Josephine Baker: Gendered Ethnicity on a Mainstream Stage

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Abstract:
[M]y point in using discussions of the portrayal of African American and, for instance, Asian American women to support an overall argument of racial fetishism is to point to a politics of resistance. If the white male gaze blurs, paradoxically, Whoopi Goldberg, Josephine Baker and Lucy Liu as 'Asian' dragon lady in Ally McBeal, we may do well to combine black feminist thought and Asian American Studies to deconstruct the nature of such a myopic gaze - such will be the aim of this paper.

1 At a time when popular TV series such as *Miami Vice* establish what Renato Rosaldo has called an affirmative action haven of politically correct multiracial casting, it seems almost obsolete to speak of Josephine Baker. Baker posing for photographers in a bubble bath which reveals more than it conceals attests to a racialized gender politics that, in the age of a sexless Whoopi Goldberg running around in her bathrobe, we seem to have safely left behind. Quite to the contrary, however, it could be argued that Goldberg's contemporary sexlessness and Baker's scanty (bubble bath) costume at the beginning of the 20th century converge in what Sau-ling Wong has called the "gendering of ethnicity": race accounts for the ways in which the gendered spectacle is portrayed. As Patricia Hill Collins has argued in her discussion of stereotypes of black women in US popular culture, the tramp may not be all that different from the mammy under the curious - and, as I will argue in this paper - curiously detached white male gaze: "Connecting [both images] is the common theme of Black women's sexuality" (78) - a sexuality that is apparently absent from the mammy image and hypervisible in the black seductress. Moreover, mainstream discourse, in its lumping together of various ethnicities in the generic spectacle of a desirable "black" woman at the same time creates the basis for a women of color coalition which I would like to inscribe here in methodological terms. Rather than to repeat the gesture of "racial lumping," then, my point in using discussions of the portrayal of African American and, for instance, Asian American women to support an overall argument of racial fetishism is to point to a politics of resistance. If the white male gaze blurs, paradoxically, Whoopi Goldberg, Josephine Baker and Lucy Liu as "Asian" dragon lady in *Ally McBeal*, we may do well to combine black feminist thought and Asian American Studies to deconstruct the nature of such a myopic gaze - this will be the aim of my paper. Moreover, my focus will be a transnational one: as the striking resemblance between the articulation of French national homogeneity in Baker's films and highly similar discursive patterns delineated in US American Ethnic Studies theories demonstrate, strategies

of exclusion may transcend national borders. Even as the particular rationales for introducing restrictive immigration policies may differ, the overall thrust may be the same.

2 Both *Zou Zou* (1934) and *Princess Tam Tam* (1936), I will argue, revolve around two fundamental issues which ultimately converge in a single thematic strand: the (il)logical feat which the mainstream accomplishes to ensure the whiteness of the nation-space. As Robert Lee has suggested in the context of anti-Asian sentiment in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, this allegation of national purity collapsed the nation into the nuclear family: "The family is the primary metaphor of the nation. The idea of Americans as family is the discursive basis for an imagined nationhood" (7). This strategy of upholding racial purity clearly emerges in Baker's films as a gendered one. Miscegenation or racial mixing is stemmed by disavowing white male desire for the black female body: while the black woman as seductress without moral inhibitions threatens the integrity of the nation space, this desire is never mutual. Ironically, however, this very assumption which underlies the filmic discourse of both *Zou Zou* and *Princess Tam Tam* is undermined by the very fact of Josephine Baker's presence on a mainstream screen - a presence based on her success with especially a white male audience. As metadiscourse and filmic content contradict each other, the question is thus precisely this: just what did white men see when they looked at Josephine Baker dance on stage? My focus therefore is not so much on the authority of the white male gaze as it undresses the black female Other as on the ways in which this authority could be said to be fractured. Mainstream discourse resorts to distancing or screening devices in order to create the impression that even when watching a black woman perform on stage, white men are never *really* looking.

3 My conflation between the actor and the role which would parallel, on a literary level, that between the author and the narrator is deliberate: I am interested in the circulation of Josephine Baker herself as an icon of blackness - with all the misogynist and racist implications this entails. In a sense, then, Baker does play herself in *Zou Zou*, a sense in which, crucially enough, the deconstructive potential of the role may inhere. Read in this vein, Zou Zou as Josephine Baker would inhabit the cage deconstructively, holding up a mirror to a white audience which is thus being mocked from behind the bars of a gilded cage, in its fetishization of a blackness that does not exist.

4 In this context, I would like to focus on the image of a half-naked Josephine Baker suspended above the stage in a bird cage. This image, I propose, can be used to unravel the signification not only of Baker's films *Zou Zou* and *Princess Tam Tam*, but also Baker's extra-textual reception as a whole. A key image such as the bird cage can thus be decontextualized

from the narrative of *Zou Zou* in which it occurs and can be made to yield more general conclusions about racialist narratives as such. This abstraction is possible, I would stipulate, because Baker's films are part of an overall continuum of racial fetishism which transcends national borders - a transnationalism implied not only through the presence of an African American actress on a French stage. Interestingly, both films self-consciously breach their own fictional frames and signify on, even explicitly comment on, the "real" success of their lead actress, Josephine Baker. The frenetic audiences shown within *Zou Zou* and *Princess Tam Tam* mirror Baker's own audience in movie theaters and stage performances. If the audience constellation is the same within the films as without them, moreover, so is the life-world of the black woman who is their protagonist. The image of a black woman finding herself alone and abandoned in the Western metropolis, a lonesomeness her stardom could not ultimately ameliorate, could also be said to echo Baker's own life-world and physical presence in the West. There is thus a certain sadness about the bird cage precisely because its inmate is never permitted to fully participate in French society. Finally, I will explore the ways in which Baker's eroticism informs the savagery she is made to enact. For her sex appeal is clearly racialized; why else should she be in a cage? The most remarkable task which both films accomplish, then, is their veiling of the white male spectator's *sexual* desire of racial difference. In a logical tour de force, white men are made to seem curiously disinterested as they contemplate a black woman in a bird-feather costume.

Zou Zou and the Art of Checking the Light

5 Josephine Baker's film *Zou Zou* can be read through the image of ethnicity in a gilded cage - an image that in turn sheds light on another key question: the question of whether the presence of ethnicity on the screen or stage of the mainstream is in itself a good sign or whether, on the contrary, its framing neutralizes any subversive potential which this presence could have unleashed. *Zou Zou* revolves around a black girl's displacement in a benevolent but racially homogeneous French society and her unrequitted love for the white "brother" with whom she grew up, Jean. At the same time, the film mirrors Baker's own success as a singer, dancer, and stage performer. Zou Zou's becoming a celebrity on a Paris stage echoes Baker's own career.

