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Racialized Topographies of the New and the Old World: Jeannette Lander's Atlanta and Hans J. Massaquoi's Hamburg

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Racialized Topographies of the New and the Old World: Jeannette Lander's Atlanta and Hans J. Massaquoi's Hamburg

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I. Introduction

In this essay, I will address two writers or, more specifically, two books which at first glance seem to compete with each other for the oddest, the most unlikely constellation of characters and settings and the most unusual forms of cultural contact. I am referring here to Jeannette Lander's debut novel, published in 1971, *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K*, and Hans J. Massaquoi's book of memoirs, published in 1999, *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (published in German under the title *Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger*). In the case of Massaquoi, many reviews appearing in the American and German press after its release reiterated the sheer surprise and astonishment that such a case, that of a black German boy growing up in Nazi Germany, even existed and commented on the text as a documentation of this 'rare specimen', this 'unique figure' which Massaquoi seems to present in his first person narrative.[1] In the case of Lander, the 'oddity' of her young female Jewish

[1] The following sample of references captures this general tone with its rhetoric of 'uniqueness.' F.N. D'Alessio, "New Book Examines Growing up Black in Nazi Germany," *Associated Press*, August 23, 2000; Janet Singleton, "For Blacks in Nazi Germany, Hardships Outlasted War," *Denver Post*, April 16, 2000; reviews in *Ebony*, November 1999, in *The Washington Post Book World*, December 19, 2000, in *The New York Times Book Review*, February 20, 2000; Jobst-Ulrich Brand, "Dunkle Erfahrung," *Focus* 44 (1999), 184-85; Dirk Knipphals, "Normale Hitler-Anhänger," *Tageszeitung* 27.11.1999; Daniel Speich, "Als schwarzer Junge im Dritten Reich," *Tages-Anzeiger* 31.01.00; "Kolumne: Wie es war, in dunklen Zeiten ein Schwarzer zu sein," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 21.11.99. The book was published in Germany in November 1999 and by November 11 appears for the first time on German national bestseller rankings.

immigrant protagonist living in the black ghetto of Atlanta during World War II went almost unnoticed for several decades; reviews of the novel were rare and ambivalent, the novel has been out of print for years.[2]

As the title of my paper stresses, both texts make use of an urban setting as the arena for the drama they unfold; in both instances it is a drama of defining, living, and negotiating otherness, of coming to terms with one's own 'deviation' from a cultural norm – of whiteness, of Germanness, of Americanness, of being a cultural outsider. The common urban focus of both texts allows them to establish a narrative microcosm, that of a neighborhood, streets, houses. The urban topographies of Atlanta and of Hamburg function as a way of anchoring the plot, of mapping out the experience of otherness, yet in quite different ways: Lander uses the urban space as a point of departure for the exploration of difference in a fictional realm by employing a technique of modernist defamiliarization, a technique which refrains from a merely mimetic depiction of her heroine's surroundings and which abstracts from the house, the street, the neighborhood in theatrical scenarios and scenes that are no longer traceable on a map. Massaquoi's text, a book of memoirs, is geared toward establishing authenticity and verifiable evidence of its author's life and existence. Concreteness rather than abstraction is

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[2] These rare reviews include: Salcia Landmann, "Juden vom Negergetto," *St. Galler Tageblatt.* January 1, 1973; Georg Zivier, "Liebenswerte Leute in Kovskys Kramladen," *Der Tagesspiegel*, November 28, 1971. A number of publications illustrate the new critical interest Lander's novel has received within the last decade: Leslie A. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History: Feminism and German Identity* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1993) and "There's No Place like Home: Jeannette Lander's and Ronnith Neumann's Utopian Quest for Jewish Identity in the Contemporary West German Context," *New German Critique* 50 (1990): 113-34; Tobe Levin, "The Challenge to Identity in Jeannette Lander and Fran Ross," *Commonwealth and American Women's Discourse*, ed. A. L. McLeod (New Delhi: Sterling, 1996) 256–67 and "No Place for Identity: Jeannette Lander's Migrating Women's Aesthetic," *International Women's Writing: New Landscapes of Identity*, eds. Anne E. Brown, Marjanne E. Goozé (Westport: Greenwood, 1995) 253–63; Heike Paul, "Not 'On the Backs of Blacks': US-American (Im)migration and Jewish Diaspora in the German-Language Writing of Jeannette Lander," *Multilingual America: Transnationality, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York UP, 1998) 281–96. Lander's inclusion in the *Metzler Autorinnen Lexikon* with an entry written by Katja Schubert (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998) 283-84, also signals her by now canonical status. An interview with the author has just appeared in the *Women in German Yearbook* 15 (2000).

the aim as the narrator reconstructs his life in Nazi Germany insisting on and proving his place in the history of that era and the fact that he lived to tell.

In the context of the general theme of this lecture series, both books present "Encounters on Intricate Issues"[3] without being *directly* about the Holocaust: Lander's Jewish immigrants interacting with the African American ghetto residents are far away from the scene of crime. Massaquoi growing up in Hamburg is, of course, aware of racial hatred with regard to the Jewish population and with regard to himself; yet, while he feels threatened and discriminated, he remains for the longest time ignorant of the scope of the persecution and ethnic 'cleansing.' The reader's own previous knowledge operates to crystallize all the implications of Massaquoi's tale and the many other ways in which it could have ended. In Lander's text the situation in Europe serves as a counterpoint, an analogy and contrast to the life in the black ghetto of Atlanta. The presence of African American characters in Jeannette Lander's novel and that of an Afro-German boy in Hans Massaquoi's book triangulates and complicates a German-Jewish dualism and opposition.

II. Hans J. Massaquoi's Book of Memoirs

Massaquoi's book is a rather unadorned text of personal memoirs. The author positions himself in the preface of his account offering "this rather different perspective on the Holocaust" (xii), of somebody who "faced the constant threat that Nazi ethnic-cleansing

[3] The present paper was first delivered as a talk at the John F. Kennedy-Institute, FU Berlin, on November 29, 2000 in the context of the lecture series "Encounters on Intricate Issues: Interrelations between Jewish-American and Jewish-German Literary and Cultural Practices" organized by Winfried Fluck, Susanne Rohr, and Sabine Sielke. Special thanks to Sabine Sielke and Susanne Rohr for their helpful comments and questions on the paper and for their thorough editing of this essay.

policies posed to [his] safety alone" (xii).[4] Massaquoi's tale of growing up in Hamburg as the son of a wealthy Liberian, whose father was for a short term appointed consul in Hamburg, and a young German nurse during World War II, depicts the obstacles of growing up black in Hamburg at a time when 'whiteness' was the official policy. Massaquoi recounts navigating the obstacles of racism and the scenarios of exclusion and stigmatization in school, during his apprenticeship, during his work in a factory. He tells of the people he encountered who helped and protected him as well as of the people who harrassed and threatened him. In an atmosphere of racial hatred, Massaquoi repeatedly manages to 'get by,' to survive. The narrative recaptures many instances of close escape and sheer luck. After World War II, he re-establishes contact with his father, spends two years in Monrovia, Liberia, before immigrating to the US in the 1950s where he "immediately felt at home" (413). There, he re-settles, serves in the US-Army, has his own family and works in the publishing sector (as the editor of *Ebony*) immersed in the public and political life of his adopted new home. The author's self-fashioning depicts him as a (black) 'American': his name Hans-Jürgen is altered, the second part of his first name turned into the middle initial.

