemption of a German identity emasculated by war and defeat through the heroic defense and rescue of the female victim by the white male protagonist; and the forging of a genuine national community beyond class barriers and interests in the united front mustered in the face of the occupation.

In the second part of the book, Wigger elaborates on these themes in the national context of the propaganda campaign, focusing on the ways in which it employed the categories of gender, race, nation, and class in the (re)making of German national consciousness. Often quoting extensively from source material, she shows that gender and race, in particular, were crucial factors in constructing the "black horror." White German women served as symbols of both the defiled white race and the violated national body, but often in ambiguous representations. On the one hand, the white female body, if heroically defended by a white male German, could stand for the purity and innocence of the nation, that is, the shrine of the nation's future. On the other, if raped by a nonwhite man, or worse, voluntarily submitted to the alleged sexual appeal and prowess of a black occupation soldier, the same body could also represent the perceived danger to the nation in the form of racial mixing and feminization. The propaganda campaign thus sought to reaffirm and strengthen preexisting, but not necessarily dominant, conceptions of the German nation as exclusively white and primarily male. Moreover, Wigger illustrates that through this discursive reconstitution of the German national community, its bourgeois agitators sought actively to integrate white male workers into the nation and thus recoup the class-transcending spirit of *Volksgemeinschaft* that appeared to have engulfed the country during the war. In this sense, too, the campaign proved fateful because it contributed to establishing the perceived incommensurability between an imagined, true national community, in which no political, social, or cultural differences and distinctions existed, and a republican form of government that revolved around the constant negotiation of competing political, social, and cultural positions.

Despite the rich synthesis offered in the work, readers may find some of its features problematic. Perhaps surprisingly for an author intent on discourse analy-

sis, Wigger could have provided a much "closer" reading of texts. She only retells the basic plot elements of Kreutzer's novel, for instance, and she rarely proceeds to the level of a detailed literary analysis informed by any of the newer literary theories, any of which theoretically sophisticated readers might see as useful in the context of such a study.

Ultimately, too, the main sections of the work seem to stand beside each other rather than being integrated. Exactly how ideas and concerns shared by the international community of imperialist nations–or, as Germans referred to it, the "community of the white race"–were transmitted from the international to the national level is not clear. Thus, whether the German discourse on the "black horror" was merely a radicalized expression of broader, pan-European (or even transatlantic) concerns or a phenomenon *sui generis* remains uncertain. Comparison to other such cultural moments is neglected; in this regard, the author might have taken inspiration, for instance, from Christian Koller's work on the deployment of colonial conscripts in earlier European wars. Moreover, although Wigger implies that the (re)construction of the German national body politic as a white, gendered, class-transcending entity must be understood and situated within a transnational context, she abandons this angle of inquiry halfway through her study. This omission may result from a conceptual disparity between the two sections. Although the first addresses not only *what* was argued about the occupation, but also *who* argued, from which ideological background, and with which purpose, the second features a discourse that becomes an agent in its own right, obscuring its speakers. As a consequence, Wigger's detailed analysis of the contents of the German campaign somewhat suddenly diverges from the search for transnational similarities and differences in the construction of the "black horror." The work can also be tiring to read, as the choice to analyze gender, race, nation, and class separately leads to redundancies that–in light of extensive source quotations–occasionally overwhelm the reader with pages upon pages of unsavory ideas.

Even so, Wigger's archaeology of this discourse is not without merit. Indeed, she admirably dissects the ways in which the four elements she deems central to understanding the propaganda campaign were woven together into a web of mutually constitutive meanings. Yet, in confining herself exclusively to the national dimension and largely omitting the campaign's international intellectual context in the second part of her book, she fails to move much beyond the conclusions that older scholarship had already established. Her argument regarding the importance and simultaneous ambiguity of gender in the discourse on the "black horror," for example, has also been investigated, with similar conclusions, by Sandra MaÃ. In addition, in light of the broader implications Wigger seems to draw from her analysis–that is, that the "black horror" discourse was an important ingredient in constructing the ideological outlines of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* and its strategies of exclusion–it would perhaps have rounded off the study if she had also addressed questions about the potential presence of a counter-discourse to the racist campaign and its construction of Germanness. (Wigger does provide a brief excursus on French justifications of use of colonial troops, but she does not dedicate much space to German voices critical of the "black horror" campaign, whether in the Foreign Office, which monitored the campaign lest it interfere with the *Realpolitik* of postwar diplomacy, or among the small community of black Germans.)

In sum, Wigger furnishes her readers with a rich synthesis of current knowledge about the campaign against the "black horror on the Rhine," one solidly grounded in primary-source research. Her book will therefore probably stand as a good introduction for students new to the subject. Whether it will also provide new impulses for further research and help to propel the scholarship on post-World War I Germany in a new direction, however, remains to be seen.

Note

[1]. For the military and diplomatic dimensions of the campaign, see Keith Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy," *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970): 606-627; Christian Koller, *"Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt": Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und MilitÃ¤rpolitik (1914â1930)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001); and Jean-Yves Le Naour, *La honte noir: L'Allemagne et les troupes coloniales franÃ§aises, 1914-1945* (Paris: Hachette, 2003). The decolonization perspective is prominent in Sandra MaÃ, *WeiÃe Helden, schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer MÃ¤nnlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964* (Cologne: BÃ¶hlau, 2006); and Jared Poley, *Decolonization in Germany: Weimar Narratives of Colonial Loss and Foreign Occupation* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005). On the question of how the campaign foreshadowed certain aspects of the Nazi "racial state," see, for example, the classic studies by Gisela Lebzelter, "Die 'Schwarze Schmach': Vorurteile–Propaganda–Mythos," *Geschichte*

*und Gesellschaft* 11 (1985): 37-58; and Reiner Pommerin, *"Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde": Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit 1918-1937* (DÃ¼sseldorf: Droste, 1979). See also Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Peter Martin and Christine Alonzo, eds., *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt: Schwarze im Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: DÃ¶lling und Galitz, 2004).

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