

“Postcolonial” Travel: Of Empires and the Empirical

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on walking tours experienced on two Academic Travels in the discipline of Postcolonial Studies, I seek to explore where Academic Travel’s desire for authenticity goes head to head with the institutionalization, commodification and consumption of postcolonialism as travel experience. Moving through a consideration of the ambiguities of Postcolonial Studies in the academy, the tensions Graham Huggan has identified between postcolonialism (as resistance practice to Western systems and structures – also of thought) and postcoloniality (the commodification of difference), my contribution aims to uncover the ways in which these ambiguous dynamics are replicated in “postcolonial” travel, suspended between highlighting the continuing power of the colonial system in action in tourism practice and the marketing of historical and contemporary spaces in a commercialization of postcolonial cultural production and the fetishization of difference. Answering calls to take the postcolonial “outside” and critically engage with and theorize pedagogy on the ground, I describe how our move into the empirical, in Berlin’s “Afrikanisches Viertel” (African Quarter) and in the Parisian district of La Goutte d’Or, brought an empir(e)ical experience, a chronotopal thickening, a dialog between time, space, history, all of the various actors involved and the narratives and representations brought to the space, producing site-and-time-specific ways of telling that thereby enmeshed us in our own practice and confronted us not only with the significance of the socio-political moment, but also, in a productive discomfort, with ourselves.

KEY WORDS

Postcolonial Studies, Postcolonial Travel, Frontstage/Backstage, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Memory, Chronotope

“[T]he very idea of postcolonial spaces is layered with, and evocative of, empires past, present and future, complicated stories and identities, intimate and alienated relationships, shifting borders and contested terrains, ambivalent, partial and contradictory meanings. Within these spaces people live and make sense of their lives. Here is the riddle; they occupy shifting spaces, they shift the spaces they occupy and yet the spaces are the same spaces that existed before.” (Tuhiwai Smith 2006, 549)

“[T]here is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various sociocultural, historical, and political formations that give epochs their peculiar individuality.” (Said 1989, 211)

INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL SPACES AND “CONTESTED TERRAIN”

In the following reflection, I would like to unpick what happens when you take courses in the discipline of Postcolonial Studies on the road.¹ But what does the idea of “postcolonial” travel even denote, what should it denote? While our Academic Travels, and educational travel programs in general, are not tourism as such, they do still arguably fall under John Urry’s category of “organised travel”, which also encompasses the Grand Tour, and they are thereby tied up in notions of “touring as an opportunity for discourse” and of “cognitive and perceptual education”, but also, and equally, in the notion of the “visualisation of the travel experience”, in other words the development of the always-already power implicated “tourist gaze”, as well as in that of “class restriction” and privilege (Urry 2002, 4).² In the present reflection, I move towards an articulation of the ethical challenges and lessons of “postcolonial” travel through the examples of two Academic Travels I lead to the European metropolises Berlin and Paris, examining in particular where ideas about “postcolonial” travel “grate and bleed” in incursions into “backstage spaces”, spaces not designed as primary tourist destinations, spaces where “people live and make sense of their lives” (Anzaldúa 1987; Tuhiwai Smith 2006, 549). I attempt to also outline the tensions between the critically resistance-oriented postcolonialism, that seeks to disestablish imperial modes and institutionalized structures of knowing, and the commodification-oriented postcoloniality, that markets itself on precisely these “ideas about cultural otherness” and resistance and makes products out of them (Huggan 2001, 28). In so doing, I aim to tease out, through the examples of walking tours in the Berlin district of Wedding and the Parisian district of La Goutte d’Or, what happens when academic ideas synergize or clash with the experiential, when explorations of the systems of Empire become empirical.

A.-M. Nogués-Pedregal (2012a, xiv) writes that “no social process exists independently of its practicing”, and, for better or for worse, engaging with Postcolonial Studies on the ground always already means entering into it. This goes back to Edward W. Said’s words in my epigraph, for just as no discipline can separate itself out from “sociocultural, historical, and political formations” and every study is implicated in itself, this holds (and should hold) even more true for empirical explorations (1989, 211). Yet, precisely here we are simultaneously offered a productive, if ambivalently charged, opportunity to make these formations visible and to subject them to an experientially-based critique.³

My reflections here are sparked by student reactions to a walking tour on the most recent iteration of my Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies CLCS 247T French Cultural Institutions: Power and Representation travel. In selecting the walking tour as part of our travel

¹ I am grateful to the research assistants who have supported me over the course of this project, Destiny Brown and Daniela Perezchica-Trancoso, funded by Franklin University Switzerland’s LLS program, and especially for the important resources they both brought to light on “postcolonial” travel.

² My colleague Poulomi Dasgupta also acknowledges this aspect of privilege in her work on her Academic Travel in Sustainable Development (2021, 140).

³ See also Bahri (1997) – I am indebted to Bahri’s ideas about taking Postcolonial Studies beyond the classroom, and I return to these in my conclusion.

program, I initially believed I had thought carefully both about the institution I was booking it from (the ICI, L’Institut des Cultures d’Islam/the Institute of Islamic Cultures), and about walking tours I had done with students both on the earlier version of this travel and on my CLCS 238T Reading the Postcolonial City: Berlin and Hamburg travel. Yet, as Cloete, Duncan and Coetzee discuss in this volume, when is walking ever just walking? This walking tour played into the themes of my course in ways I had not anticipated. In both informal conversations and in the course evaluation, students constructively expressed their discomfort with the ways in which we were making incursions into lived spaces. It was precisely their discomfort that caused me to stop and look more closely and comparatively at two activities, namely neighborhood walking tours with associated site visits, that I thought I was doing in the same way across two different travels, that had the same “description”, and much of the same preparatory reading, but that actually played out very differently on the ground, in a time-space web and when plugged into by students. The following is a reflection on what I learned, along with and thanks to the students of that CLCS 247T class: about the importance of how experiences are conducted, about what is explored, about who the guide is and about the significance of whether the tour is institutionalized or not, and in what ways it is institutionalized and arguably thereby “commodified” (in Huggan’s sense of postcoloniality; 2001, 28). Similarly, the contrasting experiences of these two walking tours suggest that there is a great difference between exploring or “traveling into” cultural *space*, or doing “cultural tourism” (Urry 2002), and exploring or “traveling into” cultural *memory* (Assmann 1995).

Following John Urry, Jennifer Craik defines cultural tourism as “where cultural sites, events, attractions, and/or experiences are marketed as primary tourist experiences”: two of the more impactful in this context are “the commercialisation of culture and cultural products” and “the restructuring of cultural production into the cultural industries” (1997, 113). The fact that the Paris neighborhood walking tour emanated from the “cultural industry” of the ICI, and was thus implicitly commercialized, or, after Graham Huggan (2001, 28), commodified, as a selectable, bookable offering on its website, visibly and “economically” tied to it, seems to invite an exploration of the ideas of ethnocommodity, defined by Meiu et al. (2020, 17) as the merchandizing of the desirability of difference (from a white “center”), and of the postcolonial exotic (the consumption and becoming-product of postcolonialism, or “the booming ‘alterity industry’”; Huggan, 2001, vii-viii). Similarly, the marketing of the tour in question plays into observations about the becoming-bourgeois and strategized “mixing” of the area masking social inequalities and power imbalances (Albert-Blanco 2022).