In the following reading, I will show how Massaquoi chooses to depict his life's story for an American and, by extension, for a German audience. I will point to the strategies of representation at work in the text and single out a number of ambivalences which are generated by these strategies. My somewhat critical perspective is not intended as a critique of the author or of the narrative project itself. Rather, I mean to trace some of the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in the text, i.e. performed by the text, while all along taking seriously Massaquoi's self-professed intention to bear witness.

[4] All references are to Hans J. Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).

The chronological structure of the narrative text contains brief, anecdotal chapters which string up different scenes and situations of Massaquoi's daily life; each episode concludes with an, at times predictable, small final 'effect' aiming at surprise, shock, a lesson learned. The first published English-language version of the book is spiced with terms, phrases, names in italicized German which are then repeated in English in brackets. Massaquoi refers, for instance, to his "Mutti," to the "Schulleiter," the "Vaterland," and "Heil Hitler" (terms not translated), includes German phrases such as "um Himmels willen," "Mitgefangen, mitgehangen," and ends his book with his mother's words "Ende gut, alles gut." The quite numerous German-language interjections can be read as gestures of authenticity helpful to create the atmosphere of the German setting and of the narrator's own insider status and cultural mediator, at least with regard to language.

The narrative (in the English version) is accompanied by two sets of photographs which depict Massaquoi at various ages and various times in his life. The first set quite powerfully shows young Massaquoi as the odd one out amidst his white German contemporaries, childhood friends, his babysitter, his schoolmates. The second set of pictures shows his life and his successful integration in the US: in the military, in his professional life, with his family, with prominent public figures. Unbelonging and belonging are contrasted here and also reveal Massaquoi's ultimate desire to be accepted for what he is, an acceptance, as becomes clear, which he increasingly imagines to find in America only.[5]

[5] In the German translation, the selection of photographs differs slightly: in addition to Massaquoi being depicted in the second set of photos with leading figures of *American* public life, we find a picture of him with Walter Scheel, then *Bundespräsident* of West-Germany, to show Massaquoi's role as a public persona in the US *and* in Germany, again, indicating two contexts of reception. That Massaquoi has become a public persona in Germany (particularly since the publication of his memoirs) speaking out against fascism and racism can also be gathered from his recent article "Wie lange noch zuschauen?" in *Der Spiegel: Jahreschronik 2000* in which he correlates his historical experiences in Nazi Germany with today's resurgence of Nazi-terror.

From beginning to end, one fundamental ambiguity runs through Massaquoi's narrative project with regard to the status and representation of difference and discrimination, with regard to the strategies and the rhetoric Massaquoi chooses to employ. This paradox becomes evident in the oscillation of the text in evaluating difference, i.e. the author's own difference – as alternately positive and negative, an asset and a stigma. Two opposite lines of argument – the notion of him being *just like* the rest, an ordinary German, and the notion of him being *different* from the rest – seem to be competing and to present a constant tension in Massaquoi's narrative operations.

This ambiguity, if not contradiction, between both perspectives is already well-captured in the two different titles of the German and the English version: The phrases "Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany" present an almost prophetic gesture and accord the author an exceptional status. His particular difference, positively phrased, has him play a certain role in history, and bolsters the position of authorship he takes on in order to fulfill his responsibility of witnessing. By contrast, "Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger," the German title which has been found to be rather silly by some critics,[6] on the other hand records the negative consequences of Massaquoi's difference, of his blackness: the continual teasing at school, his being stigmatized and harrassed; his being the odd one out is captured in "the hated chant" (37) which haunts him throughout his childhood. In their varying evaluation of difference, both titles also present different stages of reflection – that of an adult, that of a young boy –, target two different audiences – an American and a German one –, and raise the general question of the forms and modes of autobiographical

[6] See, for instance, Dirk Knipphals' review in *Die Tageszeitung*.

self-invention, an invention which particuarly in the re-creation of a child perspective always presents a retrospectively installed identity.

This ambiguity of difference is introduced in the narrative quite early by the contrast of Massaquoi's life in his grandfather's mansion (he resides in Hamburg as consul of Liberia) where black people are treated with utmost respect and served by whites, and the subsequent life with his mother (after the grandfather and his entourage have picked up and left, his father has left already prior to that) in a working-class neighborhood. Massaquoi's blackness having been a signifier of status and wealth now becomes a signal of his outsider status in a lower class context and his isolation (of being the only one of his kind) in a white society. It is this isolation that is then repeatedly enforced by "constant stares of people that followed us wherever my mother and I went" (24), by a derogatory vocabulary of *Mischling* and *Neger*, and by his being associated with the so-called "Primitive Peoples Exhibit," an African village, at the Hagenbeck Zoo (25).

Massaquoi's text, for the first part of the book, is governed by an impetus to erase this otherness, this difference that sets him apart from his fellow Hamburg citizens. Attempting to show that he was 'just like the others,' the average German boy, he claims the same Nazi fandom everybody else practiced and establishes exactly this fandom as the measure of his own normalcy. Along those lines we can read the choice of the cover photograph which shows young Massaquoi posing with a swastika on his sweater among his blond schoolmates. The image encapsulates otherness and sameness paradigmatically: the physical difference of skin color is set off against the attribute of the swastika emblem, both signifiers virtually undermining each other.

For (shock) effect, the first "brief encounter" which the book presents – even before we encounter his mother or any other family member or friend – is the encounter with Adolf Hitler when attending *Grundschule*:

> Now *we* [my emphasis] would get a chance to see with our own eyes this legendary savior and benefactor of the *Vaterland.* To most of the students, *myself included* [my emphasis], the thrills in store for us seemed beyond our ability to comprehend. [...] The moment everyone had been waiting for was here. Standing erect beside the driver of his black Mercedes convertible, his right arm outstretched in the familiar Nazi salute, the Führer rolled past at a brisk walking pace, his eyes staring expressionlessly ahead. The 'biggest moment in our lives' for which Principal Wriede had prepared us had lasted only a few seconds, but to me they seemed like an eternity. There I was, a kinky-haired, brown-skinned eight-year-old boy amid a sea of blond and blue-eyed kids, filled with childlike patriotism, still shielded by blissful ignorance. *Like everyone around me, I cheered* [my emphasis] the man whose every waking hour was dedicated to the destruction of 'inferior non-Aryan people' like myself, the same man who only a few years later would lead his own nation to the greatest catastrophe in its long history and bring the world to the brink of destruction. (2)

Again, in this encounter Massaquoi's focus is on his inclusion, on his own participation ("most of the students, myself included," "like everyone around me, I cheered"); in cheering Hitler, he feels he belongs and erases the difference that he is so painfully made aware of time and again. Upon meeting Hitler, he momentarily feels his difference to be suspended, feels part of a collective body of pupils. The positive image that Hitler presents is mitigated in the last lines of the quotation, yet, the spectacle remains intact. Recreating the perspective of his youth at times has strange effects in the book as it seems to present these past scenes rather uncritically. Paragraphs like these in a rather ironic way performatively explain Nazi success. This constant mixing of perspectives (child – adult) in the narrative enables the narrative voice to indulge, it seems, once more and rather guiltlessly, in the naive and innocent euphoria of the past, a euphoria that is not so innocent anymore and therefore modified and relativized by a critical and distancing commentary. This manner of cherishing fond memories of the Nazi past while compensating for his past discrimination challenges the narrative logic and creates an odd pair of nostalgia and indictment. Yet, the narrative voice is allowed this retrospective indulgence only *because* of his outsider status, an indulgence which

would not be possible under other kinds of circumstances. It is exactly this outsider status which Massaquoi seems to negotiate, at the same time rejecting it as well as putting it to specific narrative use.