6 The film opens with Jean and Zou Zou performing in a circus. While Jean can subsequently leave the stage, Zou Zou is on display to the narrative's very end. Ethnicity is a canary that sings to itself - an image that, crucially enough, disavows the norm's fetishization of it, its spectatorship. There is thus a contrast between the cage itself and the self-

containment, even vanity, which it implies (the canary looks at itself in the mirror) and the positioning of the cage which betrays the obvious: the cage and Josephine Baker in it are the dream image of the norm that is the audience; in this sense, *Zou Zou* becomes yet another minstrel show which the audience performs for itself.[1]

7 What is particularly blatant about this disavowal is the projection of white desire onto the black woman as desiring subject - a reversal highly at odds with Baker's discursive frame. The film thus participates in the legacy of slavery and its aftermath, in a blatant disavowal of white rape as a giving in to the allure of blackness. At the heart of this representation is the stereotypical image of "Jezebel," which Collins has described thus:

> The image of Jezebel originated under slavery when Black women were portrayed as being [. . .] "sexually aggressive wet nurses" [. . .]. Jezebel's function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by white men reported by Black slave women. (77)

Even if the tones of this scenario have been muted, the scenario remains: the disavowal of white desire for blackness which has been responsible for confining blackness to its cage to begin with. The integrity and racial homogeneity of the nation space is thus threatened by black female desire. The practice of caging, however, betrays the ambivalence inherent in this assumption: to what extent is the black woman caged for her own good? For while the cage protects the white nation from the savage seductress, it also protects the alleged seductress from white male desire. In this latter scenario, there is an intriguing parallel to the idea of blaming the victim for mainstream racism: anti-immigration legislation, from this disturbing angle, is seen as legal protection as restrictive immigration policy becomes an anti-racist act: those who are not in the country cannot become victims of hate crimes. Similarly, if the Other is kept aloof from mainstream society, there is no danger of her being ravished by whiteness. In neither case is white desire - for a homogeneous nation space, for black female flesh - at fault; the fault is that of the Other's presence.

8 The film starts as it ends; as a freak show of ethnicity. This scenario echoes Vijay Prashad's description of P.T. Barnum's exhibitions or "congresses" at the end of the nineteenth century: "Barnum paraded people from the wide world before a U.S. audience. Whereas the 1874 congress displayed *representatives* of various parts of the world, the 1884 congress portrayed *specimens* of different (and lower) races" (30). What is particularly interesting about the circus or freak show is that it at the same time exhibits a fundamental, "outrageous"

[1]This link to minstrelsy is also emphasized by Wendy Martin: "[Baker] rolled her eyes, contorted her face, and swiveled her body in a deliberate parody of the blackface vaudeville routines and the conventions of the Negro minstrel show" (311).

Otherness and neutralizes the potential danger emanating from the "freak" himself/herself. Reading ethnological exhibits of 1930s Berlin, Nancy Nenno observes: "In the case of the 1931 Völkerschau, the twelve African women seemed very foreign indeed. But the threat posed by their difference was mitigated by the ethnographic context of their exhibition, which circumscribed their presence and their meaning" (150). The cage is thus a marker of the Other's freakishness as well as a containment of the threat which this freakishness potentially constitutes - a threat which is both racial and sexual.

9 The only space available for the Other to inhabit, then, is the stage. All Zou Zou has to do is play herself the way the white audience is bound to see her - as a generic blur of blackness; a blur which, I want to argue, echoes Baker's own playing of herself in *Zou Zou*. The film opens with the child Zou Zou contemplating herself in the mirror: we see a black face framed by "exotic" flowers - here too the canary is self-contained. The gaze on blackness is thus twofold as the viewer shares Zou Zou's own perspective; we see what Zou Zou does, or do we? In the cinematic view of Zou Zou's *mirror* image, the spectatorship of the white norm is once again disavowed as Zou Zou is looking at *herself* in the mirror. Once again, the suggestion of the self-containment of ethnicity - a child absorbed in its own blackness - masks or disavows the gaze of the spectator and his whiteness. At the same time, however, the freakishness of race is twisted by the narrative itself: Zou Zou is to be accompanied on stage by her "brother," Jean, whose "difference" remains unexplained: even as Jean's normative presence seems to attenuate the discourse of racist representation, then, his transparency and consequent lack of difference only serves to reify the exoticism of Zou Zou: if anything, the "accident" of race is paraded by a white boy before a white audience.

10 The circus stage and the announcer's suggestion of the mode of reception in which the spectacle is to be viewed, then, create the sense of a *vision* of ethnicity - which of course, Zou Zou both is and is not. Deconstructively, it must clearly be emphasized that Zou Zou is made to enact her own presence as the mainstream conceives of her. On another level, however, this rendering ethnicity as a dream is clearly an epistemic violence that disavows the very real presence - and subjectivity - of the black child on stage. The Other thus exists regardless of the freaks which the mainstream continues to dream up: it deconstructs these dream simulations of ethnicity even as it is made to authenticate them. Once again, *Zou Zou* thus underlines the ambivalence of an Other that is both within and outside of white imagination. Papa Mélé, Jean's and Zou Zou's foster father in the "real life" of the film, announces his

freaks: "Freaks have the right to be delayed. They're not like us. Don't try to understand. Mysteries are not meant to be understood. Where would we be without them?"[2]

11 The freakishness of the children, and Jean's part in it, then, is precisely their coexistence on stage, a disavowal of the possibility of a coexistence of whiteness and blackness outside of the circus which in turn prefigures the impossibility of interracial desire that will be inscribed as the filmic narrative progresses - the stage as the space of the nation. The following revelation which is at the same time a (fictive) explanation for the *accidental* presence of race in the West (a blatant disavowal of French colonialism), is at once one of the many narratives of the origins of Zou Zou's racial presence. As difference can never originate in Paris, the mainstream has to be told where Zou Zou "came from" for this assumption to be confirmed: interracial desire is thus inscribed as a specter which remains taboo even as the narrative cannot help returning to it. If even the offspring of a Chinese mother and an Indian father turn out to be freaks, what would happen if whiteness were involved in an interracial marriage? This, precisely, is the question the narrative does not ask even as the disturbing possibility continues to hover in the background. White desire for blackness is so incredible as to not even bear mention: this is an outrageousness, however, which is ironically disproved by the very content of a film culminating in the display of a half-naked black woman on a swing in a birdcage. As Zou Zou and Jean enter the stage, Papa Mélé announces: "[H]ere's one of nature's miracles: the two twins . . . born on a Polynesian island . . . Their parents were a Chinese woman and an Indian who didn't want to acknowledge them because their skin had a different color." The narrative proceeds to toy with the question of Zou Zou's and Jean's "real" parentage. While Jean's heritage is no less ambivalent than that of his sister, this ambivalence is not racially marked and is therefore never acknowledged as significant by the plot. Papa Mélé's telling them that they had different fathers does not altogether rule out the pssibility of their being half-siblings; the paradox of their being together despite their obvious racial difference remains. It is crucial for the narrative as a whole that the fact of this paradox is never called into doubt; ethnicity can only originate in Polynesia and will always be freakish when displayed in the West.