In Berlin on the other hand, the neighborhood walking tour, via its literal and narrative exploration of street names and naming, was primarily a journey into cultural memory, “that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image”, where the “face” of the neighborhood demonstrates how Berlin (and German) society is “aware” of itself as a group and (chooses to) “[become] visible to itself and to others” (Assmann 1995, 132-33). As Assmann argues in this context, “[w]hich past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society” (1995, 132-33), and this was both our travel’s exploratory conceptual focus and what we experienced and saw on the ground.

In order to journey through the ideas related to this reflection on the “curation” of “postcolonial” travel, I first give a brief overview of the specificities of the two travels themselves and the two districts in question, as a preface to exploring notions of postcolonialism and institutionalization more broadly. My subsequent foci will be “postcolonial” travel and backstage spaces, and I will conclude by investigating how these collected theoretical ideas, metonyms of the academy, “grate and bleed” on the ground, at the interstices of postcolonialism and postcoloniality.

AT THE CORE: TWO TRAVELS IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

To underline the core ideas of the two travels as *academic* explorations before looking at how these ideas feed into the walking tour examples, it is necessary to first give a brief overview from their course outlines, as well as some general context about the areas in which these ideas ultimately play(ed) out in the iterations of the travels I discuss here.

My German travel in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, CLCS 238T Reading the Postcolonial City: Berlin & Hamburg, the first object of this analysis, took place in the Fall semester 2018. It had first run in Fall 2015, with a very similar schedule and experiences, and both iterations focused on close ties with postcolonial and anti-racist organizations in both cities, primarily Berlin Postkolonial (now part of Dekoloniale)⁴ and Arbeitskreis (working group) HAMBURG POSTKOLONIAL. The course’s main learning goals are to move towards an understanding of how to “read” traces of the past from the face of the city and to explore how these major German cities are engaging with these traces and remembering these pasts, or “dark heritages”, in their present (Förster et al. 2016). Excerpts from the course description put forward that:

Colonialism has left its traces not only very obviously on the former colonies themselves but also on the face of the cities of the colonizers. [...] Seeking to explore colonial echoes in less obvious places, namely in contemporary Berlin and Hamburg, the course asks how we can remember colonialism in the modern world, become conscious of its traces, and encourage critical thinking about the connections between colonialism, migration and globalization. [...] Where can we see [colonialism’s] traces in the modern city? How could or should we remember it and how can we actively employ its vestiges to engage critically with the past and to renegotiate it?

My French travel, also in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, CLCS 247T, has been through two titles. Beginning as “French Orientalisms Renegotiated” in Spring 2016, the Registrar’s concern that the theoretically-weighted title would dissuade students from enrolling was addressed by a shifted emphasis to on-the-ground activities and to spelling out the dynamics it explores. It became “French Cultural Institutions: Power and Representation”, a title that has turned out to be very apt in the context of the present discussion. The course ran once in France and once on campus in the COVID-hit Spring 2020 before its most recent iteration, and it seeks to explore the interplay between representation and institutions, investigating how societies represent themselves through the shaping and recognition of Muslim Maghrebi French “presence”:

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French authors and artists were instrumental in shaping the imaginary of the “Orient”, with a myriad of paintings and texts housed for public consumption in national cultural institutions. Students will use the French case to explore the politics of representation: the creation and objectification of an Oriental “Other.” On-the-ground field study in museums, archives and galleries of Paris (the former colonial capital) and Marseille (the “Gateway to North Africa”) will help students to investigate the ties that bind the visual arts and literature with the exercising of knowledge and power, and to read literary and artistic works as shaped by their cultural and historical circumstances. [...] What broader significance [...] might [this] have for questions of representation and identity, Self and Other, in the (not only French) present? [...] Gallery “encounters” will consider the significance of reappropriating the gaze and of the relationship between visual pleasure and politics, while questioning who art is “for” and where the “representation business” takes us.

In a sense, the comparative match-up of the two course descriptions already demonstrates where I had erred when I tried to introduce an institutionalized walking tour into my French travel.

⁴ See <https://dekoloniale.de/de>

Institutionalization and representation are what we set out to critique on this travel, and yet I proceeded as if the walking tour would automatically renegotiate traces on the face of the neighborhood in which we were walking. However, just because the institution (the ICI) is a modern one, and experienced controversial beginnings in its attempt to combine the cultural and the “cultural” in laic France (see, for example, Albert-Blanco 2022), does not mean that its role as purveyor of the tour does not shape that tour in complex – and equally institutionalized – ways.

In its first iteration in 2016, our CLCS 247T walking tour had been conducted in quite a different context by Nabila Mokrani, a freelancing curator associated with artists on our syllabus who seek to renegotiate representation (and herself a “subject” of the art of Houria Niati).⁵ Mokrani had both taken us on a brief walk-through of La Goutte d’Or and Montmartre and given us a talk in a local brasserie about contemporary (French-)Maghrebi women artists, subsequently being interviewed by a group of students about her experiences as curator and subject of this contemporary art.

It is the approach to this district itself that historically shapes the interactions with it. Indeed, the area being walked around, La Goutte d’Or, is always already marked by the way it has been included in the French cultural imagination, as Kaplan and Recoquillon write: “As North African immigrants poured into this district during the 1960s, it is likely that an image of the Goutte d’Or as an exotic locale was fixed in the French imagination and added to its reputation” (2014, 40). The informality of Mokrani’s tour, its affiliation with her own expressed identities, and its siting within her contribution to group discussion and her role as interview subject produced a very different engagement with representation to that of the later ICI experience. With Mokrani, we were not seeking to “define” a place or space, we were walking through it with little dialogue, experiencing it, and also experiencing it in conjunction with its siting in the city of Paris, and not as a closed-off space. Kaplan and Recoquillon write that “[j]ust as a group is defined partly by its external boundaries, the perceptions of outsiders have a large role in defining this place” (2014, 48). With Mokrani, we literally crossed these “external” boundaries and walked it into frontstage Paris, the famous district of Montmartre.

Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Yankel Fijalkow (2006, 73) write about perceptions of the social and historical development of La Goutte d’Or as a district that welcomed Algerians and Algerian independence organizations during the Algerian War of Independence, and then made way for left-wing organizations defending immigrant causes in the 1970s, who called on such public figures as Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault for support. The substantial amount of research done on the area focuses on its concentration of non-French-born immigrants and its “identity” as providing products and services from North and Sub-Saharan African countries, and on gentrification and the movement of Bohemian bourgeois and champagne socialists into the area, as well as on (subsequent) social representation and “social mixing” and area redevelopment to “balance populations” (Kaplan and Recoquillon 2014; Pattaroni, Kaufmann and Thomas 2012; Bacqué et al. 2011).