Throughout the first part of the book, we are confronted with the narrator's Nazi craze held on to with a notion of embracing the mainstream with a child-like innocence and naiveté:

> Barely seven, I, of all people, became *an unabashed proponent of the Nazis* simply because they put on the best shows with the best-looking uniforms, best-sounding marching bands, and best-drilled marching columns, all of which appealed to my budding sense of masculinity. [...] Thus, when I had gotten my hands on an embroidered swastika emblem, I had Tante Möller [his babysitter, an elderly woman] – *who didn't know any better* – sew it on a sweater of mine. (41, my emphases)

Here, Nazi fandom is linked to images of masculinity, an important aspect for "fatherless" Massaquoi. In the first years of his life, the figure of the grandfather had loomed large as the patriarchal center of his universe. Massaquoi senior devoted a lot of his time to his grandson. His life without that paternal figure has undergone drastic changes in terms of a social and economic life-style. The life of making ends meet with a single working mother and an absent African father, leaves a kind of oedipal vacuum and a sense of loss. In that sense, I see Massaquoi's admiration for Hitler, that "near-godlike nimbus that placed him beyond blame or criticism" (45) also as filling that vacuum with a figure on which he projects fantasies of stability and protectiveness, realizing painfully only later on that he, in fact, needs protection *from* that kind of person. Prior to that, he even envisions Hitler's support in coping with daily harrassments, a man whose image is everywhere and whose "face [...] had become as familiar to [me] as that of Fräulein Beyle [his teacher]" (41). This aspect of familiarity and the analogy between Hitler and the teacher – a person Massaquoi is extremely fond of because she, in fact, does protect him from racial discrimination – along with a hypnotic fascination with regard to Hitler's voice Massaquoi shares with his classmates, all of these work toward firmly ensconcing Hitler in the author's life. Indeed, for a long time for young Massaquoi the removed Hitler figure and the Nazis which threaten him in his daily life are not related at all:

"I simply could not get myself to blame the architect of the racist policies himself" (92). His own naiveté and ignorance is corroborated rhetorically when he pardons in passing and without any further explanation his babysitter's participation in his scheme: we never learn just why she "didn't know any better."

The subsequent dethroning of this larger than life Hitler-figure comes as a slow shift from fascination to fear triggered by a series of incidents that direct aggression and violence against Massaquoi: drunken SA troopers wanting to display him as an exemplary case of 'racial defilement,' the exclusion from Hitler's youth organization, his mother's loss of her job. Gradually, the city and its familiar places turn hostile territory, familiar spaces become inaccessible, as for instance when he is barred by law from his neighborhood playground. The urban topography becomes racialized, Massaquoi's movements restricted: "My constant endeavor was to remain as inconspicuous as possible in order to avoid unnecessary attention or humiliating ridicule" (60).

The (Afro-)Americanization of the Holocaust

Partly in response to these keenly felt limitations, Massaquoi discovers America, i.e. first, he discovers American movies: "Sunday afternoons [...] I would leave Stückenstrasse and Barmbek far behind and enter a magical realm populated with villains and heroes, gangsters and cops, cowboys and Indians, knights and knaves..." (52). On the screen, Massaquoi enjoys the symbolically acted out conflicts between good and evil in a make-believe, playful fashion with antagonisms removed from those of his own daily life. The utopian dimension of America is later reiterated for 10-year old Massaquoi by two black personae, Joe Louis and Jesse Owens. Both athletes function as empowering role models. After the end of the war,

Massaquoi socializes with black GIs, and 'passes' as an African American when given the chance. This passing anticipates his change of citizenship and national affiliation. The figure of the black soldier also embodies another desire for Massaquoi: brought up with an euphoria and enthusiasm for all things military, yet rejected by all Nazi youth and military organizations, he now encounters black men like him who are allowed to wear a uniform and fight for their country. A new discourse, a new context for militarism and patriotism opens up in which Massaquoi as a black subject is able to participate in and to identify with. The racial discrimination within the US military is only marginally mentioned later on and does not keep Massaquoi, then a resident in the US, from following his mistakenly issued (!) draft orders.

Likewise at the end of the war the author undergoes a crucial inner change after coming into contact with the Allied troops (for which he – significantly enough – works as a translator). In the description of this change Massaquoi takes recourse to an *Ur*-American textual and cultural trope, the conversion experience:

> It dawned on me that in one fell swoop I had ceased to be what I had always considered myself – a German. But somehow, the thought didn't bother me. The Germans never let me fully share in their happy past. Now I didn't need any part of their miserable present. (257)

He feels free of fear, "a burden lifted" (258). Thus, the narrator utilizes the moment when the tables turn on the German population to shift his perspective from wanting to belong to those Germans to choosing another, a new context for himself. In a clean-cut fashion, young Massaquoi disengages from the baggage of his past to freely embrace Anglo-American culture, a culture among which he learns to 'pass' as African American. The experience of conversion as a solution for the narrative dilemma of difference and belonging suits Massaquoi in yet another sense as it is *something that happens to him*, in line with all other things that so far have happened to him in his life. In fact, the narrative on the whole creates a rather weak and vague sense of agency, and this is an important point to which I will return.

Massaquoi performs a pervasive self-troping as an American and, more specifically, as an African American, and this Americanization of self and narrative has many faces.[7] Right at the beginning of his book he positions himself by drawing on the words of Frederick Douglass, the words of another 'survivor,' in order to contextualize his project firmly in a discourse of racial emancipation and to correlate African American slavery with his own experience under National Socialism. Another case could be made here for an "Americanization of the Holocaust," indeed, perhaps more to the point, for an "Afro-Americanization of the Holocaust."[8] Further references to that analogy can be found throughout the text: the chapter which relates the end of the war is entitled "Free at Last!" (250), borrowing from Civil Rights rhetoric. Quite frequently, the text employs American topoi and American narrative traditions, or, even more specifically, African American topoi and traditions – the pattern of bondage/flight/escape, the rhetoric of testifying, of conversion and of upward mobility – and echoes the self-confidence and empowerment of that tradition and its representatives. It is toward prominent African American figures – such as Joe Louis and Jesse Owens – that the young Hans Massaquoi looks for empowerment in times of crisis; their very presence mitigates his self-loathing as a black boy. In that sense, Massaquoi's text seems indeed to be different from other forms of Holocaust writing as he inserts himself and his narrative into an (African-)American rhetoric and racial discourse.

Perhaps this explains why throughout the book, we get only brief glimpses of the author's own feelings. In fact, the narrative is characterized by an overall lack of introspection, of inner life explorations. The text is neither fundamentally politically nor philosophically charged. It is, quite drastically put, not analytical at all. We may speculate as to why this is so. Massaquoi's intention may have been to write a well-digestable book that

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[7] I have previously referred to Massaquoi's formal self-transformation through a slight modification of his name.