12 With Jean having grown up to be a sailor and gone to contemplate more foreign spectacles of racial difference, Zou Zou's adulthood begins innocently enough. She mimics the spectacle of performing ethnicity, yet with its sexual undertones safely removed; the spectacle of race, however, remains. Zou Zou is "performing" for a child who exclaims: "Zou Zou, do the clown again!" In a classical example of both a white and a male gaze, Zou Zou's

[2]I am referring here to the English subtitles from the film itself. This also applies to my quotations from Baker's Princess Tam Tam which I will discuss below.

body is dismembered by the camera into fragments which are both themselves unpredictable and which can only make up a "comic" whole. At first, we see only white-shod dancing feet on black legs. Then, in another shot paralleling the circus child decked out in exotic flowers, we once again see Zou Zou in a mirror. Here too, racial difference can be contemplated at a safe remove. The black woman is a natural clown because her childlikeness parallels that of this particular audience. Zou Zou rolls her eyes, screams, and rolls around on the floor. She is alternately a bleating goat, an acrobat, and a singer accompanied by a toy guitar: the playground of race is at once a disavowal or displacement of a white gaze for which the racially different is unthreatening only when relegated to the nonsensical realm of the childlike.

13 In what follows, this childlikeness is mapped onto a romantic, naïve infatuation with whiteness. Zou Zou's romantic obsession with Jean seems all the more inappropriate because it could not be any more unrequited. Moreover, since so far it has remained unresolved whether or not Jean and her are in fact siblings, this infatuation is all the more inappropriate because it is potentially incestuous. Black signification is thus portrayed as seriously deranged precisely because Zou Zou seems to be unaware of this inappropriateness. When Jean is discharged from the navy, Zou Zou rushes to the harbor with the other women to meet the sailors; only *they* are meeting their *lovers*. The discourse of incest masks what the narrative inscribes as the inappropriateness or impossibility of miscegenation. Interestingly, as films like D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* attest, the idea of incest as a distancing device inscribing the impossibility of white desire for Other-race bodies can be used to prevent both Asian male predators and black seductresses from entering the nation space through the back door of the nuclear family. While in Griffith's film, the character of Cheng Huan pretends to protect young (white) Lucy, his intentions are far from honorable. As Lee puts it, "Notwithstanding the apparent liberalism of the narrative, the melodramatic power of *Broken Blossoms* rests on its play between three powerful taboos: pedophilia, miscegenation, and incest" (129). This apparent liberalism, I would argue, recurs in Zou Zou; here too, the ideology of a white nation-space masks as the impossibility of *mutual* desire.

14 Propriety once again resides with the transparent as Zou Zou cannot see what Jean has been aware of all along. The black female subject is once again shown to be freakish. When Zou Zou sees the tattoo on Jean's forearm, she is inappropriately jealous. This is a jealousy which is all the more ironic and prophetic since, given the fact that we see only the outline of a woman's body, the tattoo depicts a *white* woman. Through the narrative's inscription of the threat of incest, then, Zou Zou's sexual allure is effectively neutralized - a neutralization

which is, however, starkly at odds with the cinematic representation of Zou Zou / Baker herself.[3] In the figure of Jean and his only "brotherly" love for Zou Zou, the narrative thus inscribes the assumption that, to paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, whiteness never desires the orangutan; it is always the other way around. Zou Zou not only bleats like a goat; to Jean, she is one.

15 Jefferson's ossification of both Native American and African American racial difference occasions a choice which is at the heart of this paper: in the face of the whitestream's consistent disavowal of its desire for ethnicity, it ceases to matter which terms this disavowal is couched in: the black ape and the Polynesian goat hardly require differentiation. For, then as now, it is this meaning of race that keeps the races different: in each case, the Other is never the same. While the whitestream remains the touchstone of both beauty and wisdom that the Indian is told to emulate and the black will always fail to comprehend, the Other's physical difference precedes his social distance:

> Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favor of the whites, declared by their preference for them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan [sic] for the black woman over those of his own species.(Jefferson qtd. in Appiah 44)

History, of course, gives lie to Jefferson's account by reminding us of his own experience with blackness - a twist in which his African American shadow family makes his ideological assurance appear in an altogether different light. As Jefferson avows, "'My doubts were the results of personal observation" (Appiah 47) - to which Appiah adds: "[one wonders, a little, about the Orangutan here]'" (47).

16 Thus, if we kept separate the ideological and the material, the historical treatise and the internet, we would miss a key opportunity to disprove Jefferson's lip service to the separateness of the races. Yet perhaps, his personal observations had less bearing on his ideology than his language admits: he saw only a black woman, after all, not a presence to disrupt his own thoughtlessness. As the racist sees only what he wants to see, what is already preexistent in his mind as perceivable, personal experience is devoid of the power to rectify racist belief. We are left wondering, as in Appiah's ironic insertion into the quote from Jefferson, about the exact nature of Jefferson's experience with orangutans. PR News service announces, on October 20, 2000: "Join Shannon Lanier, the seventh generation grandson of

[3]Martin underscores the intersection of the racial and the sexual in Baker's performances: "[I]n addition to playing with the trope of the black savage, she used feminine artifice to successfully arouse the sexual appetites of the white male audience" (313).

America's third president, Thomas Jefferson and his enslaved mistress, Sally Hemings, for a lecture and slide presentation based on his recently published book, 'Jefferson's children: the story of one American family.'" It is here that material life calls the bluff of historical representation: the hypocrisy of Jefferson's evocation of the separateness of the races is exposed through the very presence of his racially different grandson. From these considerations, two conflicting views of Josephine Baker emerge - either an entire audience pays to see a half-naked orangutan on stage, or all of French society has been afflicted with sex with animals.