Hancock and Albert-Blanco have compellingly demonstrated how the institution in which the second iteration of our walking tour was sited, the ICI (L’Institut des Cultures d’Islam/the Institute of Islamic Cultures) is wrapped up in the politics of “civilizing” and “controlling” Islamic expression in La Goutte d’Or, while Albert-Blanco has gone on to track the enmeshment of the ICI project with gentrification, and with the positive “coding” of the area within the context of a broader range of “politics of attractiveness, of ‘social mixing’ [...and of] ‘sociological diversity’”⁶ for a space that “remains today one of the sectors of Paris with the highest percentage of foreigners and working class”⁷ (Hancock 2019; Albert-Blanco 2022). This

⁵ See <http://hourianiati.com/gallery.php?c=films> “Emigrée et Demi... Un Portrait de Nabila” (“Emigrée and a Half... A Portrait of Nabila”) and <http://hourianiati.com/gallery.php?c=11> “What If?”

⁶ “politiques d’attractivité [...] de ‘mixité sociale’ [...et de] ‘diversité sociologique.’”

⁷ “demeure aujourd’hui l’un des secteurs de Paris dans lequel la part d’étrangers et de classes populaires est la plus élevée.”

notion of “social mixing”, as we have seen above, is in fact one of the primary modes under which the area is studied.

Originally conceived of in 2001 under mayor Bertrand Delanoë as part of a “solution” to address praying in the road caused by the overspill of worshippers because of the size of the mosques (Albert-Blanco 2022), the conception of the ICI had the effect of replacing this “by an expression conforming more closely to dominant conceptions of urban space”,⁸ and commentators have noted the “contradictory impulses” of freedom of religious expression, but also control of it (Albert-Blanco 2022; Hancock 2019; Milne 2018). Famous for its hiccups in terms of getting spaces, and in terms of the vacillation of Anne Hidalgo and the Paris mayoralty on the issue despite the proposed private funding of the Institute’s prayer room, the lack of public support precipitated the resignation of the then president of the ICI in 2016 (Hancock 2019, 9, 14). However, perceived pushback against Paris leadership is tempered by the notion that the institution, precisely as a public institution, pushes “a certain idea of diversity”⁹ (Albert-Blanco 2019, 32). Bacqué and Fijalkow go further to suggest that the gentrification projects in La Goutte d’Or, which include the ICI, are like a new form of colonizing of an area viewed in the early 1980s as having a “concentration” of poor immigrants (2006, 63, 70).

The traces of the Berlin walking tour site are very different, with a shift from the representation of lived spaces to an exploration of memorializing functions on the face of the city. Also a neighborhood space, the “Afrikanisches Viertel” (African Quarter) of the district of Wedding in Berlin, where we conducted the “Postcolonial City” travel, as Nabizadeh and Förster et al. concur, is an unremarkable space in the social landscape of Berlin, quiet and “residential”, with modest grey and brown apartment buildings, a small shopping area and a few cafés (Nabizadeh 2012, 41; Förster et al 2016, 3). Rather, with a focus primarily on the street naming that gives the area its own epithet, and the history behind these names, it is a site that promotes discussion and reflection on the echoing of the German colonial past in the contemporary landscape, on the “material and semantic marks of this past present in the public space”, and on its “contestation” (Engler 2013, 41; Förster et al. 2016, 1). In this vein, it becomes a space characterized by Förster et al. as “a public arena” that is the site of struggles between “different social groups” and their readings and understandings of the past, because of the street naming that effectuates an inscription of the “colonial expansion of the German Empire in the public space and thus also in the collective memory landscape of Berlin” (Förster et al. 2016, 2-3; Kopp and Krohn 2013, 223). This becoming-public of the area’s memory via the “communicative function” of street signs, particularly in a situation where only twenty percent of street signs in Germany are named after people (Ehrhardt 2022, 305, 315), reminds of Stuart Hall’s discourse on how heritage “becomes the material embodiment of the spirit of the nation, a collective representation” (Hall 1999, 14). Street naming laws in the German context are currently challenging because they do not allow for the colonial past, rather only for the National Socialist past and communism (Förster et al. 2016, 4-5).

In 2004, public information boards were set up in the district contextualizing the Afrikanisches Viertel and its street names, and coming out of the discussion surrounding this initiative (and the refusal to actually rename the streets).¹⁰ This in turn led to the development of the walking tours, as well as exhibitions, with the aim of fostering public consciousness for the situation (Engler 2013, 41). Similarly, in 2008 Berlin Postkolonial put out a dossier on the colonial street names in the city of Berlin “stressing the symbolic power of street names to provide orientation not only in urban space but also in history” and began putting together postcolonial maps of the city and pushing for the renaming of streets (Förster et al. 2016, 6; Engler 2013, 46).

Research focusing on the Afrikanisches Viertel predominantly centers on ideas that

⁸ “par une expression plus conforme aux conceptions dominantes de l’espace urbain.”

⁹ “une certaine idée de la diversité.”

¹⁰ There were two versions of the information on the boards, one from the Berlin BVV and one from Berlin Postkolonial (Engler 2013, 41).

representation in the public space, as aligned with notions of cultural memory and entering into cultural memory, can engage with and comment on ideas of who belongs to the city and who gets to be a citizen, and can make clear links between the cultural memory tussles surrounding street signs and racism in the present (see for example Engler 2013, 42; Bönkost 2017). Thus, the Afrikanisches Viertel is predominantly studied as “a place of learning and remembrance” that serves as a point of negotiation of “memory politics, identity politics and spatial politics” (Engler 2013, 50, 52). Needless to say, the Quarter is also a space where people live who might not want to learn and remember: a student article relates the throwing of a raw egg at a similar educational tour to ours (Jacobs and Sprute 2019, 115). These actors, argue Förster et al. “interpret space as a bounded territory over which only those who physically and emotionally ‘belong’ to this space have the power of decision” – for this reason, Berlin Postkolonial moved their offices to Wedding to be physically present at the site (Förster et al. 2016, 10).

While the foundation of Berlin Postkolonial in 2007, as Förster et al. explain, united “anticolonial activists from both Germany and former African colonies”, opposed to Berlin Postkolonial in the area is a group of residents, Initiative Pro Afrikanisches Viertel, protesting the idea of street renaming, and actively courting support in its prevention, particularly in the cases of Nachtigalplatz, Petersallee and Lüderitzstrasse, which were “officially recommended” for renaming in 2018 by the leadership of the overarching district of Berlin Mitte (Förster et al. 2016, 6-7; Steckenbiller 2019, 109). Significantly for our purposes, the postcolonial and anti-racist organizations in question, as NGOs, “are placed outside the state’s representational system and must therefore strive to influence the political discourse in an agitational way” (Förster et al. 2016, 8). This *non*-institutionalization is significant, both for its possibilities of genuine resistance and for the outsider status that it holds that restricts its impact, and I will return to it in the context of our own Academic Travel walking tour experience below.

As we can see from the area descriptions and the work that scholars have done to tease out their dynamics, both areas can be characterized as study sites in different ways – La Goutte d’Or is predominantly of interest for researchers in terms of its demographics, or indeed as something of a congratulatory study on multicultural Paris, while the Afrikanisches Viertel is a site of memory. Precisely as “study sites” both are backstage but also in the public arena, and La Goutte d’Or is made further frontstage by its building projects that draw in visitors, both local and international. Tensions between the way the areas are lived and the way the areas are studied characterize both sites, as do notions of power and planning: Brian Ladd argues in the case of Berlin that “[a]ll urban planning contains an authoritarian element [and] planning and architecture are always linked closely to power” (1997, 139). Christiane Steckenbiller (2019, 108) further draws on Ladd to posit that planning “naturalizes” signs and markers of hegemonic power structures, and this leads into important considerations for an engagement with both areas, both in terms of the circumstances surrounding the genesis of the ICI in La Goutte d’Or and the debates surrounding the changing or preservation of street signs in the Afrikanisches Viertel – and for how these circumstances impacted our own empirical engagement with the two areas.

