

BOOK REVIEWS

Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond The Color Line.

By Paul Gilroy, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000. pp.406

Reviewed by: KARLA POEWE
University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

According to Paul Gilroy, this book had its source in various childhood contradictions centered on race and fascism as he experienced them in England. One of the purposes of the book, therefore, is to make people who value multicultural life aware that the “modern idea of ‘race’ can have no ethically defensible place” in it (p.6). It has become an anachronism. Likewise passé is the “tarnished language” and lack of ethical considerations of “antiracists” (ibid). Since the DNA revolution and high technology have made the crisis of raciology explicit, Gilroy suggests that we must somehow get hold of that transformation and make it work against “the tainted logic that produced it” (p.15). Whatever one may think of Gilroy’s postmodern argumentation with its routine opposition to “logocentrism”, the expressed sentiment is laudable.

The way Gilroy sees it, the crisis of raciology parallels that of fascism since the two are intimately intertwined. Fascism has not disappeared from the world despite its thorough defeat in World War II. Rather, it too witnessed some transformations and is now a highly conspicuous form of politics among peoples who were once considered victims, from Africa, to the Balkans, to Asia. It has also entered “black Atlantic cultures in motion toward globalization” (p.8), so that Gilroy’s point is, if fascism “can take hold, unidentified, among the descendants of slaves, (it) can enter anywhere. Past victimization affords no protection against the allure of automatic, prepolitical uniformity” (p.8).

In light of these crises, Gilroy seizes the opportunity to create a new world view or, as he calls it, a new humanism. Because this world view is to be the perspective and intellectual locus from within which future histories are to be written, it must be postracial and postanthropological. While he does not distinguish German philosophical anthropology, from physical, social, or generally, empirical anthropology, I take his “postanthropological” to mean the cessation of romanticizing the existence of distinct, homogeneous populations with their own unique histories and adaptations to the environment. Instead of the “triumphal tones of anthropological discourses”, Gilroy’s new world view is to have at its core a sensibility for our “fundamentally fragile, corporeal existence” (p.17). This too is laudable were it not for two things. First, the humanism here expounded has long existed in some major world traditions

including Christianity and Judaism. If that is forgotten and has to be restated in the language of postmodernism, it is because postmodernists have made major efforts to eliminate knowledge of world traditions in the first place. Second, if the author means that the chronic tragedy of human vulnerability has been defined and made explicit to us in the “melancholic art” of such figures as Nietzsche (p.17), the world has more reason for despair than for hope. In my current research on the take-over of National Socialism in Germany, every young man who wrote a letter to one of the numerous founders of the Deutsch, Nordic, or Germanic religions that helped bring Hitler to power mentioned that the deciding step in his conversion to National Socialism was having read one or another of Nietzsche’s works.

The book is not, as the author admits, a world history. Rather, it is a world view of what he calls a planetary humanism (p.327), one that is to inform future research and therefore must be free of “raciological theories”, be they those of Kant, Darwin, Helena Blavatsky or Carl Jung (p.331). Being a world view, however, the book sits, as was the case with the dozens of world view books written in the nineteen twenties and thirties in Germany, on numerous small, but irritating errors. These errors have their source in too much reliance on secondary and tertiary works published in the English language, although a translation from a French work is included. Correlatively, they have their source in lack of empirical research, be it of a fieldwork nature or of archival research of unpublished primary materials in their original language. What the author knows well, and from which readers benefit, is Black local and global art, music and politics that, importantly, he works into the world picture just as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) advocated doing more than two centuries ago. Unfortunately, Herder’s particularism was picked up and expanded, even by the father of American anthropology Franz Boas and the historian of anthropology George Stocking, but Herder’s universalism was ignored so that the present generation has to restate things as if they were never said before. Nevertheless, in the juxtaposition of black and white witnesses of human suffering, Gilroy’s work is exemplary.

Interesting too is his summary of existing interpretations (by Griffin, Guérin, Jackson, Benjamin, Berman) of what fascism is and how it fascinates (pp.150-165). In typical postmodernist fashion the evil of visual representation and its juxtaposition with technological rationality is highlighted. Therefore, according to Gilroy, the creative aspects and distinctive qualities of Nazism were associated with the “enhanced power of visibility” (p.149). By contrast, speech was devalued and print culture reduced (p.158). Given Leni Riefenstahl’s phenomenal film talent and the spectacular rallies (pp.156,165), on which American visual media are fixated, one does not disagree with the fact that visual art (including Nazi sculpture and painting that are usually kept out of sight during art displays of that period), enjoyed an enhanced status. But Gilroy is wrong, as are those on whom he relies, when he argues that print culture was reduced and speech devalued. As Mohler (1999, *Die Konservative Revolution in*

Deutschland 1918-1932) and Schulze (1998, *Germany: A New History*) point out, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a virtual explosion of print culture. In fact, if there is a group that more than any other helped usher in National socialism by virtue of its persuasiveness, it is the hundreds of writers and scholars of that period. But to know this one has to know German intimately and conduct painstaking research in that difficult language. At any rate, in the twenties and thirties, the written word flourished as never before in the form of flyers, brochures, novels, popular philosophies, sagas and epics. Every little *Bund* (usually youth groups), and there were hundreds, put out its own journal with its own version of *völkisch* and National Socialistic thought.

