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Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. xxix + 320 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8032-2545-9.

Review by Kate Marsh, University of Liverpool.

Since the publication of Tyler Stovall's *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, the centrality of Paris to any discussion of what Stovall characterizes as "a new type of black community, one based on positive affinities and experiences rather than the negative limitations of segregation, one that included a wide variety of individuals yet at the same time celebrated black culture" has become axiomatic.[1] Numerous monographs, including studies by Jules-Rosette, Blake, Berliner, Jackson, and Edwards, along with special editions of journals such as the *Journal of Romance Studies*, have explored the cosmopolitan community which developed in Paris during and after the interwar period, and have interrogated the clear contradictions of modernism evident in the exchanges between African and African-American cultures and the *métropole* of the second-largest European colonial empire.[2] In this respect, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* constitutes an intervention in a growing field of research in cultural history. The aims of Boittin's monograph are, however, focused and specific. Heeding Mann's assertion that "(c)olonial histories need a sense of place,"[3] the monograph offers a detailed racial and gendered reading of Paris as a colonial space between 1919 and 1939 and, in doing so, it explores in what ways the cultural phenomenon known as the *tumulte noir* was linked to the social and political lives of the men and women whom it purported to represent (p. xvi). The argument is supported by comprehensive archival research, making expert use of the records kept by the police on the daily lives of the key political participants (notably those records kept by the *Service de Liaison avec les Originaires des Territoires Français d'Outre-mer* [SLOTFORM]). There is also extensive analysis of the artistic and literary production of the diaspora, including a detailed examination of a range of newspaper articles published in the 1920s and 1930s. It is to be regretted that, for all this detailed textual analysis, quotations are given in English translation only—a feature common to the "France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization" series and one which is becoming infuriatingly prevalent among major US university presses.

Informed by Wilder's contention that France has always been an "imperial nation-state," with colonialism being an essential part of France's national self-definition rather than something external or exceptional to it, *Colonial Metropolis* explores the centrality of colonial interactions to the history of inter-war Paris.[4] Given the weight of current scholarship on jazz, and what Boittin characterizes as "other forms of black culture" (p. xvi), some of the subjects addressed within the six chapters which form the main body of the work are familiar. The monograph opens, for example, with a chapter devoted to Josephine Baker, addressing both the consumption of Baker as a cultural product and Baker as a symbol of colonialism. Despite such engagement with well-rehearsed arguments, the subsequent chapters offer a more innovative reading of the Jazz Age, colonial politics, and Parisian spaces. The second chapter, "Dancing Dissidents & Dissident Dancers," combines textual and topographical methodologies, making extensive use of notes on and by informants archived in SLOTFORM dossiers, and supplementing this with a study of the recorded addresses of peoples from the colonies (*arrondissement* by *arrondissement*), the sites of the dance halls (venues for *bals nègres* and *bals antillaises*) where they congregated, and the places where black associations held their official and unofficial meetings.

Boittin thus establishes the visibility in Paris of peoples from the colonies by mapping out the locations where French men and women might encounter their colonial counterparts. The third chapter continues this geographic reading by analyzing how the urban spaces of Paris facilitated connections between “members of the African diaspora” (p. 77). By far the most compelling and original section of the monograph, however, are the final three chapters, which interrogate the links between the politics of race relations and anti-imperialism on the one side, and gendered discourses on the other. Here, exploring what she terms “reverse exoticism,” a method available to groups such as the *Union des Travailleurs Nègres* for propagating political ideals, Boittin deftly teases out how they “gendered their political world male” (p. 113). The imbrications of politics and culture are further explored in the penultimate chapter, which is devoted to elucidating how female writers, notably the Nardal sisters, used articles in newspapers to identify an explicit consciousness of race. The monograph ends with a chapter looking at how French feminists responded to colonialism and at the connections between anti-imperial and pro-suffrage political discourses.

The central thesis of the monograph, namely that Paris was crafted “into a space in which to consider and shape colonialism” by the local struggles of black and white women engaging with a transnational system (p. 221), is illustrated by detailed studies of individual actors and their cultural productions, including Ousmane Socé, Paulette, and Jane Nardal, Marguerite Martin, and Yvonne Netter, and of events which have become familiar reference points within numerous histories of an international black movement (for example, the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*, the anti-Colonial Exposition, and responses to Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1935). In light of the central argument, *viz.*, that “interwar Paris was a colonial space, meaning a space in which the specter of ‘empire’ guided the self-identification of its residents as well as their social and political interactions” (p. xiv), it is somewhat frustrating that other migrant groups, particularly from Algeria and Indochina (valorized as France’s *perle de l’Extrême Orient*), and connections with other anti-imperial groups, do not figure within the analysis. The methodological reasons for their exclusion are clearly delineated within the introduction and the justification that the *tumulte noir* “as a phenomenon was distinctive” is compelling (p. xix). However, Paris was a haven not only for black American artists, diasporic Africans, and peoples from the France’s Antillean and Western and Central African colonies; it was also a haven for a range of peoples dispossessed in the wake of the Great War (exiled White Russians, immigrant Polish, Italian, Spanish workers amongst others), in addition to being the capital of France’s vast overseas empire. As such, it constituted an important axis of anti-colonial activity beyond that of black political movements, activity which included the early career of Ho Chi Minh, whom, it is worth noting, Boittin does mention in passing (p. 111). Simone de Beauvoir, reflecting back on 1929 in the second volume of her autobiography, highlighted this confluence of anti-imperial discourses and activity within Paris with the observation that “(l)e colonialisme serait liquidé dans un bref délai: la campagne déclenchée par Gandhi aux Indes, l’agitation communiste en Indochine le garantissaient.”^[5] A comparative analysis of the range of political movements identified by Beauvoir during the interwar period would fully establish the significance of Paris as a colonial metropolis and as the locus of transnational exchanges that Boittin persuasively contends it was. This criticism notwithstanding, the monograph offers insightful and original analysis of the links between the *vogue nègre* and anti-imperial politics, and of the important role of the city of Paris in facilitating such a nexus.

NOTES

[1] Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston, Mass.: Mariner, 1996), p. xv.

[2] See, for example, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers’ Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz Age Paris, 1900–1930* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Brett A. Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003);

Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003); and Sam Haigh and Nicki Hitchcott (eds.), Special Edition: Black Paris, *Journal of Romance Studies* 5(2005).

[3] Gregory Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa", *The American Historical Review*, 110/2(2005); <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.2/mann.html> [accessed 12 July 2010].

[4] Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 19.

[5] Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 22.

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