[8] This phrase is adapted from Hilene Flanzbaum's publication *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999).

does not put off any part of his prospective readership. We can choose to see this intention to spare the audience as a strategic decision or as a mechanism of self-protection.[9] Both options, however, leave us wondering about the narrator's state of mind. As a self-proclaimed witness – and perhaps this is what he is above all else: a witness – he offers us a narrative of the surface, which does not gesture toward any depth or hidden implications. His interior life is cut short, there is no probing, no sense of inner agony. In employing familiar topoi of American narrative traditions he almost seems to mask and to downplay, if not to outright trivialize his experiences and that of the Holocaust. His life is, almost playfully, depicted as a series of more or less dangerous 'adventures.'

In making sense of this overall 'absence' I have described, we may choose to read the issue of passing as quite symptomatic of the protagonist's strategy to come to terms with *difference* as well as with *representation*: in the same way that he 'passes' as African American, i.e. he desires to belong to a group and be allowed a group identity, we can see his whole narrative 'passing' as the tale of an American hero – rather than a victim of the Holocaust. This self-fashioning of the author as an adventurous young man, as an African American man, I should add, in its adaptation of well-known black and white American textual topoi invents a new kind of narrative formula, so to speak, new formulaic codes for writing the Holocaust *from the perspective of an African American.* In doing so Massaquoi creates a particular space for African American readers of Holocaust writing, offering ways in which they may relate to this historical experience through familar narrative patterns. In the process of mediating the experiences of his past and of couching them in a vocabulary reminiscent of the slave narrative and other American narrative forms, it seems to me that

[9] In that sense Massaquoi's text could claim, once again, a proximity to the historical American slave narratives and their gesture of unspeakability, a rhetorical strategy which has been analyzed by Toni Morrison in "The Site of Memory," *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton, 1987) 103-24.

Massaquoi tries to invent himself as a kind of trickster figure who displays strategies of survival as he goes along and ultimately triumphs in the face of adversity.

Earlier appearances of this trickster figure can be found in another literary portrayal of Massaquoi, written before his self-authored book of memoirs, by journalist and writer Ralph Giordano. In his novel *Die Bertinis*, the epic chronicle of a family of partly Jewish descent living (and hiding) in Hamburg during the Nazi era, Giordano introduces a character named "Mickey" as a "Barmbeker Berühmtheit":

> Es war *Mickey*, seinem Äußeren nach ein Vollafrikaner, aber, so wurde in den Straßenschluchten des Viertels geraunt, die Frucht stürmischer Liebe zwischen einer deutschen Mutter und *einem feinen Pinkel vom Schwarzen Kontinent.* [...] Aufgewachsen hier im Norden Hamburgs, unter ausnahmslos weiße Menschen verschlagen, stellte Mickey, äußerlich ganz nach seinem Erzeuger ausgeschlagen, in dem zweihunderttausend Köpfe zählenden Stadtteil eine ungeheuerliche Rarität dar. Ohne je eine Palme, eine Kokosnuß am Stamm, den Kilimandscharo oder den Glast über der verdurstenden Steppe erblickt zu haben, war er hier groß geworden und, wie es hieß, von seiner Mutter stoisch gegen alle Attacken solange verteidigt, bis der dunkle Sohn die Fähigkeit dazu selbst gewann.[10]

In the course of the novel, Giordano fleshes out the figure of Mickey, alias "Hans Massakon" as a friend of Roman Bertini and his family and portrays him not only as a street-wise fighter and survivor, but also as a future African American:

> [...] Wieviel Bindung an das Land, in dem er [Mickey] aufgewachsen war und das er nie verlassen hatte, war geblieben? Roman Bertini bekam auf diese nichtgestellten Fragen eine indirekte aber vollständige Antwort. Eine Antwort, die keinen Zweifel daran ließ, daß Hans Massakon, genannt Mickey, nicht die geringste Bindung mehr an Deutschland fühlte, daß da nichts war als totale Beziehungslosigkeit zum Land seiner Geburt, zu seinen Menschen, ja zu den eigenen Erinnerungen seiner zwanzig Lebensjahre.
> Denn Mickey erging sich nun in dichten und blühenden Zukunftsvisionen; plastisch, als seien sie greifbar nahe, fast schon verwirklicht, so inbrünstig beschwor er sie, und sie alle bündelte er in drei Buchstaben – USA! Dorthin wollte Mickey, *gleich danach*, wenn *alles vorbei* sein würde. Mit dem ersten Schiff, lieber aber noch mit dem Flugzeug, weil das schneller ging über den Großen Teich, und gleich tief hinein in den Kontinent [...] – hin zu seinem Volk, den Schwarzen Nordamerikas.

[10] Ralph Giordano, *Die Bertinis* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985) 115-16. For further descriptions, which confirm that Mickey's identity is modelled after Hans J. Massaquoi, see pages 329-30 of the novel.

> Siegessicher, zukunftsgewiß, anscheinend sämtlicher Gegenwartslasten enthoben, so stand Mickey vor Roman und fragte: "Und was werdet ihr machen – danach?", aber nur, um sogleich selbst die Antwort zu geben, seiner Meinung nach die einzig natürliche und denkbare: "Klar, ihr werdet auch Deutschland verlassen!"[11]

Giordano sketches Mickey/Massaquoi as a counterpart to the Bertini-brothers who will continue to see Germany, more precisely Hamburg, as their home in spite of the experiences under the Nazi regime. Mickey's orientation toward the US is something which Roman Bertini cannot match with an optimistic vision of his own. Giordano's Massaquoi appears as an inventive trickster who will become "the man of the hour" after the war is over: he is able to procur seemingly endless amounts of food for his mother and the Bertinis, and he moves freely through the occupied city being mistaken by all the soldiers for a black GI.[12]

This brief excursus on Giordano's novel is meant to suggest that Massaquoi may have used Giordano's novel as a point of departure for his own version of that same past. Thus it may be in *Die Bertinis* that we see the literary figure of Massaquoi as survivor and trickster emerge. We know from public statements by both Giordano and Massaquoi that the former has repeatedly urged the latter to write down the story of his life and that Giordano has accompanied the writing process and has promoted the final result. The latter is reflected in Giordano's afterword to the German edition of Massaquoi's book.

Yet Mickey's/Massaquoi's self-confident gestures and lightness of tone do not work as well in Massaquoi's own text as they do in Giordano's novel. If you choose to present yourself as a survivor and winner in this particular historical context, as does Massaquoi, what kind of narrative status, what kind of narrative space do you give to those who certainly did not survive and did not 'win'? It is in the representation of Jewish experiences, in the way they are recorded by Massaquoi, that the failure or at least the less successful part of his representational strategies and politics becomes most obvious.

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[11] Ibid, 332.
[12] Ibid, 652.

The Jewish Presence

Recounting his autobiographical story as a story of his own victimhood, Massaquoi's narrative creates an awareness for other victims but does not provide them with a lot of narrative space: young Massaquoi is absorbed in handling his own difference. Yet he does register the antisemitic tone and policy of the Nazis. His reaction to these attitudes once again reveal his wish to belong: he naively mimics the prevalent prejudices.

