



Maybe I should start with a personal anecdote. Back in the day, among many other newspapers and magazines, I was writing for Germany's biggest hip-hop magazine, *Juice*. Even if there was nothing radically political about the magazine, it gave me the chance to interview and meet some of the central figures of rap culture. Very often, my whiteness would raise suspicion, and only through our conversation, when the MCs and producers would find out that I had a lot of respect and knowledge about their issues, both musical and political, would an intimate dialogue open up. This gave me the privilege of hearing *black* oral history first hand. Hip-hop is a complex and creative culture that I learned to love after seeing the art of breakdance in films like *Wild Style* (Charlie Ahearn, 1983) and *Beat Street* (Stan Lathan, 1984) and the creativity of the graffiti on the walls of my small hometown in western Germany. And of course I loved rap, which was introduced to me by fellow skater friends, or by the first *German* rap groups, mostly consisting of migrants (like Fresh Familee or Advanced Chemistry) in youth centers I would visit, not to mention the legendary TV show *Yo! MTV Raps*, which I was able to watch after my parents got cable television. Thus I experienced the emergence of the fruitful interrelation between American rap culture and a new scene of *Germans* and migrants in Europe who were creating a worldwide interface to express (and teach me about) exclusion, classism and *racism*. As Fatima El-Tayeb argues, hip-hop culture is arguably Europe's "most important transborder counterpublic site,"<sup>1</sup> a site that also took elements from the US to express its own, postnational perspective on the politics of belonging and against new forms of racism:

1 Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others – Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) xl.



The tide of racist violence that swept Europe in the early 1990s politicized many young people of color who could not relate to the politics of traditional migrant and antiracist groups. Hip-hop culture created a framework in which European ethnic “(un)subjects” for the first time were able to create a language through which they could express their specific experiences, define themselves as autonomous, and position themselves in relation to the struggles of American communities of color...<sup>2</sup>

Hip-hop culture was one of the first minor subcultures that connected affirmation and politics, partying and a discourse against migrant exclusion – and I was proud and grateful to have it in my life. It made me learn a lot about racism and non-western codes of belonging, and it gave me shelter when I felt lonely as I moved to live in a bigger, more urban city like London. I wrote many articles for *Juice* and met Afrocentric-conscious MCs like Talib Kweli, new rhyme innovators like Dizzee Rascal or Aesop Rock and multicultural rap traditionalists like the Dilated Peoples and great female soul divas like Truth Hurts.<sup>3</sup> But sooner or later I reached a limit.

Because of my then somewhat confused bisexuality and interest in crossdressing (next to obvious privileges as a white, middle-class boy with German citizenship), I never felt like I really belonged in a movement that seemed very dominated by sexism and homophobia. When I heard about homo-hop and other queer articulations in rap, such as the Deep Dick Collective or Jen-Ro, it seemed that I could

2 El-Tayeb 30.

3 At this time, my work obviously wasn't limited to hip-hop. It also included jazz, trip-hop, reggae, dub and German leftist underground discourse rock. It opened the world to a whole oral history of black music and culture to me.



connect what I learned from a matriarchal, feminist family structure with the impulses of the hip-hop world. Finally I proposed to *Juice* that I write a big report on queer rap artists – something that had never happened before in this scope in the history of German music journalism. They accepted, but still acted a little bit paranoid, possibly worried about homophobic reactions from their mostly young, male and straight readership. Even though the story was one of the biggest in the issue, they wouldn't note its existence on their cover. What was also odd was that they wouldn't put any photo of the featured artists (Juba Kalamka and DDC, Deadlee, Jen-Ro, Godess and She) in the article, which gave the story a somewhat strange dimension, as the queer rappers seemed to have no actual bodies and faces. Maybe I'm exaggerating – but the real strange thing happened after that. As if through an unspoken contract, this was the last article I ever wrote for *Juice* magazine. I was never again asked to submit a story or review an album. And I never asked them again either, and alternatively got caught up in the inspiring and emerging queer world just becoming a trademark for affirmative politics and deviant subcultural production and lifeforms in Europe – and especially in Berlin.