17 The crux of the issue, however, is that the mainstream strives to relegate race to the margins of both society and representation. The shadow family, as in Jefferson's case, becomes the copy of the "legitimate," white family. It is here, I would argue, that the concept of voyeurism recurs: as *ethnic voyeurs*, the shadow family can only watch, clandestinely, the "real" familial affection of original whiteness. Given the ethnicity she embodies Zou Zou is thus doomed to remain a spectator in the heartland of whiteness. Even when she becomes a laundrywoman and thus adds another layer to her infatuation with whiteness through the bleaching of linen, Zou Zou is never really integrated among her colleagues whom she is nevertheless accepted by as an entertainer. While the other laundrywomen discuss the underwear and the bodies of their clients, it is not for Zou Zou to be that intimate with whiteness - a remove which prefigures her actual confinement to the cage of ethnicity and which earns her a comment from her fellow laundrywomen which is at once a stock feature in the scenario of racism: "Zou Zou is so mysterious!"

18 At the same time, Zou Zou's first "appearance" on stage is itself a key moment of white disavowal of its desire for blackness: Jean, who works in the theater as an electrician, asks his "sister" to go up on stage (she is still wearing the low cut dress the women have admired so much) so that he can adjust the light. Jean's disavowal of his desire for Zou Zou is thus also a distancing of his own gaze from that of the audience. Even as he makes Zou Zou go on stage and as his gaze merges with that of the audience watching a black woman swing her legs, this merging is immediately disavowed: he is only checking the lighting. In order for interracial romance to remain an impossibility, the narrative has to position Jean as the only man in the theater who does *not* enjoy what he is seeing.

19 Tragically, Zou Zou is instrumental in precipitating her own doom by wanting to show off Jean to her best friend, Claire: "You'll see how handsome he is!" Despite her obvious attractiveness, then, Zou Zou inhabits the role of the mammy who can facilitate but never interfere with the romance of whiteness with whiteness. Once again, the tragedy of the

situation is undermined by the absurdity of Zou Zou's innocence and naiveté which reinscribes precisely her unawareness of racial taboos. As Jean and Claire are dancing closely in a dance hall that the three of them have gone to, Zou Zou dreamily writes Jean's name on a white tablecloth in red wine.

20 Ironically, the self-fulfilling prophecy of race enacts itself only by accident - a fact through which, I would argue, the narrative only veils what has been inevitable all along: the fact that the place of ethnicity is on stage, or in the zoo. Zou Zou decides to accept the theater director's offer to play the lead in the show only in order to save enough money to pay Jean's lawyer after he has been wrongfully accused of a murder. Ethnicity remains self-sacrificing even in the face of fame. When Zou Zou, who has witnessed the incident, spots the real murderer in a newspaper, she can only think of Jean and leaves in the middle of the show despite the fact that the audience is already ecstatic about her.

21 When Zou Zou goes to meet Jean at the prison entrance (he has been released only because of her testimony), she glimpses Claire from a distance. The ethnic is doomed to fade into the background wherever the glaring center of whiteness is concerned. As she flees from what has been unpredictable only for her, the camera accelerates the course of time, zooming in on her 100th performance. The cage of ethnicity can unfold only as a spectacle that is on constant replay: the mainstream mind can only accommodate so much variation. The open-endedness of culture is to no avail here. Zou Zou remains trapped in a fictional Haiti; an entrapment whose finality reinforces the fact that Martinique, Polynesia and Haiti are all the same to the mainstream.

22 As the curtain falls, we are left with the tragic certainty that Zou Zou will have to remain the colorful canary that she performs on stage. Yet, even as she assures the mainstream that her dearest wish would be to return to where she came from - Haiti -, I want to argue that this resolution remains ambivalent. Even in Zou Zou's performance of the half-naked bird in the cage of French multiculturalism which is itself a legacy of colonialism, the dream of "home" which is a simulation merges with Zou Zou's unbroken love for Jean which defies the stock scenarios of racism. In her own world, Zou Zou remains the center - an ambivalence in which the containment of the cage is both final and provisionalized. The concept of naiveté is turned on its head in a rhetorical move that is consolation regardless of the fact that the mainstream will not understand it. I want to suggest that the narrative of Zou Zou can be retrospectively deconstructed from its closing song - a deconstruction which is also a race-ing of its lyrics. This is a song in which the mainstream shares in the idiocy of a man who, for all her color, cannot see the attractiveness of his own "sister":

> ZOU ZOU: For me, there's only one man in Paris, it's him, I can't help it, my heart belongs to him, I think I'm losing my mind he's so dumb, He hasn't understood a thing. Twenty times a day by the dozen Some very passionate gentlemen Offer me the life of a queen If I gave myself to them There's only one who has pleased me He is naughty and doesn't own a cent His stories … are not very clear I know it well but I don't care He runs after all the girls They are all at his mercy His look undresses them His hands do so as well I do nothing to make him love me He brings happiness to others But he is still mine Because he is in my heart

Despite this deconstructive insight into the mainstream's idiocy, however, the ending of Zou Zou ultimately proves the success of the mainstream's desire: not the ravishing of the black bird, but the maintaining of the whiteness of the nation space. The black seductress has ultimately failed in her plan to make whiteness go astray. In this stock scenario, Zou Zou is neither innocent nor mere entertainment. Rather, its plot justifies restrictive immigration policies and national homogeneity: the orangutan is bound to be a voyeur of *human* intimacy. The idea of such voyeurism, of course, could not be cynical. Given the suspension of a half-naked black woman in a bird cage on a white stage, who is the voyeur here?

Revues of Whiteness in *Princess Tam Tam*

23 The issue of black female voyeurism of white intimacy recurs in Baker's subsequent film, *Princess Tam Tam* (1936). Ironically, however, fiction is again disproved by reality: for the very film which inscribed the "natural" separateness of the races was made by Baker's own husband, Pepito Abatino. Abatino's film portrays a French writer, Max, who journeys to Africa in search of inspiration and is rewarded for his efforts: inspiration appears in the form of a "native" woman, Alwina, whose childish pranks he proceeds to turn into a bestseller. Like *Zou Zou*, *Princess Tam Tam* has an autobiographical dimension: Max's novel describes Alwina's transformation from a shepard girl to a princess from Parador - the novel within the film as well as the filmic narrative itself echo Baker's own success story.