THE AMBIVALENCES OF THE POSTCOLONIAL AND THE UNIVERSITY

Both of the Academic Travels in question are sited not only within Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, which, as per Franklin’s Academic Catalog, “invites students to think about the nature, function and impact of storytelling in a globalized world”, but also, specifically, within Franklin’s Postcolonial Studies Minor, developed by Alexandra Peat and Fintan Hoey:

The minor in Postcolonial Studies builds upon Franklin’s culture of travel and global citizenship by asking students to think critically about what it means to travel and live in an increasingly interconnected, yet persistently unequal world. Postcolonial Studies examines the effects of colonial encounters and structures

from a transdisciplinary perspective. The courses in this minor explore global power structures and the ways in which literatures and other media are produced, disseminated, and consumed in a postcolonial world. (FUS Academic Catalog 2023)

The minor is explicitly enmeshed with our Academic Travel Program in this description, and its transdisciplinary impetus encourages us to take these ideas further and critically explore them both inside and outside of the classroom, alongside its specific set of learning outcomes, which put forward that once they have completed the minor, students should have:

1. Acquired a sound understanding of a broad range of *postcolonial texts and theories*;
2. Learned how to apply *postcolonial terms and concepts* in their own work;
3. Gained an awareness of the *enduring legacy of colonialism* in shaping both global systems and individual ways of thinking, seeing, and understanding;
4. Developed *research strategies in postcolonial studies* that reflect the disciplines represented;
5. Become familiar with *the role of class, gender, location, nationality, race, and ethnicity in a postcolonial context*;
6. Gained an awareness of *the interdisciplinary links among postcolonial literatures, theories, and historical/economic/cultural/social/political change*;
7. Acquired *an understanding of postcolonial studies* as an academic discipline that, in the words of Graham Huggan, expresses a “*commitment to an ethical academic citizenship*” and *hopes for “real and equitable social change.”* (Peat and Hoey 2017)

In particular, the call to “*ethical academic citizenship*” that forms the last, overarching outcome and concern of the minor, reminds us both of the responsibilities of Postcolonial Studies as a subject area within the university and of the possibilities of the travel match up.

Indeed, Postcolonial Studies does not always sit easily within the academy. Commentators have written on the tensions, contradictions and ambivalences of this siting within academia as an institution,¹¹ a space we (should) acknowledge urgently needs to be decolonized, based as it is on *unacknowledged systemic “shaping of social relations by offering images and narratives about who (we think) we are and how we understand ourselves to be”* (Douglas 2022, 254). Anne-Marie d’Hauterresse summarizes the crux of this problem in terms of systems of thought: “postcolonialism offers a critique of Western structures of knowledge and power. It is defined as reflexive Western thought, interrogating and rethinking the very terms by which it has constructed knowledge through the duality of colonizer and colonized” (2004, 235). And yet, “a critique of Western structures of knowledge” and “reflexive Western thought” are not really the same thing, for the second implies that one is still using these structures to critique themselves – as Linda Tuhiwai Smith cautions: “The master’s tools of colonization will not work to decolonize what the master built” (2021, 22).

Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia highlight the ambivalence of challenges and possibilities for the field within the academic system:

both as an institution where people are inculcated into hegemonic systems of reasoning and as a site where it is possible to resist dominant discursive practices. [...] On the one hand, [education] is an object of postcolonial critique regarding its complicity with Eurocentric discourses and practices. On the other hand, it is only through education [a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary processes of globalization intersect] that it is possible to reveal and resist colonialism’s continuing hold on our imagination. (2006, 257)

¹¹ See, for example Bahri (1997), Loomba et al. (2005) and Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia (2006).

As is clear from the above, even, and perhaps especially, in thought, the postcolonial, precisely as a “disciplinary practice” is always already implicated within “educational institutional structures” at one and the same time as it is, as Diana Brydon identifies, haunted by “difficult forms of knowing” (2013, 3-4). Deepika Bahri frames the situation thus: “When marginality is sanctioned by institutional decree, it is apt to be defused”, and she goes on to demonstrate that postcolonial studies is not just constrained by the academy but also by the wider world “the material conditions of [...] the outside having defined the inside, so to speak” (1997, 281, 283). Bahri acknowledges thereby the ambivalent situation of postcolonial teaching and learning in the academy “within the context circuits of production and consumption”, the framework of which enables the development of “a manageable, systematized, and consumable discourse of difference” that by its very nature, in this context, has turned marginality into “a valuable intellectual commodity” through “academic fetishisation” (Bahri 1997, 280; Huggan 2001, viii; Suleri in Huggan 2001, 17). This “managed” engagement with otherness, Bahri continues, both “contains’ the possibilities of resistance” and “leaves the normative intact”, ending, as we can see above in the example of circular thought processes, by duplicating the system whose power injustices and inequalities it should by rights be bringing to light (Bahri 1997, 278-79). I argue that it is precisely this idea of the management and construction of a course, alongside ideas about “trends” in creating and consuming postcolonial texts, that is thought-provoking and potentially problematic on the ground, replicating as it does both the construction of our Academic Travel programs and the construction of the tours themselves, where we risk siting the student as “consumer” and ourselves as “purveyor[s], facilitator[s], and [...] tour guide[s]” (Bahri 1997, 284) within the system and thought processes described above – if these are not both carefully critiqued in advance and empirically highlighted in the moment.

The fine line the postcolonial walks in academia (its face value versus its actuality on the ground) is embodied by its siting in the university, it is already a contested and ambivalent discipline by being a discipline in the first place. Not surprisingly, similar tensions and ambivalences, also circling around notions of power, representation, Othering and commodification, are inherent in the idea of “postcolonial” *travel* – so what potential does the combination of the two hold? Can it point beyond obvious ambivalences to offer further possibilities for a “real” understanding within spaces? Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia and Bahri call for Postcolonial Studies to be taken “outside”, in Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia’s case to be able to understand, in the “vernacular”, as they put it, “outside political forces” as tied up in localities in modes “that are specific to [those] particular localities” with the aim of “elaborat[ing] new modes of imperial power and [...] devis[ing] ways of resisting them in and through education” (2006, 257). Bahri also sees these possibilities inherent “beyond the brick and mortar classroom” in “a projection of symbolic educational issues into a larger frame of reference” (1997, 294). In writing about our travel experiences it is my hope that I am answering Bahri’s and Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia’s calls to critically theorize our pedagogy in engaging with it through the specificities of “vernacular” localities, on the ground.

(HOW) IS “POSTCOLONIAL” TRAVEL POSSIBLE?