> One day, as my mother and I were on our way to her cleaning job, we noticed groups of SA and SS troopers lining the downtown streets. Many of them were carrying signs that read DEUTSCHE KAUFT NICHT BEI JUDEN (Germans, do not buy from Jews). Inspired by the signs, I confided to my mother that I, too, hated Jews [...]. (57)

Here, as in many other instances, his mother speaks as the didactic corrective of her son's opinions. Overall, however, the presence, the harrassment, and growing absence of the Jewish population is not dwelled upon at any length in Massaquoi's text. One brief chapter headed "Jews" describes the initial verbal racialization under Nazi rule. Another chapter describes the 'move' of a Jewish friend to another city and the hear-say about concentration camps being "hell on earth" (198), although Massaquoi adds that he did not know about these places for sure (again, we have the oscillating perspectives of child and adult).

In anecdotal fashion he describes two individual scenes of horror and pain, one of them witnessed on the streets of Hamburg, when a group of Jewish girls and women are guarded to sweep the streets of Hamburg on a cold winter day without warm clothing, a scene of the "living dead" (228). And later, evacuated from Hamburg to the Harz mountains, he observes:

> A convoy of open military trucks passed daily by the window of my room at Harzstraße 6. The trucks carried an unusual cargo – bald-shaven, emaciated-looking men in vertically striped convict garb, with hollow cheeks and huge, expressionless eyes that made their heads look like skulls. (213)

These daily one way trips to the top of the Kohnstein mountain attract Massaquoi's attention. "Spurred by curiosity and boredom" he takes a 'daring' walk into off-limits territory to unravel "the secret of the Kohnstein." In the process he is caught, suspected of espionage, yet, walks free after an interview with the police as his relatives are in good standing in the community (216). The unfolding of this episode displaces Jewish suffering by the narrator's own cheekiness: it relates how Massaquoi got into trouble in a way that is reminiscent of adventure tales in youth literature. In fact, the tension between what is being told and how it is being told seems rather bewildering – almost to the effect that we perceive of Hamburg (or the Harz mountains) during World War II as one big *Abenteuerspielplatz* peopled by mostly good-natured Germans (his babysitter was mentioned earlier as a case in point) afraid of and/or seduced by the Nazis.

All in all, instances of Jewish suffering do not receive any further commentary or analysis. They appear like uncanny presences in a life depicted from a child's perspective which keeps a certain lightness of mood, a nonchalant tone, a tone of triumph and survival. The self-image created by the author and the sense of terror implicit in any portrayal of the Holocaust co-exist uneasily in Massaquoi's tale.

Let me conclude my discussion of Massaquoi's text by returning to the question of audience and by pointing to an odd narrative moment which is perhaps symptomatic of the overall intention of the book as geared toward an American readership. This moment is far from issues of race or the Holocaust, it is about smoking. Writing as a fully Americanized individual, Massaquoi has adopted a late twentieth century US-American non-smoking attitude that in the context of World War II sounds quite hilarious. Upon being offered a cigarette by the first British soldier he meets, he proclaims:

> Up to that point I had steadfastly resisted all peer pressure to take up the smoking habit, but now I didn't feel that I should reject this first expression of cordiality from

> my liberators. So I gratefully accepted and lighted up as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with my allies. (256)

Thus Massaquoi's conversion is sealed with a peace pipe, a cigarette that is legitimized in this 'American' book by its symbolic value of exchange and successful intercultural communication.

III. Jeannette Lander's Modernist Novel

Jeannette Lander's life did not lead the author from the Old world to the New but vice versa. She was born in New York City in 1931 as the oldest daughter of a Jewish-Polish immigrant family. She grew up, however, not in New York but in Atlanta, i.e. in the racially segregated Atlanta of the 1940s, as a resident of the city's black ghetto, a place where her father had a special permission to open and run a grocery store. It is this particular situation – the Jewish Polish immigrants living in a black neighborhood of the American South during World War II – that forms the core of Lander's first novel *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K.* It relates the coming-of-age of 14-year-old Itke Kovsky (the author's *alter ego*) in the black ghetto of Atlanta during one summer, a summer the narrative condenses to one week. In its non-mimetic but rather expressionistic portrayal the text describes Itke's first attempts to free herself from her Jewish immigrant parents, her first sexual experiences and her desire to take part in the African American culture of the streets and the neighborhood which she encounters in her father's store and which strike her as more attractive than her Jewish life at home with its rules and regulations. The interaction of Itke and her family with the African American ghetto residents and customers is at the center of the novel. It constantly negotiates the possibilities and limitations of cultural contact, and it exposes the hybridity of every day cultural and linguistic practices by which this setting is shaped regardless of, perhaps even in spite of, racial prejudices and segregation. The ghetto is thus both a somewhat utopian

narrative space and a space in which racial violence is exerted by white authorities against black residents. This violence is witnessed and at times quite literally felt by Ike and her family while the 'news' of the Holocaust reach them from Europe.

In view of its setting, theme, and (as we will see) language, the novel about Itke's growing up in 'Afro-America' challenges and extends several critical contexts. As a German woman writer of the post-World War II era, Lander dedicates her writings to places and themes of an apparently 'un-German' nature. In *Itke* as well as in other novels the author explores the subject of otherness – be it in the black ghetto of Atlanta, in Sri Lanka, in Greece, in Poland or in Israel – and the ways in which individuals engage and deal with cultural difference.[13]

In the context of American literature, Lander's novel may be reminiscent of Jewish immigrant fiction, such as Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, a novel which is also focused upon a grocery store. However, due to its idiosyncratic German-language usage Lander's text differs significantly in its approach to the American theme of immigration. The novel's linguistic dimension as well as its main focus on the interaction between Jewish immigrants and African Americans are as genuine as is her geographic focus on the American South and thus create a new version of the immigrant experience. In fact, the Jewish experience in the South has only recently been more fully and thoroughly addressed by writers and critics. A case in point is Stella Suberman's family memoir *The Jew Store* (1998) which relates the history of a Jewish immigrant family running the proverbial "Jew Store" in rural Tennessee. Suberman's recollections reiterate the role of African Americans for the Southern way of life

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[13] Jeannette Lander, *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K.* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1971); subsequent references to this book will appear in the text. Other works by the author showing her concern with otherness in and outside of Germany are *Auf dem Boden der Fremde* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1972); *Die Töchter* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1976); *Eine unterbrochene Reise* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1996); *Jahrhundert der Herren* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1993) and *Robert* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998). *Überbleibsel: Eine kleine Erotik der Küche* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1995) is a kind of 'culinary memoir' of the author combining autobiographical elements of her time in the US and Germany with the cooking repertoire and practices that have evolved from this life.

and the ways in which the Jewish immigrants try to find their own social and cultural niche, a niche which is accorded to them by white Southerners as being 'above' black people in the social hierarchy.[14] It is this social hierarchy which Lander's novel addresses and which is observed and interrogated through Itke's eyes.