24 The film seems to highlight the fact that in the very practice of self-critique, the simulation of the racial Other and its external manifestation (Josephine Baker - as Alwina - herself) are inevitably conflated. In the containment of "black" cultural difference by the filmic narrative, the Other no longer poses a threat to her mirror image created by the norm itself. Instead, the narrative suggests a fundamental continuity between its invention of Otherness and the Other external to this invention. There is thus a slippage, an undecidability which makes it impossible to pinpoint where the material enactment of ethnicity by the external Other ends and her invention by the mainstream begins. This slippage in *Princess Tam Tam* seems to be part of an overall political agenda. The external Other ceases to be a

threat, then, because she is made to enact in real life what fiction prescribes for her. The truth claim of *Princess Tam Tam* is its conflation of its simulation and the external Other (Josephine Baker) who is made to perform it: authenticity is established not only by the fact that "Alwina" is not represented by a white woman in blackface, but also by an implied continuity between the actual Alwina and the Alwina represented in Max's novel within the filmic narrative. Yet, it is crucial to dismantle this alleged opposition between the two Alwinas which the narrative needs in order to authenticate itself - neither Alwina is real; each is colored, literally, by the racist's perception. As Edward Said has so forcefully argued, the Orientalist is never taught otherwise by the *actual* encounter with the Orient: he sees only what he can conceive of.[4]

25 The narrative of *Princess Tam Tam* seems to dramatize the fact that whiteness does not have a story and must turn to its racial Others for inspiration. According to David Roediger, "'Whiteness describes, from Little Big Horn to Simi Valley, not a culture, but an absence of culture. It is an empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't . . . .'" (Haney López 168). The narrative starts out with Max and his wife Lucie fighting in bed; we become voyeurs of white intimacy even as the narrative will claim that it is by no means about whiteness. This beginning, however, is a sign which sets the stage for what is *not* a story about Tunisia and its inhabitants; in a reversal of the racist gaze, we see only Max himself wherever we look. In the mirror of the racist's imagination, it is the racist we see. Ironically, the filmic narrative parallels the mainstream fear outlined by Roediger that a whole film about two white people in bed together would have been dull - a dullness which it consequently proceeds to mask by pretending to be about its opposite, the fascination of blackness.

26 Not surprisingly, the search for the Other emerges from the self-critique of the norm: the narrator is fed up with himself and the old story of normativity. This is the reason for the fight Max has with his wife; whereas he is fed up with "society", his wife delights in it. In his search for respite and inspiration, Max thinks of going "to the country"; a remove from civilization which, however, as his friend and manager informs him, would not be complete enough. It is at this juncture that self-critique collapses into an invention of ethnicity for the first time. Since for Max, it is civilized society that has become savage, his longing seizes upon a savagery that is more real; the "actual" savage (a simulation to begin with) becomes a

[4] Said's question is thus not quite a rhetorical one: "It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. But is this failing constantly present, or are there circumstances that, more than others, make the textual attitude likely to prevail?" (*Orientalism* 93).

mirror image of society that is yet fundamentally different. "Africa" is mirror image and alternative at once. Savagery is quaint only in the jungle. Max has found a solution: "Let's go among the savages. The real savages! Yes, to Africa!" The teleology of the journey suggests that we will now catch a glimpse of the "real" geography of Africa, yet this prediction is doubly undermined in a maze of actuality and simulations; the Africa we encounter is seen through Max's eyes in the first place, even as the narrative inscribes a distinction between the country Max enters and his subsequent representation of it. Moreover, this slippage which masks as distinction is repeated by the filmic representation itself: even as the simulation is authenticated through its filmic location - Tunisia - and the presence of Josephine Baker, what we see is nevertheless what the mainstream wants us to see. There is no actuality here, on both planes; the "simulation" never has a referent (Vizenor 15). As the new locale unfolds, we glimpse Baker's face among cacti and aloe vera plants - a picture puzzle of ethnicity. Blackness blurs into the nature surrounding it; ethnicity *is* the jungle.[5]

27 Not surprisingly, then, the narrative itself revolves around an ethnicity which knows its place. It is here that the paradox emerges: ethnicity is most appropriate in its own home - the "East." Yet, in order for the self-critique of the West to succeed, the importing of ethnicity into Paris must also seem intriguing. What is never questioned, however, is the fundamental displacement of ethnicity in the West. Africa is quaint only in its fundamental difference from the West; in Africa, dirt is never quite as distasteful. Alwina is beautiful to Max precisely in her difference. At the same time, this contemplation of the beauty of an exotic female remains "platonic" from the start as the film introduces a taboo very similar to that of incest in *Zou Zou*. Here, too, interracial desire on the part of the white man is disavowed: Alwina so completely blurs into nature and the sheep she is herding that to desire her would come close to contemplating copulation with a sheep. It is in this context that the ensuing test of civilization becomes precarious; once Alwina is transformed from a wild beast - "one wonders, a little, about the Orangutan here" - to an exotic spectacle decked out in Western clothes, this disavowal of desire and the concomitant evocation of perversion - a penchant for sheep - would cease to apply. The transplanting of ethnicity becomes an experiment by and for the West. In a blatant disavowal of the history of colonialism, the alleged separation between whiteness and its Others, between civilization and manure is reinforced. As white men go slumming in Africa, Alwina is the rose in the manure:

> MANAGER: I prefer the perfumed chicks of the Rue de la Paix.
> MAX: But nature smells much better!

[5] For a reading of the concept of savagery with regard to Baker's elusive presence, see Wendy Martin's "'Remembering the Jungle': Josephine Baker and Modernist Parody."

MANAGER: Manure is nature!
MAX: Well? Lovely roses grow in manure. . . . They'll be even lovelier once I transplant them.
WHITE AMATEUR GARDENER: African flowers are not meant for the parlor.

28 Interestingly, it is at this point that the narrative introduces Alwina's counterpart in the West. While Max is amusing himself, quite platonically, with this child of nature, his wife has made the acquaintance of the Maharajah of Datane. His very presence, which is, however, undermined by the fact that the Maharajah is impersonated by a white actor, an Indian in blackface, so to speak, seems to belie the argument which the narrative has reiterated so far - that ethnicity, in the West, will always be displaced. The Maharajah, as Alwina's male equivalent, adds a twist to the filmic perception of ethnicity which is clearly gendered: where Alwina is childish and thus ultimately sexless, the Maharajah combines cosmopolitan allure with a knowing masculinity that is associated with the predatoriness of ethnicity. The civilized veneer cannot quite make us forget our knowledge of the Orient: we know how they treat their women. *Princess Tam Tam* thus introduces the idea of an "Asiatic" or "Yellow Peril" with South Asian flavor: crucially, however, the idea of racial pollution is at the same time a masculinist one - the Asiatic predator as potential rapist. As Gina Marchetti has observed with regard to Hollywood cinema, "rape or the threat of rape of a Caucasian woman by an Asian man is the narrative pattern of the Yellow Peril as it is portrayed by [mainstream film]" (10). Even as the Maharajah thus appears sexually threatening, however, his appeal is ultimately contained in the same disavowal of interracial desire which Lucie shares with her husband. Like *Zou Zou*, the narrative makes it very clear that while it is inevitable that ethnicity will be infatuated with the superior beauty of whiteness, whiteness never desires its racial Others. Lucie toys with the Maharajah's desire for her only as a means to an end which continues to be the desire of whiteness. Ultimately, both the Maharajah and Alwina are ethnic pawns in a sexual game whiteness plays with itself.