As for speech (p.158), I would argue that it was not so much devalued by Nazis, as it was transformed into a style that numerous self-proclaimed “geniuses” and *Führer* (of *Bünde*, circles, parties) thought more befitting their role. Public debates and conversations were replaced by monologues, perhaps because they were more theatrical, more suited to propaganda, more suited to the force of will. As Kershaw (1998, *Hitler, 1889-1936*) points out, Hitler kept organization to a minimum because in his view a *Weltanschauung* “needs for its dissemination not civil servants but fanatical apostles” (p.403). The most sublime mission, not only of the party, but also of speech, was “to provide for the expansion of the ‘idea’” and this was to be done, of course, through propaganda (ibid).

Nor is the relationship between “race” or “raciology” and National Socialism as clear cut as Gilroy and his sources would have us believe. True, Fischer’s and Günther’s “biological”, “scientific”, and Darwinian notions of race became popular among the hard core around Hitler and among many followers (p.142). But National Socialism would not have seduced so many, including initially W.E.B. Du Bois (Lewis 2000, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, pp.397-400), had it not been for the fact that a large number of leaders and followers thought “biological race” unimportant and race hierarchy distasteful, basing national distinctiveness on cultural and historical continuity, on the soul of a nation, on intimacy with locale, and turning German idealism quite literally into a *Deutscher Glaube* (German Faith). Influenced by Leo Frobenius, among others, Léopold Sédar Senghor turned *Négritude* into a faith, and as National Socialism was Pan-Germanic, so *Négritude* was Pan-African. This “softer” National Socialism did not, however, prevent anti-Semitism. Because Jews were associated with Versailles, internationalism, the “Diaspora” (p.123) and, above all, with “Jewish Christianity” that was seen as a form of Jewish imperialism believed to have suffocated “authentic” German faith and culture, German Jews were turned into “foreigners” and their place in public office made impossible - with worse to come later.

Gilroy’s book bursts with delightful language and humane sentiment. The wonderful “itinerants” and cultural “hybrids” are given their place in the sun. And it is deserved. For all that, however, it is a book full of blame for the wrongs that nineteenth century Europeans, who somehow should have been

“perfect”, committed in the colonies and later on the battlefields of Europe. Like any ideologist, Gilroy fails to recognize that brutality is learned more quickly than the first suck of a new born baby, and that no amount of ideological idealism can protect humanity from brutality. For me the energies of scholars who write world views is misplaced. Our task is the careful, painstaking, systematic pursuit of knowledge in the language of the people whose doing - or wrong doings - we want to understand.

Coming of Age in Post-Soviet Russia

by Fran Markowitz, University of Illinois. Press, Urbana & Chicago, 2000. pp.

Reviewed by: JULIA MIRSKY

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, Israel

This fascinating journey into the world of Russian youth is *"a tale of two transitions"*, writes Fran Markowitz in the preface to her book. It tells the story of *"Russia's reemergence as a nation-state after the USSR and of the individual children who have changed into adults in the midst of this grand transformation"* (p.3). This tale of Russian adolescence, however, turns out to be universal and is not confined to one place, one society, and one point in time. The external transformations of Russia notwithstanding, adolescence is a tale of young people searching for their individual identities, contemplating their future, and considering their career options. In the meantime, they are busy with their clothes, their music and their friends - busy being teenagers.

Markowitz's telling of the tale of Russian adolescents challenges some "self-evident truths" of social sciences as it poses the questions, "The adolescence crisis" - is it universal? Uniform in content and form? Is it inevitably the time of storm and stress? Can adolescents develop well without manifest revolt? Is "social stability" critical during adolescence? Do adolescents fully depend on it for their internal integration; in the face of instability do they necessarily lose their psychological balance? Fran Markowitz asks these questions during her encounter with post-Soviet youth and leaves the reader wondering. Over the course of the book and especially in the eleventh chapter, the answers become clear: social stability, like the construct of adolescence itself is, in her view, more a concern for adults than it is for the young people who navigate their society's ebbs and flows.

During her six months in Russia, Markowitz became an active participant in the post-Soviet youth experience. Not only did she interview scores of adolescents, she also visited eleven different schools in St. Petersburg, Dzerzhinsk and Moscow. She regularly attended classes with eleven-graders, getting to know their surroundings, their curriculum and their teachers. In a compelling and eloquent manner, she relates their childhood memories, their