

**"I´m not a nigger, I´m a man."  
Intricacies of Masculinity and Race in Raoul Peck´s  
*I Am Not Your Negro***

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**Introduction**

In all modesty, I do confess I do not know of any other example of a film created strictly from the preexisting texts of one author. Especially when the texts came from sources as diverse as personal notes not intended for publication, letters, manuscripts, speeches, and published books.<sup>1</sup>

In his foreword to the published script of his 2016 movie *I Am Not Your Negro*, director Raoul Peck points to the specific composition of the movie that places it in a space between historical and biographical documentary and essayistic adaptation. As the quote implies, the narration that structures the movie´s content consists entirely of different texts by James Baldwin that Peck compiled and arranged.<sup>2</sup> While the movie´s main focus clearly lies on Baldwin´s impactful perspective on racial issues in US culture before and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the following article aims at mapping out the status of masculinity in the movie´s rhetoric.

<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, Raoul Peck (ed.): *I Am Not Your Negro*. USA 2017, p. XV.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. XV ff.

Drawing on the general premise of the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality as well as social class, Baldwin as a historical and literary figure particularly invites a focus on gendered aspects: Not only is his work characterized by a thematic complexity that intertwines and relates various topics.<sup>3</sup> Baldwin as a male figure has himself gained a range of reputations that reach from a status as a queer icon<sup>4</sup> to characterizations such as "the fiery, sermon-delivering, commanding patriarch."<sup>5</sup> The patriarchal conventions of his time further lead to masculinity as a significant discursive aspect.

As theoretical groundwork, the article will use the analytic terminology of Raewyn Connell's fundamental 1995 study *Masculinities*. The paper will then examine gender representations throughout the film before turning to articulations and connotations of masculinity in Baldwin's statements as well as in the movie's imagery. Referring back to Connell's terminology and patterns of masculinity, I will thereby focus first on the linkage of white supremacy and patriarchy and then turn to the positioning of black masculinity as a specific political and social tool. I will argue that while Baldwin's dissection of white power also holds a threat to patriarchal hierarchies, patriarchal masculinity at the same time remains a significant rhetoric position. The consideration of this position may prove valuable when referring to Baldwin's political thinking today.

### **Shaping Baldwin's Voice – the Characteristics of *I Am Not Your Negro***

"Baldwin[s] voice speaks even more powerfully today", Owen Gleibermann writes in his review of *I Am Not Your Negro* and adds: "The times have caught up with his scalding eloquence."<sup>6</sup> Especially with the transfer of

<sup>3</sup> See Justin A. Joyce, Dwight A. McBride: James Baldwin and Sexuality. *Lieux de Mémoire* and a Usable Past. In: Douglas Field (ed.): *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*. Oxford et al. 2009, pp. 111-139, here p. 132, pp. 134 f.; Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman: "As Though A Metaphor Were Tangible": Baldwin's Identities. In: Michele Elam (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*. New York City 2015, pp. 164-179, here p. 174; p. 176; Douglas Field: Introduction. In: id. (ed.): *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*. Oxford et al. 2009, pp. 3-19, here p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 3 ff.; pp. 8 f.; D. Quentin Miller: Coda: The Heart of Baldwin. In: Michele Elam (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*. New York City 2015, pp. 227-230, here pp. 227 f.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, Coda, p. 227.

<sup>6</sup> Gleibermann, Film Review, para. 1.