I had certainly known gay culture and cabaret from a young age, since my uncle was supposedly gay – and I became inspired by phenomena such as the drag king community in Cologne and the books on queer theory by icons like Judith Butler, Judith “Jack” Halberstam, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, and Beatriz “Beto” Preciado. Soon, inspired by my then-partner who became interested in transgender politics, I would start doing *drag* myself and luckily I got a scholarship to work on a subject that gave me a certain visibility in the queer academic world: *postpornography*. Obviously, a lot of amazing work has been



done in gender and queer studies regarding the visual. Becoming an outspoken supporter of queer politics and theories myself, most notably through my work on queer feminist interventions in porn,<sup>4</sup> but also through my journalism and my drag performances, I argued for a radicalization of sexual politics and with it, the universalization of its ideals. But again, only concentrating on one or two categories of power, in this sense gender and sexuality, made other dynamics and forms of exclusion merely invisible. I remember, for instance, how I was invited, along with many other fellow queer activists and performers from Europe, the US, and Canada, to take part in the performative wedding of the LoveArtLab in 2009, Annie Sprinkle's and her partner Elizabeth Stephen's project about postporn love and queering marriage. This glamorous event at the Biennale in Venice was really a blast and created one of the highlights of my postporn life. It made me aware of how stimulating and successful queer visual politics have been as interventions and new forms of community building beyond a still very male-dominated and heteronormative art world. While white queer artists like Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, or Annie Sprinkle and Catherine Opie have become partly incorporated into the art canon, queer-of-color positions have mostly remained invisible or at least secondary and marginal. Therefore, again, I reached a limit. While my interest in rap, next to soul and jazz music, seemed mostly to happen in a heteronormative world, my interest in queer feminist cultures and theories seemed mostly unmarked white. Also, emerging discussions about queer-of-color politics and emerging critical whiteness studies proved to me that there was no political space in Germany that was naturally given to the ones who suffer from double discrimination and multiple forms of exclusion. The phenomenon of

4 See Tim Stüttgen, ed., *Post/Porn/Politics* (Berlin: b\_books, 2010)



pornography seemed indirectly to prolong a very western discourse of sexual freedom while unintentionally ignoring the queer feminist issues of black sexworkers<sup>5</sup> or Arab women. Of course my intention is not to blame Annie and Beth or the emerging queer porn world for the invisibility of queers of color in their project. But sooner or later I became aware of how embedded the notion of queer feminist pornography is in a predominately western white narrative of sexual liberation. This narrative would not only clash with persons of color in queer subcultures and the sex industry, as their experiences of racism have mostly been overlooked, but also with a new phase of imperial discourses and wars that have been taking place since 9/11. Obviously, things seem to have shifted in recent years. While some queers were associated with illness and death by a homophobic culture during the early days of the AIDS crisis, now they are interpellated as good citizens, consumers, or even patriots and soldiers. As Jasbir Puar notes, while some communities became targeted for life, others became “targeted for death.”<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, just to name one obvious example, communities that were marked as colored would become the new outsiders that symbolize backwardness and regression<sup>7</sup>.

5 Just think of how the BDSM figure of the slave might seem different for somebody who stems him or herself from a black tradition that experienced real slavery and its aftermath. This doesn't mean though, that there are no non-western artists changing pornographic representation, including interactions with BDSM practices. To name just a few, there are Dumb Type from Japan, Shu Lea-Cheang from Taiwan, Afro-British video artist Isaac Julien, or Indian postporn filmmaker Tejal Shah.

6 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 36.

7 This is obviously not an argument against the inclusion of some queers into more liveable lives, but a reflection on a situation where the inclusion of some goes along with the exclusion of others.