29 The orangutan is never obsolete as Alwina's ethnicity, for Max, serves two purposes at once: to prove the superiority of whiteness by making Alwina fall for him, and to make his wife as jealous as she makes him by associating with the Maharajah. The question Max poses is paradigmatic: can ethnicity be civilized? The Other is thus subjected to a lab test of culture: "It intrigues me. I'd love to listen to her reactions." At this very point, Alwina's behavior seems to reflect negatively on the very possibility of success of this experiment: we see her chasing an ape up a tree. White voyeurism of a difference that is both racial and cultural is thus masked, from the very beginning, as an altruistic and culturally enlightened experiment which is alleged to be for the benefit of the Other, not the white norm. The white man's

burden has been lightened as the experiment promises to be manageable in its scope: it is clear that once Max has finished his novel, he will return to where he belongs. The Orient is a flirtation which is all the more charming because the experiment will always work: the outcome is predetermined because the racial subject is bound to prove its difference. The test cannot fail precisely because ethnicity is known to be unpredictable to begin with; any outcome will be in keeping with our simulations of the Other.

30 At the same time, another element has to be introduced in which the narrative once again metaphorizes Baker's presence itself. As a mere clown, ethnicity is never childish enough. As Andrea Barnwell has argued, what accounted for Baker's phenomenal success was precisely her mixture of childishness and sexual savagery (cf. 85). In the recipe of ethnic success in and for the West, Max introduces the final link: "I'll pretend to be in love with her. We'll see. She's smart.[…] An interracial story […]. It could be a contemporary novel." The narrative thus anticipates contemporary multiculturalism by emphasizing the fact that a novel about whiteness desiring whiteness would be predictably dull. Once again, there is thus a slippage between whiteness not having a story and its telling of the same old story *through* its racial Others. What is even more crucial, however, is that in this scenario of both catering to the audience's expectation for juiciness and the "ingredients" of interracial romance, Max blurs into Jean checking the light in *Zou Zou*. By *pretending* to be in love with Alwina, he can enact and disavow his desire for the racial Other at the same time. In both films, then, the narrative enacts a white male gaze that is at once voyeuristic and neutral. In any case, whiteness is only testing the light - an argument which would seem to be disproved by enthusiastic French audiences who could not possibly have come to see the show for the same reason.

31 Even as Max is about to turn Alwina into plain sameness in the act of civilizing her, his wife is being initiated into the pleasures of difference. Her head tilted up to her Maharajah in fascination, she seems to betray the fact that the claim that ethnicity is always infatuated with whiteness, never the other way around, may in fact be false. Even as he is obviously quite at ease in the West, the Maharajah conforms to the script of Orientality through his longing for his origins; a place he is happy to invoke for the enjoyment of the plain. Even when he is most at home with Western customs, the Oriental himself reiterates the sadness of his displacement from "home." The Maharajah remains a cultural informant; the Other's stories are never about Paris. At the same time, his account sheds an ironic light on Max's civilizing mission in the Orient which is about to begin: "The Orient is admirable. Everyone lives naturally. You call us 'savages.' But the poorest among us has more independence than

you'd imagine." Whiteness likes to tease itself with ethnicity, then, without admitting to its own interracial desire. While for Lucie's women friends it is beyond doubt that the Maharajah is madly in love with Lucie, the possibility that the desire could be mutual never presents itself. The fascinated voyeurism on the part of the women watching Lucie's apparent romance with Indian royalty, the narrative alleges, has nothing to do with their own racial fetishism - and is additional proof of Max's prediction that interracial romance sells. What emerges is thus an obsession with interracial romance by a whitestream pitying its racial Others for their incurable infatuation with whiteness. Desire is never about "us": even where indications of this white desire for blackness surface, thus betraying the instability of the discourse of disavowal, they immediately have to be contained. A Maharajah, in the West, is never himself but a token of cultural difference and its fascinating displacement: Lucie could not have possibly desired the Maharajah for what he is. Instead, ethnicity has to be functionalized in order to veil the real reason for the whitestream's interaction with it: regardless of whether Lucie is fascinated by the Maharajah's riches or uses him to win back her husband, the functionalizing remains: again, the West is only checking the light. The Maharajah enters the stage not as a figure in its own right but as the mere tease of ethnicity, complete with pearls and elephants:

> WOMAN # 1: He has acquired a huge fortune. And pearls! Even puts them on his elephants.
> He doesn't know his own wealth!
> WOMAN # 2: If [Max] knew his wife is flirting with the Maharajah!
> WOMAN # 3: It's beyond flirting!
> WOMAN # 2: Why not? The Maharajah is charming.
> WOMAN # 3: You mean he's rich!

Interracial romance thus remains a spectacle with which whiteness entertains itself: Lucie's interaction with the Maharajah must be public for everyone's enjoyment to unfold. With the whole party watching, the Maharajah bends over to kiss Lucie's hand as shadow picture - a tableau or façade of interracial desire which is *staged* in two interconnected senses: the Oriental's alleged desire for Lucie is functionalized in her plan to make her husband jealous; and its staging has to be public in order for this plan to work. With the whole of society looking on, the spectacle is bound to reach Max's ears even in a remote corner of Africa. The place of ethnicity, once again, is on stage; and once again, it is framed by the Western discourse containing the difference. The shadow picture strips the Maharajah of his features; he becomes a generic threat to a whiteness which teases him on. The Maharajah, for all the narrative reiterations of his animal predatoriness, is thus an ethnic pawn Lucie has on a string. And the reason for the puppet theater of ethnicity is never the whitestream's own interracial

desire. In this very scenario, Lucie's attitude towards the Maharajah is mirrored by Max's own pet experiment. Here too, desire is staged to urge ethnicity on:

> ALWINA: Why do you say you love me?
> MAX: Because I feel something for you. I enjoy being with you. And you?
> ALWINA: Me? I think you're nice.
> MAX: Are you moved by me?
> ALWINA: What does "moved" mean? . . . What's it like to feel confused?
> MAX: Your heart beats very fast.
> ALWINA [FEELS HER HEART]: Well, then I'm confused.

The desire that is exposed is thus always that of the Other; the Other as a sample of cultural difference can be studied, thus rendering voyeurism devoid of the sexual implication of the norm.