Much like the ambivalent situation of Postcolonial Studies within the academy, unpicking the problematics of what could constitute issues and opportunities for “postcolonial” travel on the ground involves an exploration of subject positioning in space and the (resultant) gaze, also on the self, tied up as it is with tourism consumption, the dynamics of Othering and the construction of the “exotic.” Moving through ideas about “difference projection” (Hollinshead in Amoamo 2009, 14), categorizing, and the gaze, I seek here first to outline the colonial continuities of the tourism system, before touching on the practices of the postcolonial-tourist-wannabe (authenticity and backstage tourism), finally addressing ethical modes and situated approaches for tackling the tourism system from within. To me, “postcolonial” tourism seems to be made up of two constituent and complimentary parts, the first, understanding the functioning of tourism as a

continuing colonial system, and the second, the attempt to do tourism and travel differently, “postcolonially” (in the sense of the resistance to this system; Huggan 2001), a worthy ambition that does not always work in practice because of the commodified nature of the space these attempts play out in (its “postcoloniality”; Huggan 2001) and the ethical questions surrounding incursions into lived spaces per se.

In his comparison of the dynamics of “institutionalisation [in] Western commercial and educational systems”, Graham Huggan sets us up for crossover in the ambiguities inherent in Postcolonial Studies and those of the idea of “postcolonial” tourism, both relying, as they do, on “postcolonial cultural production” which is “profoundly affected, but not totally governed, by commodification [...and...] frequently, but not invariably, subject to the fetishisation of cultural difference” (Huggan 2001, 27). Indeed, Hall and Tucker introduce their volume *Tourism and Postcolonialism* with the reflection that “[f]or the vast majority of people, otherness is what makes a destination worthy of consumption” (2004, 8). Nogués-Pedregal, in turn, concludes that this “attraction for variance”, spatial or expressive, does not have to be experienced in traveling outside the nation, it can also simply be a(nother) neighborhood where it is possible to experience “other modes of life” (which, for Nogués-Pedregal, includes cultural heritage; 2012c, 200).

One significant mode of effectuating this “difference projection” is in tourism’s imposition of categories, both “creating differences” and simultaneously “sorting them out” (Hollinshead in Amoamo 2009, 14; Nogués-Pedregal 2012b, 57; 2012c, 193), and this is all too reminiscent of the colonial impetus and its “economic structures, cultural representations and exploitative relationships”, especially where the “construction of [...] identity within a tourism environment [is] predominantly governed by Eurocentric ideologies” (Hall and Tucker 2004, 185; Amoamo 2009, 4). Much of this identity construction of both spaces and their inhabitants rests on the relationship between desire and the “exotic”, for d’Hauteserre, “a thin parody of the colonial experience”, where tourist sites hereby become “cultural manuscripts”, palimpsests of meanings imposed “in the broad geopolitics of Western superiority” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in d’Hauteserre 2004, 237). The choice of how to depict these spaces is never innocent and is tied up in the gaze and the overwriting of meaning, and, disturbingly, in Meiu et al.’s notion of an “ethnocommodity”, where ethnicity gets its perceived value from its desirable “quality of difference” from powerful, centered whiteness (and patriarchy; d’Hauteserre 2004, 237; Meiu et al. 2020, 16-17).

We have to admit that, just like tourist guidebooks, Academic Travel, too, sets us up for the meaning to be derived from spaces, directs the gaze and “designs” what to see and how to see it. This notion of curation and selection is inherent to the “syllabus” per se, as Huggan identifies, where syllabi, and particularly “fetishized” syllabi “may also adhere to the ossifying logic of the reproducible list [...] of cultural capital within an institutional context” (2001, 248-252). Similarly, we have to tread carefully in power contexts on Academic Travel and be humble enough to acknowledge the dangers inherent in “curated gazing”, for “seeing is so much a part of touristic experience and [...] the manipulation of the imagery is so important in the marketing of tourism” (Cheong and Miller 2000, 376). Both in marketing and in making meaning, the gaze and the control of sites and their inhabitants are “socially ordered and systematised”, precisely because, in all the forms of travel I reference here, we are directed to gaze on certain things by materials: from “tourist managers”, from institutions, from organizations, or indeed from the courses themselves (Urry 2002, 1, 10; Amoamo 2009, i).

In the two experiences of my CLCS classes that I outline in the following section, this is also, and importantly, where the function of the guide comes in. As Cheong and Miller (2000, 384) caution: “Tourists see through [guides’] eyes, as they choose the objects of interest to be viewed and steer attention to the selected objects [...] tourists will not see what guides prefer they ignore. [...] They construct the gaze through their special expertise, esoteric ‘local knowledge’, and abilities.” Cheong and Miller go on to explain how the guide’s agenda is imprinted on the tourist through this gaze mechanism and through managed interaction with surrounding local actors, as

well as how the tourist’s desire to align with the guide’s thinking may be an outcome of this web under positive circumstances, when the tourist is, for example “sensitive to the stigmatized identity of the ‘Ugly Tourist/American’” (2000, 384). My two CLCS travels had contrasting on-the-ground experiences in this vein, which I will discuss below, and we discovered, resultantly, that these feelings are very dependent on who is the object and who is the subject of the gaze – namely in terms of the identity of the guide in relation to the area, the tour and the locals. As multiple commentators attest, the ability to “challenge the “white gaze” and turn it on itself exists in tourism practice (Hollinshead in Amoamo 2009, 19). The (potential) critical contribution of locals to tourist identity also plays a role here – for Cheong and Miller, they may be able to exert “social control”: “they observe tourists, making inferences about their aspirations and judgements about their behaviour”, and this impact is enhanced because they are not involved in a service relationship with these tourists, and “consequently have the option of behaving as host, becoming antagonistic, or exhibiting utter indifference” – if they are able to return the gaze (Cheong and Miller 2000, 384; Amoamo 2009, 18-19).

While the above modes and reflections address tourism as a continuation of the colonial system, I would argue that the idea of “postcolonial” tourism as *practice* is always already founded in a potentially problematic search for authenticity, both in the self, as a “better” kind of tourist and in the space/time being explored and the interactions with guides and locals within that space. For a consideration of Academic Travel in the contexts of postcolonial cities and power and representation, this is key. Being a “better”, more engaged, “authentic”, academically-informed and ethical kind of tourist is what we aspire to on Academic Travel, but frankly this is also something of a conceit on our part, and therefore perhaps some of the shock factor comes when we are put in a situation that teaches us that we are not really better than other tourists:

Authentic tourism is predicated on tourists’ desire to project themselves as authentic individuals rather than as members of some tourist class [...]. Tourists who see themselves as authentic will experience the world differently from tourists who see themselves as members of a tour group or who identify with some generalised tourist persona. (Reisinger and Steiner 2006, 488)

When we are inauthentic, on the other hand, “our possibilities are ‘averaged and leveled down’ to accommodate the experiences of those who share our identity” (Reisinger and Steiner 2006, 488-89). I would argue that, for better or for worse, Academic Travel, and indeed educational travel programs generally, are about wanting to be an authentic tourist, and (to experience) challenging spaces. This “search for authenticity” takes us beyond the “staged” and leads us into a “backstage”, as Jaguaribe and Hetherington identify in the case of favela tours in Rio: “a space that is more truthful than the artifice of the hotel beach, or other tourist site [where] the sense of ‘packaging’ is diminished because the local people are not ‘performing’ for foreign eyes. Rather, it is the space that performs” (Jaguaribe and Hetherington 2004, 163-64). Obviously, however, this is deeply problematic in the sense that we are speaking of a lived space with people in it, and the reading of that space is always already managed from outside.¹²