An Aesthetics of Difference and the African American Presence

The exceptional theme and setting of Lander's novel is matched by its strategies of representation. A closer look at the opening of the book conveys the atmosphere and spells out some of the crucial narrative features, features which unfold an aesthetic of difference throughout the text:

> Itke.
> Itke mit krausem Haar, mit dunklen Augen, lebt in einem Kreis in einem Kreis in einem Kreis. Der innerste ist jiddisch. Der mittlere ist schwarzamerikanisch. Der äußere ist weißprotestantisch-amerikanisch tief im Süden.
> Itke-ich. Im vierzehnten Sommer. Tiefsüdensommer beginnen im Mai.
> Lebt in ihrer Wohnung, der jiddischen Wohnung, über dem Lebensmittel- und Kolonialwaren-laden, dem "Kromladen" für Negerkundschaft im Negerviertel in der immer größer, schneller, besser werdenden Stadt Atlanta, wo ein weißer Lebensmittelhändler ausnahmsweise in der Wohnung wohnen darf, die an seinen Laden anschließt, auch im Negerviertel.
> Lebt nicht unter ihresgleichen. Erste Generation Itke, mit langen dunklen Locken Morgen für Morgen von europäischen Mammahänden gekämmt und gelegt (Oi ayoi, a jiddische Mammeniu), geht in die Schule unter Einheimischen, hundertfünfzigprozent blond von innen her seit Generationen im tiefen Süden. Itke mit Rebekkaaugen, Rebekka und Ruth, Morgen für Morgen Maismehlbrötchen, die Negerhände backen, in Mamma Kovskys koscherer Küche kauend, in der blaßweißen Schule verdauend, im Außenkreis. Nicht unter ihresgleichen.
> Abend für Abend kommt Itke-ich unter Menschen mit Klarinettenstimmen in Kovsky's 'Kromladen', Tattes 'Krom'; Tatte ist polnischjiddischer nicht blondyankee 'daddy', Mittelkreis. Itke wiegt süße Kartoffeln aus. Wickelt Wassermelonen ein zu Melodien von Kunden gesungen, gesummt, Mittelkreismelodien -
> Nobody knows the trouble I see
> Nobody knows but Jesus. (13)

[14] See Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store. A Family Memoir* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 1998), 12-15, 22, 26-30, 33, 63, 65-67.

This opening poignantly relates the narrative setting to the immigrant identity of the protagonist Itke, who finds herself immersed in different cultural spheres. Several strategies operate in this passage that are somewhat typical of the novel at large:

First, Lander accounts for the cultural difference in Itke's every-day life in a trope which organizes difference spatially. Her 'rings of identity' establish a dialectic between Itke's identity and the places of difference she inhabits 'not among her own,' an imagery allowing for immersion, for entering and leaving, for a performative understanding of cultural difference. This scenario portrays the racializations of Itke's world, a geography which in the course of the narrative is extended to also include references to the world beyond the ghetto.

Second, difference is indicated through actions and in terms of the language mix that characterize the different spheres of interaction and cultural contact in the novel. We can catch a glimpse of Lander's strategy of multilingualism in the first paragraph of the book: embedded into a German sentence, the Yiddish interjection "Oi ayoi, a yiddische Mammenui" linguistically marks Itke's "innermost" ring. The two lines at the end of the paragraph taken from an African American spiritual – "Nobody knows the trouble I see / Nobody knows but Jesus" – are incorporated in English into Lander's original German text to mark Itke's "middle" ring. Thus, Lander's first paragraph gives us an impression of the cultural contact at work in the community. Throughout the novel five different languages and language varieties, German, Standard English, African American Vernacular English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, are presented and incorporated. Lander's 'languages of America' are further accentuated by the texture of the novel: poems, proverbs, songs, and prayers appear in all the different languages.

Lander's word-play is also reflected by neologisms which contract several words into one, as "blondyankee", "Itkeweißjüdisch." This strategy of defamiliarization recreates the flow of the English language in the more abrupt sounding German sentences. It may also function as a self-reflexive ironic device that puns on the German language as such (it is often considered to be a

characteristic of German that individual words can be strung into long compounds). Lander's invention of these compounds, however, signals a modernist's struggle with and against language. It is in instances like these that we can sense Lander – a non-native speaker/writer with a more detached perspective toward German idioms – experiment in her writing. Lander wrote a German text about an American locale, yet, she chose a German that is twisted, distorted, and creatively adapted to her particular needs. She is 'othering' the language she uses: it becomes the hybrid language of a migrant.

Overall, language as a medium of expression and innovation is much more prominently and self-consciously addressed in Lander's text than it is in Massaquoi's. And there are other points of divergence: whereas Massaquoi Americanizes his theme and style, Lande, in her search for an appropriate German-language linguistic idiom to convey an American and African American reality, 'de-Americanizes' her narrative, its theme and style. This 'de-Americanization' not only leads to a new kind of language. It also creates a new literary space for a desegregation and dissection of American racial matters.

Third, among the tropes employed in the paragraph above is the musical metaphor of the "Klarinettenstimmen" conveying, next to linguistic difference, also a specific acoustic impression. Along those lines the store itself at times appears like a stage on which differences are performatively, musically, theatrically enacted and negotiated. This stage effect functions throughout the text as a centralizing force. The location of the store connects the privacy of Jewish family life to the African American neighborhood and figures as the site of numerous dialogues and interactions. The narrative focus on this interaction modifies Itke's narrative position as the (only) main character. Although Itke certainly figures as the protagonist of the novel, the text constantly shifts perspective from first to third person narration (evidenced in "Itke-ich") in order to give narrative space to additional characters. Apart from the Jewish

family only black characters appear in the narrative whom we meet as they come to the grocery store to do their shopping, pausing to chat and to catch up on the news of the community.

The store as a strategic narrative site allows for a literary exploration of a number of constellations: it positions the immigrant, the immigrant's family and community, within the complex and overdetermined topography of the city (Itke's reality "rings" indicate the different realms and spheres) while also suggesting the vulnerability of the immigrant's status ("not among her own"). This positionality of the store is introduced from the beginning as a precarious place, inhabited as an *exception* and *with special permission* by a Jewish immigrant family in the black quarter (we learn that, in fact, Kovsky's predecessor was killed). This special status echoes Massaquoi's negotiation of difference: in both texts the exceptional, the other, the odd one out is introduced as inhabiting the narrative's centerspace. Lander's store itself presents a microcosm and a site for the interaction between the Jewish family and the African American residents, interactions structured by the generation gap, racial conflict, class differences, religion and religious practice. In that sense, it is an "in-between space," a place where different cultures meet and merge.[15] The contigency of difference in this context is alluded to in the figure of Itke herself and her initial introduction "Mit krausem Haar, mit dunklen Augen": this characterization of the Jewish teenager as nappy-haired and dark eyed could also be read as the description of an African American teenager and establishes a textual ambivalence which persists throughout the book.

A further characteristic of the novel is its focus on dialogue. Rather than unfolding an elaborate plot (in fact, the plot can be summarized very briefly), the text concentrates on processes of communication, on daily encounters, on orality. It is in these dialogues – usually taking place in Kovsky's store – that linguistic and cultural difference is self-reflexively addressed, both playfully and seriously. For instance, one scene depicts Kovsky as he is

[15] This term is taken from Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 1.

ridiculed for his inability to properly pronounce the English "th" – he says "tumtacks" instead of thumbtacks. He wittily responds to this criticism by pointing to the mispronunciation of his name on the part of his African American customers: "Wie lang' kimmste aher zi mir in mein Krom arein un sagst 'Kovky', hah? As ich heeß 'Kovsky'! 'Sk'. Amol werd ich dir lernen Polnisch!" (74). In another situation, speaking about an apparent commonplace, Ty tells the 'ignorant' Kovsky: "Das weiß hier jeder Neger, der schwarz ist." Kovksy replies: "Siehste, Ty, farderfar weeß ich es ober nicht, weil ich bin a Neger, weleche ich bin weiß" (72). Here, the term "negro" is not presented as a racial signifier but, more generally, marks a marginal social position within the urban geography of Atlanta inhabited by the African American as well as the Jew: both, Jones and Kovsky, are residents of the black ghetto. The manner of speech in this instance further voices Lander's hybrid textuality as it calls upon the traditional African American narrative mode of "signifyin(g)." Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin and Testifyin* has elaborated on the characteristics of "signifyin(g)" as a "rhetorical strategy" and as a "ritual speech act" in African American language. According to her, "signifyin(g) is "humorous, ironic," a "punning, play on words" and an "introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected."[16] In Lander's text the "signifyin(g)" involves Ty Jones and Kovsky, an African American and a Jew; the signifier "negro" becomes – 'logically unexpected' – de-essentialized and transforms into a self-reflexive linguistic marker.