32 There is a slippage, nevertheless, in which Max almost seems to betray the fact that interracial desire may in fact be mutual: while before it was the fate of the racially Other to be moved by whiteness, Max's language slips even as this slippage is immediately contained: he too is moved by Alwina - yet only as he would be by a native animal. Once again, Jefferson's orangutan and the film's sheep conspire to establish the taboo of an interracial desire that is mutual. Max is not perverse: "That little animal moves me; she's so naïve."

33 Max's experiment culminates, then, in the act of displacement: at the completion of his civilizing mission of Alwina, the object of the experiment is taken to Europe. Here too, normative discourse remains ambivalent: Alwina is taken to Paris both as a freak of nature (racial difference) and a *civilized* freak. The veneer of civilization is constantly at risk of being disrupted by the savagery it can only conceal, never eradicate. Alwina as a *civilized* woman can only be *paraded* before a Parisian audience because her race ensures that her civilization will never be complete. To match the Maharajah, Alwina is presented as the "Princess of Parador." As Max's friend and manager puts it: "I've duped [Lucie]. Tit for tat. She and her Maharajah! I gave her the Princess with royal blood."

34 This completion is sabotaged, however, by Max's by now jealous wife who masterminds an experiment of her own. The party which Lucie persuades the Maharajah to put on becomes the ultimate test of ethnicity and of the ultimate success of the civilizing mission. Once again, it becomes obvious that this mission is never about the Other, but rather about what the norm wants to prove to itself. Yet, as even the failure of the experiment could be blamed on the ultimate inassimilability of Other races, the experiment, for the norm, becomes a situation in which it will always win. Even so, Max is nervous and tells his friend: "Watch the princess carefully. If she makes one mistake, we're sunk. I want all of society prostrate at her feet." Max's concern, however, is hardly about the spectacle itself. Rather, the

white norm continues to define itself against the backdrop of ethnicity. Just as Lucie's chastity, for all her flirting with Indianness, gains shape against the vulgarity of the "black slut," Max's worries about the princess's success are far from altruistic: "My wife will be jealous and I'll say, 'Off to the conjugal bed.'" Ethnicity is thus a mere turn-on to inspire whiteness in its interaction with its peers. The princess serves a purpose in the West; once this purpose has been fulfilled, she is free to follow the call of her ethnic soul to Haiti. Once again, there is thus a striking contradiction between Baker's enactment in role after role of this call and her continuous presence in Paris. Moreover, her displacement in the West may be not so much a sign of individual sadness but the result of the exclusion by the Western mainstream of its unwanted ethnic Others.

35 Nevertheless, however, Lucie's plan is bound to fail in another instance in which the filmic narrative mirrors the overall reception of Baker herself. When ethnicity indeed shows its true colors, those of savage abandon, the audience loves it. Lucie's scheme is doomed to failure because the audience venerates the primitiveness it has suspected to be beneath the civilized veneer all along. The success of ethnicity *is* its vulgarity; vulgarity is the success, not the failure of ethnicity: in its vulgarity, ethnicity is only being true to itself. The simulation of ethnicity thus creates a situation in which the mainstream always wins and its Other never does: when Max realizes that the failure of the experiment is actually a success, he joins a frenetic audience in applauding the spectacle. Conversely, the Other will be deemed savage regardless of whether she conceals or lives up to her own innate vulgarity. The frenetic applause for Alwina's failure to remain civilized, in turn, mirrors the mainstream reception of Baker herself, as well as the constraints this reception must have been framed by. Lucie's plan is thus premised on the self-fulfilling prophecy of race: give the ethnic a drink and her true colors will show. What is beyond doubt is precisely what these true colors will be. It is at this point that the racializing of gender issues surface once again: civilized dress is only an empty marker for the chaste cult of true womanhood which a black woman can aspire to mimic at best. Her unbridled sexuality is bound to resurface. Alwina's true nature thus takes shape against Lucie's ultimate chastity and conjugal faithfulness. For all her scheming, Lucie ultimately remains on the right path. As Collins notes, "[a]ccording to the cult of true womanhood, 'true' women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. . . . African-American women encountered a different set of controlling images" (71).

36 The revue that is staged as the highlight of the party is yet another disavowal of the very structures the filmic narrative as a whole is predicated upon. Interestingly, the stage

show is being propelled by a vulgarized or stripped-down replica of the host: a bare-breasted "Indian" with a turban. Once again, the sides are being disavowed as the little Indian is implied to parallel the Maharajah. The simile, however, is flawed: even as the Maharajah propels the party and both the guests and the actors on stage seem to be at his command, he has given the party almost in spite of himself. Instead, he himself is used by Lucie in her scheme to get whiteness back. Just as his mirror image on stage, the Maharajah is and is not in command. The fact that the turbaned Indian on stage seems to physically enable the show by touching a whiteness which then springs into motion, veils the fact that the show, like the narrative of *Princess Tam Tam* itself, is hardly about ethnicity at all. The little Indian holds a crystal ball from which the show unfolds; he beats an (African?) gong for the next act of the show to begin. What this scenario suggests is that it is ethnicity that has whiteness on a string just as the Maharajah's butterfly collection disavows the fact that it is he who is being functionalized by Lucie, not the other way around. Thus, in my reading of the cultural politics of Josephine Baker, I would like to focus on two key images: that of whiteness checking the light and that of ethnicity allegedly having whiteness on a string; images which concur in their allegation of white victimization by ethnicity.

37 In his movement, the turbaned ethnic makes the white women dancers spin. Yet they hardly revolve around ethnicity. Instead, it is whiteness which defines itself against its turbaned Other. The image of the ethnic making whiteness spin is thus devoid of agency: he is a mere springboard for white self-definition just as the Maharajah and Alwina serve only to clarify Max's and Lucie's desire for each other. As the scene shifts, "real" Asian actors appear and, taking their cue from their turbaned fellow, spin white women puppets on plates. As the manager at his table tries to mimic ethnicity, the result is pitiful: "they" simply have rhythm and the innate ability to contort their bodies into every possible shape - an idea which, incidentally, the narrative of *Princess Tam Tam* is about. On a white stage, the Other is happy to transform herself into anything at all: a sheep or a princess. Similarly, the turbaned Indian returns to move white women on a checkerboard; ethnicity is suggested to have whiteness at its beck and call. Yet, just as the Maharajah was never allowed to be a real threat to the purity of white womanhood, this scenario hardly rings true. Even so, I want to argue that the revue does evoke the specter of a threatening masculine ethnicity which the narrative as a whole has sought to dispel: as the Indian on stage puts a white doll on the Asian juggler's plate, what is evoked is the specter of ethnic men toying with a passive female whiteness which they trade among themselves. Even as this image is contained through the entertaining frame of the revue, its intricacy remains.