Baldwin's thoughts from the 1950s to 1970s to contemporary social situations by combining narration and original material with recent footage, *I Am Not Your Negro* reassures the relevance of the 1924-born author's analysis of structural racism and injustice in the US, prominently unfolding in the 1950s and 1960s when the Harlem-born writer established himself as an intellectual voice for the emancipation of the black population in connection to the movement's most prominent political leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Baldwin's *Notes Toward Remember this House*, an unfinished manuscript begun in 1979 in which Baldwin attempted to show the struggles surrounding the Civil Rights Movement among his memories of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Medgar Evers, forms the starting point of this narration.<sup>8</sup> On this basis, Peck's selection and arrangement of additional texts creates a stream-of-consciousness-like mixture of Baldwin's remembrance of historic events and an extending analysis of US-American culture's issues with racial oppression. The technique compliments Baldwin's own characteristic intertwining of personal experience with the aim of a structural and historic understanding of US culture and society and his elaborations on the interdependency of racial oppression impairing the white as well as the black population.<sup>9</sup> The narration text is further supplemented by original material extracted from speeches and TV appearances, mainly by Baldwin himself,<sup>10</sup> but also, for example, by Malcolm X, Martin Luther King or Harry Belafonte.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See Randall Kenan: James Baldwin, 1924-1987. A Brief Biography. In: Field, Douglas (ed.): *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*. Oxford et al. 2009, pp. 21-60, here p. 21, pp. 37 ff.; Lynn Orilla Scott: Challenging the American Conscience, Re-Imagining American Identity. James Baldwin and the Civil Rights Movement. In: Douglas Field (ed.): *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*. Oxford et al. 2009, pp. 141-176, here p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> The movie's introduction written on the screen introducing the development of *Notes towards Remember this House* is also the only occurrence of an external narration in the movie. *I Am Not Your Negro* (USA/France/Belgium/Switzerland 2016, D: Raoul Peck), 0:00:48-0:01:12. In the following, the movie will be referenced as Peck, IANYN.

<sup>9</sup> See Michele Elam: Introduction: Baldwin's Art. In: id. (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*. New York City 2015, pp. 1-21, here p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Peck particularly draws from Baldwin's appearances on 1968's *The Dick Cavett Show* (Peck, IANYN, 0:01:11-0:02:00; 1:02:03-1:04:12; 1:07:43-1:11:07), on the 1965 *Cambridge University Debate* (ibid., 0:15:55-0:17:00; 0:53:13-0:54:09; 0:55:01-0:57:34) and Dr. Kenneth Clarks 1963 *The Negro and the American Promise* (ibid., 0:29:47-0:31:38; 0:40:06-0:40:24; 1:24:18-1:25:59).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 0:25:47-0:27:54; 0:58:23-0:59:11 et al.

Baldwin's perspective is shaped further by the selection and arrangement of the movie's filmic material. The editing often combines Baldwin's words, simultaneously or consecutively, with contemporary or vastly different content material like nature or street shots or thematically leaping statements. Peck thereby carves out not only additional conjunctions between Baldwin's social analysis and his personal involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He also combines Baldwin's positions with footage of current events such as the *Black Lives Matter* movement and thereby demonstrates the author's relevance for today's discourse of racial politics in the US.<sup>12</sup> Not only does this diachronic compilation demonstrate an intensive historic connectivity of contemporary movements against racism in the US by creating a kind of filmic archive that supports nowadays activism. It also installs a main level of commentary that works beyond the verbal narration and positions Baldwin between being the forming perspective and the subject of the movie.

*I Am Not Your Negro*, due to its unconventional approach, has been classified in different ways, such as a filmic essay<sup>13</sup>, "spiritual documentary"<sup>14</sup> or "posthumous collaboration [...] between the filmmaker [...] and his subject."<sup>15</sup> The difference and creativity of these classifications may mirror the intricacy of the narrative complex created in the movie. The distinct editing strategies mentioned above form a complex dimension of multilayered authorship, a simultaneity of voices that narrate the (hi)story on different levels. Nevertheless, the restriction to original texts from James Baldwin for the verbal narration and consequently the renunciation from an external narrating authority or contemporary commentaries creates an impression of intense personal insight. In effect, *I Am Not Your Negro*

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, 0:02:00-0:02:29. Other examples include 2014 protests in Ferguson (see *ibid.*, 0:30:13-0:30:35) and examples of today's US popular culture (see *ibid.*, 1:06:45-1:07:43).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Munzinger Online/Personen: Baldwin, James. 2017, para. 8, [www.munzinger.de/document/00000010718](http://www.munzinger.de/document/00000010718) (last viewed 25 October 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Owen Gleibermann: Film Review: "I Am Not Your Negro". 2016, para. 1, <http://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/i-am-not-your-negro-review-new-york-film-festival-james-baldwin-1201876-756/> (last viewed 25 October 2018).