Lander's attempt at creating a multicultural and multilingual novel, especially her linguistic experiments have not been appreciated by her readership. Prior to popular discourses of multiculturalism, prior to a broader reception of American (multi)culture in Germany, prior also to a broader reception of African American popular culture, *Itke* creates its own

[16] Quoting from Geneva Smitherman: *Talkin' and Testifyin'. The Language of Black Americans* (Boston: Houghton, 1977), Henry Louis Gates, Jr., describes "signifyin(g)" as a "black mode of discourse" in a large variety of African American literary texts. See his *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 94.

multicultural repertoire from scratch. The aesthetics of difference that emerges from this undertaking present a textuality in black and white, African American and Jewish, and all of it in German; a mode of representation which self-consciously cherishes and indulges in difference, eloquently ornamenting and exposing it and exposing her audience to it rather than mediating or minimizing otherness. The African American presence is thus not merely symptomatic but actually thematic. Contrary to Massaquoi's representational strategies, Lander's aesthetics of difference does not oscillate between affirmation and assimilation but reaches out to connect to 'different kinds of differences,' if you will, trying to carve out a narrative space where difference(s) can belong, a linguistic and a narrative form, in which it can continue to exist.[17]

The Holocaust: Synchronizing Suffering

All of the interactions in the Atlanta ghetto are placed against the backdrop of the Holocaust happening in Europe. In fact, the Holocaust enters Lander's narrative through repeated references that evoke this dimension in its historical *Gleichzeitigkeit* and as a historical parallel. As can be expected, Jewish immigrants and African American residents relate differently to the news from overseas, and nowhere does this become more apparent as in the scene which describes the joy and mood for celebration among the African Americans upon Joe Louis' victory in the heavy weight boxing championship (the year is 1942). At first, Hannah Kovsky, Itke's mother, enjoys looking on as the African American neighborhood cheers, sings, and celebrates; yet, Max Kovsky who listens to the news on the radio, to "Walterwinchellnachrichten" draws her attention to news of quite a different nature:

[17] I assume that Lander's audience has mainly been German. Currently, the first English translation of the novel is under way by Lawrence Rosenwald. Chapter II of the novel has already appeared in *The Antioch Review* (Spring) 2000: 134-62.

> "[...] nunmehr zuverlässige Berichte. Hitler und seine feilen Anhänger lösen das 'Judenproblem' durch Verfolgung! durch Vernichtung! Nur das schnellste Eingreifen amerikanischer Bomber [...]" (65)

This scene closes with the sharp contrast between African American joy, pride, and empowerment and Jewish pain and suffering, a sensation which catapults Hannah Kovsky's thoughts back to scenes of her past, to her experiences of being discriminated as a Jew. We perceive the isolation of both groups within their respective emotional worlds, an isolation that is in conflict with larger parts of the novel and its general atmosphere of cultural exchange.

Regarding the news of the war and the Holocaust, both groups are positioned on different sides, yet in somewhat similar situations. One of Lander's scenes explicitly addresses the parallel of racial discrimination in the US and in Germany. Brother Wilson, a black neighbor, who enters Kovsky's store in his uniform just after having been drafted, discusses the segregation and stigmatization of blacks in the military:

> "Da führt die good ole USA gegen den deutschen Rassismus einen heiligen Krieg im Namen der Menschenrechte und so'ner Scheiße, 'schuldigung, Miss Itke, so'ner Scheiße noch mehr. Meine Kompanie schält vorwiegend Kartoffeln und wischt den Brauseraum auf, und wenn die Toiletten verstopft sind, da graben komischerweise alles Neger im Kot 'rum. [...]
> In den Blutbanken wird aber das gespendete Blut streng nach Rassen getrennt aufgehoben und streng nach Rassen getrennt verwendet. Dafür, für diese Trennung, hat sich das humanitäre Rote Kreuz eingesetzt; dafür bekam es von der fortschrittlichen demokratischen Regierung der freiheitlichen Vereinigten Staaten ausdrücklich Genehmigung. So nach Hitler-Vorbild, verstehst du? Judenblut, Niggerblut. Weißes Blut. [...]
> Es ist nicht mein Land. Mein Vaterland ist es. Hat mich geprägt, zufällig, mich ernährt, wenn du willst, kläglich, aber ernährt, solange ich unmündig war. Mein Vaterland wird's auch bleiben; mich unmündig halten, solange ich lebe. Ich komme hier nie zur Volljährigkeit, und die ist die Voraussetzung für die menschenwürdige Wahl einer Heimat. Mein Vaterland steckt mich in seine Uniform. Für meine Heimat würde ich ohne Uniform kämpfen. Aber ich habe keine. Ich kenne keine Heimat, für die ich sterben wollte." (200)

The heated dialogue which evolves among Brother Wilson, Max Kovsky, and Sonny (Kovsky's nephew visiting from New York) centers on the unfair treatment of blacks in the US military in comparison to the racial inhumanities perpetrated by others, i.e. the Germans.

It also highlights the comparable diasporic sentiment of Jews and African Americans that pervades the book. The experience of 'unbelonging' (of not being " unter ihresgleichen" as it is phrased in the first paragraph of the novel) is intensified for the Jewish immigrant family in their black microcosm when they learn about the persecution of Jews all over Europe. For the black characters their second-class status is reflected in their segregated neighborhood and the harsh treatment they receive from white authorities. Brother Wilson's critique contrasts with Massaquoi's embracing of the American military, which not only liberates him from a terrifying regime but also allows him to join its ranks as a black soldier. Whereas Lander's text sees US-American racism canceling out the credibility of any engagement on the part of the US government with regard to other minorities and the infringement of their human rights, Massaquoi's perspective relativizes US-American racism against blacks as being a far cry from what he has experienced as an Afro-German living under Nazi rule.

The parallel between African American and Jewish experiences is further explored by Lander's novel in the daily dialogues between both groups taking place in the social space of the store highlighting differences as well as similarities. Kovsky's description of himself as a white negro is one case in point, his recounting of his passage to America another: "Auf dem großen Meer bin ich gewesen sieben Wochen lang, wo ich lag im Schiffsboden tief unten im Schiffsbauch im Meerbauch mit dreiundsechzig Mann" (16). In one of the encounters between Kovsky and Ty Jones, an African American customer, the latter jokingly projects that he might be mistaken for a Jewish immigrant as a result of hanging around Kovsky's store and picking up his accent and language. Kovsky's no-nonsense reply ("Asoi schwarze wandern nicht ein in Amerika arein."), is reaffirmed by Jones: "Das ist ein gottverdammter Fakt [...] Und die wissen auch warum!" (74).