As my colleague Brack Hale has acknowledged, writing about sustainable travel in conjunction with our own Academic Travel program and educational travel programs generally, as incursions into “authentic” backstage spaces, ETPs go further into backstage areas and go there more often, with potentially damaging effects (2019, 252). The frontstage/backstage dichotomy is characterized by David Weaver in a way that ethically confronts the desire for authenticity in conceptions of “postcolonial” travel: “Elements of the local culture are offered to tourists in

¹² This is even more so the case in situations like the one Jaguaribe and Hetherington describe, which are nothing short of “poverty” or “slum” tourism. See also Selinger and Outtersson (2010), Dürr and Jaffe (2012), Burgold and Rolfes (2013) and Booyens and Rogerson (2019) on the questionable ethics of these tourist incursions.

commodified form within the frontstage”, and this spares the backstage, which should remain a “traditional” area protected from “the conventional tourist gaze”, a space “where local residents can retreat and recuperate after their exposure to tourists in the frontstage” – and this is why the impact of any incursion is so great (Weaver 2006, 155; Hale 2021, 3). In other words, in a postcolonial power and representational sense, backstage spaces are what Tuhiwai Smith calls “the spaces in which people live and make sense of their lives”, and, following Hale, “despite [the] potentially lifelong benefits for student participants in ETPs” that this perceived authenticity brings, it comes at a cost to the local environments themselves and their inhabitants (Hale 2019, 246). Both of the areas in question in my two Academic Travels are (or were) backstage – La Goutte d’Or perhaps especially because of its location next to the major frontstage site of Montmartre.

Bringing the “postcolonial” (as resistance practice) to tourism should challenge the essentializing categories created by the “Western constructions of travel and tourism [...] demand[ing in turn] a contested and subverted response through narratives of subalterns, women, and other groups that are marginalized and even expunged by neocolonial relationships and structures” (d’Hautesserre 2004, 238-39). Direct contact with these groups “resist[s] erasure” and enables a contestation of colonial narratives – d’Hautesserre calls this a “metonymic rapport” (2004, 238-39). However, it can simultaneously bring questions as to who is in control of the narrative. Precisely in this making visible of elided narratives there can be an ambivalence in terms of who is (managing the) talking, who is showing off this backstage area, and how, as I will explore below.

As Hall and Tucker declare in their introduction to their volume *Tourism and Postcolonialism*: “Any understanding of the creation of a destination [...] involves placing the development of the representation of that destination within the context of the historical consumption and production of places and the means by which places have become incorporated within the global capital system” (2004, 8). This suggests their approach to an ethical “postcolonial” tourism is one that employs the postcolonial, in awareness for historical systems and their persistence, to critique commodified postcoloniality, and I will explore the disjunctures and possibilities of this practice through the specific situations we encountered on our two walking tours, the sites where all of this worthy theory “grates and bleeds” on the ground: a chronotopal thickening at the border, in the empir(e)ical.

WHERE “POSTCOLONIAL” TRAVEL GRATES AND BLEEDS – AND SCABS?

Academic Travel arguably does “postcolonial” travel in both of the ways I put forward above, namely both in developing the tools to identify the colonial systems of the tourism industry, using education “to reveal and resist colonialism’s continuing hold on our imagination” (Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia 2006, 257), and in attempting to travel “postcolonially” in practice, with all of the ambiguities this entails, not least its problematic quest for authenticity. Writing about the tourist impulse to explore “other” spaces, Nogués-Pedregal (2012c, 200) uses the Bakhtinian idea of the chronotope, and I find this compelling in terms of the complex web of time-space relationships we encountered and entered into on both walking tours, and which ultimately propelled our readings of what was going on “on the ground.” While Bakhtin of course prioritized the notion of literary chronotopes, not only does Alastair Renfrew, writing about his ideas, point out that “time and space are the coordinates also of *history*”, but I would also further make the argument that a walking tour is always already a narrative event, given that, after H. Porter Abbott, “narrative is the representation of an event or a series of events” (Renfrew 2015, 122; Abbott 2002, 13). The idea of representation is especially important here, in the sense of layers and modes of telling, for Bakhtin tells us that “the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation” (1981, 250), and it follows that this is a representation that we, in turn, experience and interpret. Indeed, Joan Scott (in Dunn 2004, 486) concludes of the tourist experience that: “Experience is at once always already an interpretation

and is in need of interpretation. [...] it is always [...] political.” In this reading, experience, in effect, holds the potential of a means of resistance, it forms its own narrative field, that then aligns, or does not, with the narratives that surround it, in this case, with the actual and narrational “material” of the walking tours we engaged in and with. Beginning with a brief overview of the two walking tours themselves, I will then address a series of different spatial and temporal narrational factors brought into play in the (politicized) interpretation of our experience(s).

For our walking tour of the Afrikanisches Viertel, we met Mnyaka Sururu Mboro of Berlin Postkolonial at the U Rehberge metro station (close to the “Togo” communal gardens and Togostraße). As we walked the circuit of streets of the Afrikanisches Viertel with him, Mboro told us about how each street sign related to events and figures from German colonial history, also employing supporting materials (images and short texts provided by Berlin Postkolonial). The tour, having looped around the streets of the Afrikanisches Viertel, ended with a return to Togostraße and a discussion in a side room of the Each One Teach One (EOTO) e.V. organization, an organization founded “in the context of Black resistance movements critical of racism”, and now a “community-based education and empowerment project in Berlin”, (EOTO 2023)¹³ for a Q&A and to talk about Mboro’s work and look at the supporting materials more closely.

Our Goutte d’Or tour began and ended at the ICI – we met Jacky Libaud there, did a circuit of the area, looking at sites of resistance and early sights of Algerian presence per se, and discussing the problematics of gentrification, for example the transformation of the area’s original Kabyle cafés into fancy restaurants, before ending the tour with a traditional couscous lunch in the ICI’s restaurant. My notes from the tour record date after date, and highlight the names of important people in the area, poignant details of hotels for single male workers and the underground struggles of the FLN who Libaud (2021) characterized as “rul[ing]” the area in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as more recent anti-racist demonstrations and initiatives from the early 1980s.

In both cases, the students and I did not come to these walking tour experiences as “blank slates” (Dunn 2004, 487). Dunn writes that experience “is shaped by the dominant discourses, narratives and representations in circulation within their historically-specific social context” (2004, 486-87). We entered into the spaces of our experience with the additional discussions of discourse and representation we had had on campus in the weeks prior to both travels, in particular extracts from Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, and readings on power and representation in museum and gallery displays. In the German case (CLCS 238T) we had also touched on cultural memory in postcolonial spaces, and had specifically read Brenda Yeoh (2001) on postcolonial cities and Jennifer Engler’s 2013 article on street signs. This reading that we did was set to coalesce with the outcomes of the Postcolonial Studies minor – in both cases I drew on Learning Outcomes 1 and 2 for the preparatory weeks of the course, with the aim of moving us towards the acquisition of “an understanding of [...] *postcolonial texts and theories*.”