38 Meanwhile, Alwina is quickly getting drunk, mesmerized by the spectacle of whiteness unfolding on stage. The Indian is faded out and turns into a black drummer who is as bare-chested as the lesser ethnicity he has displaced. Ethnicity homes in on the ultimate blackness of Africa: while Alwina may have betrayed the fact that she is not from Parador by resisting the beckoning of the Indian, the African drummer leaves her powerless. Following what the narrative frames as the call of the jungle, the genetic call of her own true ethnicity, Alwina does what is expected of her: the black fingers on the white drum are mesmerizing even or especially to her. Having run up on stage, Alwina obediently proceeds to enact her ethnicity - a truly multiculturalist spectacle. As she undresses, what we glimpse beneath her golden robe is not - simply - her black skin but a black dress, African style. I would like to read this dress as a moment of truth in the simulation of savagery - to the extent that there can be *any* truth or presence within the simulation. For what Alwina performs is not her true, "ethnic" self but a self-imposed mask of blackness which the audience expects. She exaggerates the difference of her skin color by donning blackface. As Alwina shakes her black body for all to see, the Maharajah smiles and Max cringes as Alwina abandons herself to her race: the prophecy fulfills itself. With the black drummer urging her on, the former princess dances as if possessed - possibly by her own ethnicity. Alwina's face blurs into the drummer's in a veritable *musk* of ethnicity.

39 Alwina's failure, then, is Max's success. As the audience celebrates Alwina, Max rushes off after his jealous wife and finally makes up with her. Ethnicity has served its purpose. The Maharajah knows this and rescues Alwina to his chambers. It is then that he reveals that he has been aware of the experiment all along; the secret he devined was both the truth of Alwina's position and her love for Max. Far from mysterious, the Maharajah turns out to be complicit in the experiment of ethnicity: "I knew your secret that night at the opera. I could have told them who you really are. I enjoyed watching them . . . and watching you . . . Return to your country . . . the sooner the better."

40 The Maharajah proceeds to enact what the mainstream conceives of as the schizophrenia of the hyphenated subject: cultures are said to clash within the displaced Oriental precisely because they will always remain incompatible. A race-ing of the norm is impossible; the Oriental is torn apart by what he cannot bridge: David Palumbo-Liu has discussed the concept of schizophrenia as it has been applied by a white mainstream for what the norm perceives as a split Asian American subjectivity: "Deployed as a diagnosis of cultural and racial duality, racial and cultural 'schizophrenia' is predicated upon an absolutist, nation-based notion of identity, which is put into crisis by migrancy and racial difference"

(198). Accordingly, the Maharajah tells Alwina, "My house has two kinds of windows - Those facing the East [the Orient] and those facing the West [the Occident]. This one faces the West." As he opens the curtains, Alwina, through "Orientally" shaped bars, watches Max and Lucie kiss outside. The ethnic becomes a voyeur of a white romance which she herself has helped enable, just as it was Zou Zou who introduced Claire to Jean.

41 The answer to the question of what white men see when they are not looking is thus perhaps an unexpected one: the white gaze is veiled not only by turning its object into the desiring subject, but by turning this subject into a voyeur of an alternate desire. Through this act of disavowal of white desire for blackness, the black Other becomes a sly and pathetic intruder into the family romance of a white nation. The inappropriateness of this voyeurism ultimately reinscribes, in the euphemism of romance, the ideology of white nationhood. The only conclusion that is left is for the Other to return home and leave whiteness alone: the stereotype of ethnic "pollution" of white space and an *illegitimate* black gaze converge. As Lee observes, "Only when the foreign is present does it become alien. The alien is always out of place, therefore disturbing and dangerous" (3).

42 The ending of *Princess Tam Tam* is entirely predictable along these flawed ideological lines. As there is no place, no romance for ethnicity in the West, the solution is for the ethnic to voluntarily end her sad displacement in the country of the transparent. As the Maharajah opens the window to the East, Alwina calls out to her country of origin, "I'm coming!" It is here that the simulation is revealed as fiction; the norm has masterminded not just the tragedy of Eastern displacement in the West, but also its resolution. Max reads from his finished novel: "I'm coming, and the smoke billows up." We are back in Africa as the "real" Alwina re-enters the scene. For once, however, the whitestream doubts the representativeness of its fantasies. Max's friend tells the author: "If Alwina had really gone to Europe, it might have happened differently." Yet, at this very juncture, Alwina is quick to assure the skeptic of the unfoundedness of his self-doubts: ever herself, Alwina slurps a coconut - her stomach not yet having been civilized - and proves that if she had really gone to Europe, everything would have unfolded exactly as Max predicted it: "Won't you take me along?"

43 The black woman thus willingly enacts a white man's fantasy of her - both as the object of his desire and, paradoxically, as a voyeur of white romance which proves that the former desire is nonexistent. Josephine Baker is there to be looked at but not seen. In fact, the theater has been empty all along; or alternatively, the audience came to watch white people kiss, never minding the birdcage suspended above them.

44 The idea of the removal of the ethnic voyeur from a white nation space, then, is resolved somewhat unexpectedly in both *Zou Zou* and *Princess Tam Tam*: the black Other is relegated to the space of entertainment which is always at a remove from the real. It is at this point, however, that the resolution is fractured from within; once Zou Zou/Josephine Baker leaves the stage, she will be a black woman living in Paris. There emerges a clash between the national need or desire for ethnic labor and the will to keep the nation-space racially "pure" which is incompatible with this desire. Even as the form of Baker's work differs significantly, of course, from the turn-of-the-century Chinese domestic laborer, the ensuing paradox is the same - as is the accompanying mixture of innocence and sexual threat in mainstream imagination. According to Lee,

> on the one hand, the Chinese were indispensable as domestic labor; on the other, they represented a threat of racial pollution within the household. A representation of the Oriental as both seductively childlike and threateningly sexual allowed for both sympathy and repulsion. (10)

In this very instance, moreover, Baker uncannily prefigures, an entire century ago, contemporary Indian green card holders about whom Vijay Prashad has said, "the United States wants these workers for their labor, but certainly not for the lives they must import as well" (71).

45 As these considerations imply, the presence of Josephine Baker may be far from obsolete: what emerges, rather, is the idea that the desire for national homogeneity transcends both national and chronological borders. Then as now, the economic clashes with the cultural; "our" need for ethnic entertainment, food and - less visible - unskilled labor may contradict calls for more restrictive and culturally vigilant immigration policies. It is at this juncture also, however, that the cultural may give the economic its cue: if French immigration policies had been harsher at the time, not only a French audience would have been deprived of the solace of seeing Josephine Baker dancing, singing about Haiti.

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