<sup>15</sup> A. O. Scott: Review: 'I Am Not Your Negro' Will Make You Rethink Race. 2017, para. 3, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/movies/review-i-am-not-your-negro-review-james-baldwin.html> (last viewed 25 October 2018).

emphasizes the value of narrating history not in hindsight, but through a personally involved perspective that stands largely on its own. The author's voice is thereby awarded with an authority and impact that makes an attentive examination of his rhetoric all the more crucial.

### **Raewyn Connell's Masculinities**

To describe the appearance and functions of masculinity in the movie, the paper will use Raewyn Connell's sociological model of masculinity patterns that is developed in the third chapter of her 1995 study *Masculinities*. While discussed controversially, the theory is still held as fundamental within masculinity studies.<sup>16</sup>

Differentiating from essentialist, positivist and normative definitions and partly drawing from a semiotic understanding, Connell defines gender as a place in a "connected system of symbols"<sup>17</sup> that is realized through social practice.<sup>18</sup> Masculinity, as any "configuration of gender practice"<sup>19</sup>, can be subject to multiple influences. Therefore, individual ways of male identification – Connell uses the term *gender project* – can be highly different as well.<sup>20</sup>

Connell develops categories to describe the functioning of masculinity in patriarchal society which is understood as the general subordination of women to men. She emphasizes that her categorization is not a "character typology"<sup>21</sup> but a system of interdependent functional positions that can shift through historical and social changes and are therefore, theoretically, not bound to certain social groups.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Therese Steffen: Masculinities/Maskulinitäten and its Mal(e) Contents. In: id. (ed.): *Masculinities – Maskulinitäten. Mythos – Realität – Repräsentation – Rollendruck*. Stuttgart et al. 2002, pp. 269-287, here pp. 275 ff.; Stefan Horlacher: Configuring Masculinity. In: id. (ed.): *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*. Leiden/Boston 2015, pp. 1-10, here pp. 6 f.; Todd W. Reeser: Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity studies. In: Stefan Horlacher (ed.): *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*. Leiden/Boston 2015, pp. 11-38, here pp. 20 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Raewyn Connell: *Masculinities*. Berkeley/Los Angeles 2005, p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*

According to Connell, gender relations and relations among men evolve on three different levels. She distinguishes power relations, production relations and cathexis, meaning emotional or desire relations, to establish that connections between and within gender configurations can operate through institutionalized power, division of labor or interpersonal connections.<sup>23</sup> On that basis, she establishes four "main patterns of masculinity in the current Western gender order."<sup>24</sup> Hegemony thereby forms the central pattern around which the other positions revolve. Being "the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy"<sup>25</sup>, hegemonic masculinity dominates male gender practices by idealizing norms that ensure male social power. While the concrete shape of hegemonic masculinity is understood as dynamic, the existence of a hegemonic masculinity stays a necessary given in a patriarchal society whose inequalities need legitimization.<sup>26</sup>

To maintain its capability, hegemonic masculinity itself needs ways to control practices of masculinity that could endanger its entitlement to power. Connell distinguishes subordination, complicity and marginalization/authorization as relational patterns that are established to disable potential power disruptions.<sup>27</sup>

Subordinated masculinities contradict hegemonic power claims and must therefore be systemically devalued.<sup>28</sup> Connell claims that in contemporary Western society, homosexuality is the main subject of male subordination due to its fundamentally destabilizing effect on the (hetero-)sexual basis of hegemony which she calls an "outrage"<sup>29</sup> that is "shattering"<sup>30</sup> hegemonic power.<sup>31</sup> Reversely, she states that "the accomplishment of a gay masculinity

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 74 f.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 76 ff.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 78.

[...] cannot be stable"<sup>32</sup> due to male homosexuality's destabilization of current delimitations of masculinity.