The seven to nine preparatory weeks we have within the overarching context of our Academic Travel program, on campus and before our departure, ensure that no participant can be a truly blank slate. In our present cases we had consciously undertaken readings set to align with the empirical, so in effect we were coming to the space, in a chronotopal sense, with the “history” of that reading, with something of our own narrative and, implicitly, with our modes of reading that space already “activated.” For better or for worse, we could not have had an “objective experience” as Dunn puts it, also quoting Stuart Hall, for “travellers [...] are not sponges that assimilate [...] narratives and discourses uncritically. Rather, they arrive at understandings through the negotiation of a range of discursive networks” (Dunn 2004, 487). In carrying our discourse readings of Empire into the empirical, our narrative(s) would always synergize or clash with those encountered on site.

¹³ “im Kontext Schwarzer-, rassismuskritischer Widerstandsbewegungen”; “ein Community-basiertes Bildungs- und Empowerment-Projekt in Berlin”, see <https://eoto-archiv.de/ueber-uns/>

Cheong and Miller caution that: “In examining power relationships, [...] the first Foucauldian task is to identify the targets and the agents that structure the differentiated positions of individuals in a localized institution/system” (2000, 376). We had different modes of arrival at the starting points for these tours in the first place. This also comes down to the institutions or organizations and websites in question. Here, the crux of the problem is the implicit “structuring” of who are “tourist attractions” and who are “tourist managers” within a given space (Amoamo 2009, i). These contemporary dynamics tend to repeat how past discourses manifest in the postcolonial present, namely through “economic structures, cultural representations and exploitative relationships” should the tour be institutionalized (Hall and Tucker 2004, 185). Further, I would argue that d’Hauteserre’s concept of the disruptive metonym, where those “marginalized and even expunged by neocolonial relationships and structures” can push past epistemic control to manage a tour experience, is of significance in our experience(s), from the beginning (2004, 238-39).

For a walking tour with Berlin Postkolonial, it is necessary to email the organization and arrange with Christian Kopp and Mboro a date and time. Now subsumed under Dekoloniale, there is no specific tour website, rather the information about the tours is built into discussions of project and member biographies.¹⁴ In terms of institutions and organizations, Berlin Postkolonial itself is an NGO, as is the 2012-founded EOTO, in which our post-tour discussion was held. The siting of our discussion in an EOTO side room is spatially important: from our group only one person (me) was able to go to the door of the main building of the EOTO to get the key and gain entry to the side room because they were holding a youth project session providing a safe space for young Black people to connect, and our presence in their main space at that time, as an almost exclusively white group, would have represented a major incursion.

“Algeria in the Goutte d’Or” is a bookable tour *among* other tours on a website. Touring La Goutte d’Or in different ways (especially ways characterized on the ICI website as “thematic”) makes one aware of it as “different”, and, narratively, as per Nogués-Pedregal (2012c, 200), as a(nother) neighborhood, whose “variance” is “attractive”, but whose marketing cannot help but remind of the Turkish-German writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s comments about the creation of colonies in one’s own land (2001, 95). Many of the tour titles in question, as they are listed on the website, arguably produce narrative echoes of “exotic” space and the commodification of marginality: “Château Rouge, Little Africa in Paris”; “Algeria in the Goutte d’Or”; “Islam in the Goutte d’Or”; “Spirituality in the Goutte d’Or”; “Popular uprisings”; “Golden women”; “Street Art Stroll”; “Cultural Heritage of the Goutte d’Or”; “Wax and Fashion in the Goutte d’Or”; “Tasting Tour”; “Goutte d’Or: A Space of Beauty”. The overarching texts of the general tour offerings and the specific tour I chose for us read as follows:

Discover the Goutte d’Or

Book a thematic group tour of the Goutte d’Or in Paris and discover the economic dynamism and cultural diversity of the capital’s most multicultural neighborhood, within walking distance of Montmartre.

Let yourself be carried away through the Goutte d’Or’s history and experience its strong sense of hospitality and solidarity, taking you through various quirky¹⁵ locations including food shops and local artisan shops.

[...]

Algeria in the Goutte d’Or

Since 1914, the arrival of North Africans, notably Algerians, has spurred development in the Goutte d’Or neighborhood. This tour tracks the history of the

¹⁴ See, for example, the Dekoloniale programming site: <https://dekoloniale.de/en/program/calendar>

¹⁵ I am interested by the English translation of “quirky” for the term “insolite”, as I actually find the English term, while patronizing, less problematic.

Goutte d’Or and its shared identities, stopping at vintage stores selling *rai* cassettes, musical cafés, and restaurants.

A 2 hour visit with your guide, Jacky Libaud.¹⁶

On the English-language version of the ICI tours page, the “Algeria in the Goutte d’Or” tour is further accompanied by an image of an Algerian flag, softly lit and superimposed with sparkling lights: it is visually “ethnocommodicized.”

The ICI has only two guides who share all of the tours listed above, and it does not have information about them and their backgrounds and expertise on its website. In the case of the Afrikanisches Viertel, Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, on the other hand, is clearly sited in and introduced via Berlin Postkolonial project and biography information as having come to Berlin from Tanzania to study in 1978 and remained. One of the founding members of Berlin Postkolonial and one of the foremost figures in the struggle for the return of human remains, including those of his own ancestors, from museum and other institutional sites in Germany, most notably the controversial Humboldt Museum,¹⁷ in the sense of d’Hautesserre, this makes of Mboro a metonym for Tanzanian cultural history and for resistance to colonial systems past and present (Just Listen! 2023).

In terms of the tour experience, interactions (or lack thereof) of our tours with locals also contributed to both discomfort and solidarity construction with the spaces and with our guides in two very distinct ways. At one point on our Goutte d’Or tour we were offered water by a representative of an Algerian organization we were standing outside, who was curious about the nature of the tour. For the rest, locals either demonstrated indifference or gazed on us, heightening our discomfort at our obvious incursion on their squares, cafés and public spaces. At more than one point on the tour, Libaud warned us of the threat of “isolated minors” (2021). In Berlin, the discomfort came from a different angle, and enhanced the relationship of solidarity with Mboro and his message. As noted above, the Afrikanisches Viertel also has its own organization opposing these memory incursions, the Initiative Pro Afrikanisches Viertel – and their opposition is often active, as in the case of the student experience cited above, which relates the throwing of a raw egg at Mboro (Jacobs and Sprute 2019, 115). In 2018 our tour only experienced the occasional audible hostile muttering and a lot of staring, but in 2015 we were shouted at in a hostile exchange at the Togo garden community. For the postcolonial class the experience of being shouted at *with* Mboro and our desire to align with him at that moment is not unproblematic, allowing, as it did, the mostly settler colonials among us to sidestep our own positionality in a (post)colonial context. In the case of both tours, local chronotopes fundamentally aided us to better understand both our own experience and the impact of the colonial past on the lived present.