In this book I am not trying to universally and finally represent or solve contemporary discussions about gender, sexuality, race, class, nation, and ethnicity. But by concentrating on a very central and traumatic historical event – slavery – and the emancipatory struggles of Afro-Americans, we can see how patterns of racist discourses work to address the supposedly dangerous and backwards colored body. At that time, it was the *dangerous* and always presumably *homophobic* black man who had to be domesticated, caught and brought to prison; now these same logics are encountered by, for instance, the *dangerous* Arabs,<sup>8</sup> and new forms of emerging racism and Islamophobia are executed through new policies in European countries – partly using feminist and queer arguments to perform exclusion in a progressive costume.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore slavery makes us aware of a central contradiction of the Enlightenment project. While universal freedom for everybody was the core of the Enlightenment message, the same people who were proclaiming universal freedom were the ones installing slavery and colonialism in other countries. The biggest kidnapping of history intersected with brutal forms of torture, forced labor, and exploitation next to the dehumanization of potentially any non-white or non-western subject. It is no wonder that in these conditions the relations of, for instance, gender and race have to be thought of and understood differently than those of their white contemporaries. As non-white bodies have been the objects of

8 Even if there are obvious similarities between racisms against blacks and Arabs, it doesn't mean that this book provides a metaphor. It specifically deals with post-slavery in the Afro-American context and cannot be translated easily into other times and places. While Eurocentric arguments are very central in contemporary forms of racism, this research is clearly limited to the history of slavery and black liberation in the USA.

9 This contemporary problem is addressed, for example, in queer-of-color interventions. See Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* for the American and El-Tayeb, *European Others* for the European context.



forms of racism that clearly sexualized them, their sexuality, or even their queerness, appears in different ways. Concentrating on black articulations of the post-slavery age, a time when concrete slavery was abolished but the regressive core of its discourses survived in texts, images, and minds, I hope to shed light on an alternative narrative of black sexualities, one that I will later try to define, inspired by E. Patrick Johnson, as quAre.

Thus, the central question of this work is how different methodological approaches – the anti-categorical notion of queer theory and the multi-categorical perspective of intersectionality – can come into dialogue for the proposition of a quAre theory. QuAre takes the “A” of the black and puts it in the middle of queer. One special ingredient in this work is the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. While Deleuze has long been criticized by gender and queer theorists, it is worth noting that these days queer-of-color theorists like Kara Keeling and Jasbir Puar have started a new dialogue with the philosopher. Deleuze’s theory is not only extra-ordinary when he tries to think identity beyond structural categories like gender, sexuality, or race but proposes a more complex model of heterogeneity that goes beyond dualisms and identity labels. This heterogeneity seems to become more and more important for queer scholars to first, think beyond dualisms and categories but second, to grasp the complexity of queer of color subjects, who always seemed to have to choose between, for instance, the stereotypical antagonisms of a supposedly white queer-feminist movement and a supposedly black heteronormative movement. Therefore this work tries to deepen a dialogue between Deleuzian and queer-of-color approaches, arguing for a position that is mindful of both intersectional approaches that address multiple



categories of power, and of anti-categorical approaches that try to get beyond notions of categoriality, without merely choosing the one or the other. Instead, this study tries to show how they productively resonate with each other. Furthermore, Deleuze constructed a very unique film theory, which deals with the two major categories that come into play in this text: movement and time. In this sense I follow Kara Keeling when she writes: "I argue that 'the black image' and 'the white image' are inherently problematic and that the black image might be best understood in terms of the spatiotemporal relations it makes visible."<sup>10</sup>

Movement and time are central formal and philosophical categories when dealing with the cultural material I am looking at. Film and music exist in and through them. Also, when dealing with such a heavy issue as post-slavery in the American context, movement is central, since it was concretely taken from the slaves, while time is central, since colonial time seemed endless for its victims. Thus, the desire for another time, where blacks could move freely, was possibly the biggest desire shared by the people who were kidnapped from Africa. But before we look at some visual articulations of the dreams of black movements and times, we start at the nightmare of the black experience in the temporality of colonialism. For we can only grasp the lines of flight and escape routes from slavery if we start to understand how powerful and problematic the duality of whiteness and blackness is as it is experienced by the black man, as Fanon would call it.

<sup>10</sup> Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common-Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 27.