While the black ghetto constitutes the space in which the characters interact, it is actually the lack of space, symbolically and literally, that seems to be at stake continuously;

both groups, it is suggested, wonder about their 'home,' and both, we learn, have nowhere to go. Lander's microcosm of the grocery store as an unlikely island in the black ghetto is a precarious textual construction indicating a repertoire of intercultural communication shared by the African American customers and the Jewish family, yet also exposing the pressure put upon this interaction and the strain under which it threatens to escalate into violence. This escalation is portrayed toward the end of the novel when Kovsky's store is broken into and robbed in a heated conflict between African Americans and the white police. Kovsky is left with shelves full of more or less damaged articles and with a police injunction that his store is to remain closed for two weeks. Knowing the black community cannot buy food anywhere else but from him, he pedals through the streets, giving away the remaining goods that he is not allowed to sell. This scene closes the novel with a gesture of redemption rather than retaliation.

Predating Massaquoi's analogy of US-American slavery and German National Socialism, his way of describing the latter by way of a rhetoric of the former, Lander places African American and Jewish characters, racism in the American South and the Holocaust happening in Europe in a context of analogy. The author anticipates this comparison in all its precariousness as she takes recourse in another set of framing images.[18] These images evoke, on the one hand, the Yiddish *Dybbuk*, a play in which the ghost of a man who has died from thwarted love enters the body of his beloved on her wedding day and has her dance the dance of madness. On the other hand, black folklore and its imitations in black-face minstrelsy constitute the second set of references. Thus Lander's literary composition hinges on a formal structure that the author describes in her preface as a syncretistic blend, a hybrid form deriving

[18] A number of critics have commented on the controversies these kinds of comparisons may trigger in other texts and contexts. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993) 217-18; Walter Benn Michaels, "'You Who Never Was There': Slavery and the New Historicism – Deconstruction and the Holocaust," and Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, "Suffering as a Moral Beacon: Blacks and Jews", both in *The Americanization of the Holocaust,* 181-97, 198-210.

from two different but related and analogous sources of folklore. The dramaturgy of her narrative is modelled on these sources and includes stage directions prior to every chapter which present a summary of every scene. Chapter one, for instance, is headed as follows:

> Minstrel-Schau, in der Itke die Kreise ihrer Umwelt beschreibt, um festzustellen, welche Grenzen sie haben.
> 1. Auftritt: Itke singt das Lied einer Rebecca-äugigen unter den Klarinettenstimmen der Neger.
> 2. Auftritt: Tatte und Mamma spielen die Melodie vom Andersein auf Schlüsseln und Rollo (11)

Following four chapters framed as minstrel shows and four chapters presented as remodeled scenes from *The Dybbuk*, chapter nine announces the coalescence of both genres: "Gleichzeitig ein Akt des *Dibbuk* sowie eine *Minstrelschau*, in denen Itke und die Neger gleichzeitig ausbrechen" (237). Through this enactment of black and Jewish folklore, Lander manages not only to fuse culturally distinct art forms but also – in a non-hierarchical way – to alternately address an individual as well as a collective level of cultural and racial conflict. The narrative of Itke's coming-of-age, her increased alienation from her Jewish familial background, is paralleled by a development within the African American community which depicts the characters, socially marginalized and alienated through the racism they encounter, as increasingly prone to violent reactions. Both strive for means of self-assertion and for articulating resistance: Itke rebels against her parents, their Jewish orthodoxy and morality (and the hypocrisy she perceives at the root of it); the African American community turns against the white police which patrols the ghetto and abuses its inhabitants.

The dramaturgy of both *The Dybbuk* and of minstrelsy cannot only be read as attempts at synchronizing Jewish- and African American histories and experiences. It is also a self-reflexive commentary on matters of authorship: both present codes of speaking through and for somebody else. In creating a narrative voice that appears as a kind of minstrel figure, a kind of ghost, the novel self-consciously addresses issues of mediation, translation, exaggeration, perhaps even falsification, and – by extension – also the practice of speaking in

another/a foreign language. Rather than bolstering the position of author and narrator, it eloquently undermines, or at least questions, notions of authenticity. That this interrogation does not trivialize historical memory and past suffering becomes evident in the multivoiced, dialogical democracy which the text designs with its de-hierarchized and open narrative structure.

IV. Conclusion

Massaquoi's racialized topography of Hamburg may be viewed within the context of the debate around the "Americanization of the Holocaust," the title of an article by Alvin Rosenfeld in which he diagnoses the American tendency "to downplay or deny the dark and brutal sides of life and to place a preponderant emphasis on the saving power of individual moral conduct." And where he "wonders how any story of the crimes of the Nazi era can remain faithful to the specific features of those events and at the same time address contemporary American social and political agendas."[19] Yet, we can also choose to see this process of "Americanization" as a strategy of actualization, of translation, of making the Holocaust intelligible for the contemporary context in which it is viewed. Massaquoi may have felt that the US-American/African American rhetoric and topoi he uses lend themselves particularly well for a description of his past while also creating a firm subject position from which to speak in the present.[20]

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[19] Alvin Rosenfeld, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," *Commentary* (June 1995): 35, qtd. in Flanzbaum 4-5.

[20] Flanzbaum quotes Michael Berenbaum who advocates this kind of actualization which Massaquoi 'performs' in another context, the discussion of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: according to Berenbaum it is important "to tell the story of the Holocaust in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in San Francisco, but with a black leader from Atlanta, a Midwestern farmer, or a Northeastern industrialist." Qtd. in Flanzbaum 5. See

Jeannette Lander's novel presents a different mode of translation, that of a racialized setting offered to a German readership, a setting which at first glance seems geographically and culturally far removed from Germany, from German history, and from the Holocaust. However, Leslie Adelson, one of the few critics who has engaged Lander's text, argues – from the perspective of a US-American scholar of (West)German post-war women's writing – that Lander's novel may in fact operate with strategic "displacements" in which *the* central historical experience becomes "refracted."[21] Lander does not attempt a representation of the Holocaust head-on. Itke's identity as part of a multicultural microcosm shows her positionality not – or, as Adelson has it, no longer – "predicated on the centrality of the Holocaust in the construction of 'Jewishness' vis-à-vis 'Germanness.'"[22] Instead Lander's book offers to a German audience a form of racial discourse which perhaps can also be described as an American or an 'Americanized' one: it offers a reconfiguration of difference involving "other 'others'" (Adelson's term) and a dialogic model in which this otherness can be negotiated. That this translation did not work so well in the early 1970s is reflected in the novel's reception, or rather in the lack thereof. Rendering a 1940s black vernacular in artificial German seems to have estranged rather than attracted a German audience.

Yet if we take into account the various dimensions of geographic and symbolic locale in Lander's and Massaquoi's writing, the various narrative movements which the texts enact, and the various identificatory and dis-identificatory gestures they perform, we may conclude that both texts mirror what they do not talk about: Massaquoi's Hamburg may have to do as much with Atlanta, as, ultimately, Lander's Atlanta has to do with Hamburg.

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also Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays on Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

[21] Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History* 89.

[22] Ibid.

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