Complicity, on the other hand, is understood as a masculinity not fulfilling all hegemonic standards but also not questioning them to still profit from male social privileges which Connell calls "the patriarchal dividend".<sup>33</sup> In consequence, the weakening of hegemonic characteristics does not become a threatening to patriarchal power.

Marginalization, finally, is described as occurring between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities as well as between different subordinated masculinities.<sup>34</sup> Particularly referring to black masculinities, Connell describes the creation of "symbolic roles"<sup>35</sup> for generally subordinated masculinities. Instead of blanket devaluation, specific subordinated groups are reduced to particular social roles that are intelligible or useful to hegemonic masculinity. Playing into these roles can bring a social promotion that does not cause a general emancipation of the subordinated group but rather an advancement that is strictly limited by hegemonic norms.<sup>36</sup> This individual empowerment bound to the fulfillment of ascribed roles – Connell names the black athlete as the standard example – is called authorization.<sup>37</sup>

Connell's model is characterized by interdependency through which patterns of masculinity take part in or refer to others. The patterns are not understood as congruent with single male-identified individuals but refer to certain aspects of social existence that can coexist and intersect within individual gender projects.<sup>38</sup> When dealing with concrete articulations of manhood in *I Am Not Your Negro*, Connell's multilayered and relational approach allows a differentiated analyzing of complex social situations and positions.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 80 f.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 75 f.

### **Masculinity's role in *I Am Not Your Negro* – Gender representation**

With a male-identified narrator<sup>39</sup> telling the story of a movement by focusing on three central male figures, the movie's narrative appears, to the most part, very male-dominated on the level of personal representation. The included 1950s' and 1960s' footage, reflecting the era's cultural landscape in the US, also largely conveys a political and artistic discourse centered around male voices.<sup>40</sup> Parallel to this, there is a linguistic male predominance: Besides gender nonspecific terms such as 'people', the word 'man' is often used as a representational term.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Baldwin uses the male singular pronoun to substitute male as well as gender nonspecific nouns.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, the movie's text and imagery do not create an exclusively male frame of reference. The narration includes few, yet prominent mentions of female involvement in political struggles.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, there is a coverage



Illustration 1: Footage of the 2014 Black Lives Matter Movement

occurrence of female representations in the movie's imagery. What is made visible is that experiences of racial conflicts in the US have not been a male battlefield but have been experienced by men and women (illustration 1).<sup>44</sup> Several times, female representations are also put right at the beginning of coherent image series

<sup>39</sup> Baldwin is shown articulating a personal male identification at several points in the movie (Peck, IANYN, 0:11:46; 0:18:55; 0:21:17; 1:25:21).

<sup>40</sup> The all-male TV show hosts (Dick Cavett, Dr. Kenneth Clark, David Schoenburn) mirror this domination in the most apparent way.

<sup>41</sup> Peck, IANYN, 0:01:53-0:01:55; 0:39:39-0:39:41; 0:46:31-0:46:59 et al.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 0:32:28-0:32:30; 0:40:44-0:40:47; 1:25:23 et al

<sup>43</sup> Baldwin elaborates particularly on his schoolteacher Bill Miller (ibid., 0:11:17-0:12:46) and fellow author and activist Lorraine Hansberry (ibid., 0:33:52-0:36:03). The desegregation of schools, presented as an important motivation for Baldwin's activism, is represented by two black schoolgirls (ibid., 0:06:03-0:07:19; 0:34:30-0:35:02).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 0:16:27-0:16:38; 0:41:17; 0:56:34-0:56:55; 1:11:39-1:11:51 et al.

which counters the verbal male domination even more directly in a visual way.<sup>45</sup>

Considering this apparent editing strategy and referring to Connell's masculinity model, the further analysis will pursue the question, if the occurring aspects of male domination can be seen as mere historic or linguistic conventions or if the prevalent masculinity in the movie still fulfills systemic functions that shape the given discourse.