Bakhtin writes that “[t]he general characteristic of [...] interactions [among and within chronotopes] is that they are *dialogical* (in the broadest sense of the word)” (Bakhtin in Renfrew 2015, 127). As listener-readers coming into all of the ideas and experiences that make up the time/space of the tours themselves, the idea of the chronotope seems to allow for us, history, locals, institutions and guides at that time/space nexus, with an overarching “output” of “conceiving of the narrative(s) of history beyond – but not separate from – the [...] text” (Renfrew 2015, 128). While I am aware that this is yet another application of Western theory to try to understand postcolonial situations, the engagement seems productive precisely because of its

¹⁶ I am quoting from the English versions of the tour descriptions here because the majority of the students were not studying French, and the tour itself was conducted in English. The ICI’s French descriptions of the overarching Goutte d’Or tours and the specific Algeria tour are located here: <https://www.institut-cultures-islam.org/l-ici/> and here: <https://www.institut-cultures-islam.org/ici-la-goutte-dor/>. Further materials in English on the tours can be viewed here: <https://www.institut-cultures-islam.org/en/ici-la-goutte-dor/>

¹⁷ See also Susanne Memarnia (2021), “Die Tote zu Hause beerdigen” (“Burying the Dead at Home”), an interview with Mnyaka Sururu Mboro.

empiricism – it allows for Hall and Tucker’s positing of an ethical postcolonial tourism that makes visible its systems and “plac[es] the development of the representation of that destination within the context of the historical consumption and production of places and the means by which places have become incorporated within the global capital system” (2004, 8).

As I discussed above, the *un*remarkability of the Afrikanisches Viertel creates a “lack” of sites – and this frustrates its reading as an exotic commodity, promoting instead a productive focus on memory. Drawing on Doreen Massey, Förster et al. have already emphasized ideas of space/time in the area: that of Initiative Pro Afrikanisches Viertel-aligned locals, “an essentialised notion of space and place that draws on an affective idea of home and on localism in order to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and leave ‘others’ on the outside”, and that of the journey into cultural memory, “which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world”, and the implications of this for the present (Massey in Förster et al. 2016, 11). Mboro’s narrative and the visual aids he provided functioned as intense points linking past and present, as did his own manifestation as “metonym” for a greater historio-cultural whole within this (post)colonial space. Further, our own experiences of not being central to the narrative informed our reading, both in terms of the hostile reception of locals, and, more importantly, in terms of our coming to awareness of our incursion (as an overwhelmingly white and privileged group) into backstage safe spaces for local young people. All of this situated us multiply and complexly within and thereby productively forced us to think about the enduring legacy of colonialism.

In the case of La Goutte d’Or I need to own my responsibility as a “facilitator.” I had chosen that walking tour because I had thought that it would focus on traces of history and their present complexities in the same way as the walking tour in the Afrikanisches Viertel. But the “how” is paramount, and rather than entering into cultural memory, we found ourselves entering into a cultural touristic space that (re)colonized representation. The subject matter of the tour was not clear to the students because of the narrative “performance” of the tour and all of the surrounding spatio-temporal factors: where we were supposed to be exploring the traces of the past in the present, the lived space of the present and our role in that space was fundamentally too intrusive. The tour was supposed to be about (post)colonial resistance of the past – but the ICI as institution is itself constrained by the modes of its construction: institutionalized postcolonialism tends to “steal’ the voice of the postcolonial subject in its very bid to re-assess it” (Khaira in d’Hautesserre 2004, 236). It was narrativial representational “voice-stealing” that produced the students’ discomfort, especially when aligned with a hyperconsciousness in space – we were learning about Algerian history in a migrant space from a white French guide, a resident of an area now gentrified and characterized as multicultural and diverse, but under circumstances where, clearly, “postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance [had] themselves become consumer products” (Huggan 2001, 6). This is all too reminiscent of the manner in which, as Maria Amoamo writes about my own nation, “indigenous images were treated as the common property of post-settler nations, freely available for use as symbols in the construction of nationhood” (2009, 62). While La Goutte d’Or is located in French Paris and not in a settler colony as such, the institutional colonizing and gentrification of the area, as described by multiple commentators, does give pause for thought, as does the tour’s entering into an uncomfortable “becoming-ethnographic” in its structures of engagement with sites of “difference.”¹⁸

The Goutte d’Or walking tour resultantly confronted us with ourselves, in a space/time situation where we were duplicating the system, repeating the very things from the nineteenth and early twentieth century that the art and literature we were studying was challenging, in “a thin parody of the colonial experience” (d’Hautesserre 2004, 237). This is the difference from when we walked the same area with Mokrani in 2016. In our most recent iteration, the pre-reading had

¹⁸ Here it seems pertinent to note that it was after our visit to the Archives nationales d’outre mer (the National Overseas Archives), some days later on our CLCS 247T travel, and after we had been working with their collection of colonial postcards, that the students first expressed their discomfort to me (having already discussed the tour extensively amongst themselves).

highlighted student awareness and ability to formulate the consciousness that we were “tourists on safari” (as they expressed it). To return to Nogués-Pedregal (2012a, xiv) “no social process exists independently of its practicing”, and our experience empiricized Empire.

These two walking tours on “postcolonial” travels produce uncomfortable reflections for us in the sense of our acknowledgement of who we *want* to feel close to and who we *want* to feel different from, even, and especially where these desires might not align with our own subject positions in the system. In both cases, the difference with the inhabitants of the area and the alignment with the guides were enhanced, and all of this in backstage spaces overtop of people’s lives. An anonymous entry in the CLCS 247T 2021 course evaluation reads:

While I learned a lot from the Goutte d’Or walking tour, it did make me very uneasy. I don’t know if it was some of what the tour guide was saying (in regards to how dangerous this particular area of Paris is as people walk by us...) or the nature of being led around on a semi-historical semi-contemporary tour of someone’s neighborhood. What I learned was really interesting and I appreciate that I can literally map it onto where we walked, but it still feels very strange to think about. I know it made several of us quite uncomfortable, but it did get us thinking critically about how one could arrange a walking tour like this.

In La Goutte d’Or students pushed against the way in which we had become enmeshed in the very processes of representation and power we were supposed to be critiquing, finding ourselves gaining “an awareness of the *enduring legacy of colonialism* in shaping both global systems and individual ways of thinking, seeing, and understanding” from the inside, and learning that even contemporary, apparently postcolonial institutions can be complicit by their very institutionalization, and that “interdisciplinary links” of the postcolonial may also be those of ethno-commodity and postcoloniality. Ultimately, our experiences within these webs of narrative made clear to us that “*ethical academic citizenship*” must involve a hyperawareness of directions of knowledge production least it commit epistemic violence on the ground.

CONCLUSIONS: EMPIR(E)ICAL MIGHT

In a situation where we must acknowledge that the tools of Western theory will not work in an institutionalized sense within the academy to “decolonize what the Master built” (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, 22), the present study seems to suggest that there is value in “taking it outside” and combating the postcolonial in the “vernacular” and in modes specific to lived localities (Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia 2006, 257). While Bahri’s call for a “projection of symbolic educational issues into a larger frame of reference” – in other words, into a space which I would like to call the empir(e)ical – clearly produces Brydon’s “difficult forms of knowing”, and implicates us, often uncomfortably, in our own practice, we cannot miss the opportunity that Academic Travel provides in giving us the possibility to engage, and to “critically theorize” our pedagogy on the ground (Bahri 1997, 294; Brydon, 2013, 4). As Edward W. Said advocates, “the crossing of boundaries [...] can [...] provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger’s phrase, with other ways of telling” (1989, 225). Whose tellings we consciously enable ourselves to listen to, enter into, and engage with as cultural readers in an empir(e)ical context is crucial.

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