### **The patriarchal structure of white supremacy**

In comparison to the representation of black people, white supremacist culture appears particularly male-centered. An inherent linking of patriarchal masculinity and white supremacy is established by the repeated implementation of the standing expression 'the White Man'<sup>46</sup> and emphasized by the elaboration on the violence of culturally idealized male white representations, particularly with regard to Western star John Wayne "who spent most of his time on screen diminishing Indians".<sup>47</sup> Wayne, an iconic figure not only of US-American national identity, but also a western masculinity ideal<sup>48</sup>, is presented several times as a symbol of white American identity as a whole.<sup>49</sup> By substantiating Baldwin's thoughts on white identity, to a great degree, with filmic material from mostly classical Hollywood movies, Peck's editing thereby puts a focus on white supremacy not only as a key element of political oppression, but as a forming perspective of representation in mainstream media culture as well.

Apart from their representations, Baldwin's description of white supremacy in the movie shows significant functional parallels with Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Baldwin argues that oppression and violence against

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 0:02:05; 0:16:27; 0:43:38; 1:18:58; 1:22:05

<sup>46</sup> Peck, IANYN, 0:22:13; 0:25:48; 0:46:47. In *Masculinities*, Raewyn Connell also names the expression "The Man" as a standing term for oppressive white power in black communities. See Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> Peck, IANYN, 1:00:14-1:00:35.

<sup>48</sup> See Mark Cronlund Anderson: *Cowboy Imperialism and Hollywood Film*. New York City et al. 2007, p. 8; pp. 16 ff. et al; Jeanine Basinger: *American Cinema. One hundred years of filmmaking*. New York City 1994, p. 113 et al.

<sup>49</sup> Peck, IANYN, 0:39:39; 0:40:38; 1:00:14.

black people derive from existential identity insecurities within white culture that are projected onto the black population. Baldwin attests the white American to have "no viable connection between his public stance and his private life"<sup>50</sup>, and to therefore create "this dread figure [...] which lives only in his mind".<sup>51</sup> "[T]he Negro problem"<sup>52</sup> is revealed as an invention of white culture "to safeguard their purity".<sup>53</sup> The need to devaluate a social group whose recognition would "attack[...] the entire power structure of the Western world"<sup>54</sup> seems analogical to Connell's pattern of subordination: The instance holding social power must deem groups or characteristics as "subhuman"<sup>55</sup> or "beneath them"<sup>56</sup> to prevent its power claim from being shaken.

Particularly with regard to labor relations, the movie depicts examples that are very reminiscent of Connell's concept of marginalization.<sup>57</sup> Baldwin's statement, "[t]hey needed us to pick up the cotton, and now they don't need us anymore"<sup>58</sup>, demonstrates the instrumentalization by white power and the cohesion of marginalization and subordination in the most brutal way. Processes of authorization by dominant white culture come into play, especially regarding media representation. They refer to marginalization as well as to subordination, for the privilege of media representation and stardom is linked to dismissive stereotypes<sup>59</sup> or, mainly in case of Sidney Poitier in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*<sup>60</sup>, to conformation to social norms of white society which Baldwin comments as "being used against"<sup>61</sup> black people.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 0:44:41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 0:46:53.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 0:49:09-0:49:11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 0:45:28-0:45:38; 1:25:22-1:25:50.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 0:41:14-0:41:30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 0:33:21

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 0:56:24

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 0:07:39-0:08:11; 0:54:59-0:56:32; 1:11:39-1:11:51

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1:02:15-1:02:23.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 0:12:46-0:15:02.

<sup>60</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (USA 1967, D: Stanley Kramer).

<sup>61</sup> Peck, IANYN, 0:48:44-0:48:53.

Drawing from the linkages of white and patriarchal representations and from the structural similarities between the depicted mechanisms of racial oppression and Connell's masculinity patterns, an overlap between white supremacy and hegemonic masculinity appears with regard to their functioning as power structures. In reverse, Baldwin's endeavors to reveal white power's violence, fragility and dependency potentially includes a destabilization of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Black masculinity and empowerment – Articulating manhood**

Throughout the movie, male vocabulary very frequently appears in Baldwin's rhetoric when it comes to rebellion against social oppression by the black population. Often, these passages are directly accompanied and mirrored by references to white masculinity. "The black man's hatred" is compared to "the white man's hatred"<sup>62</sup>, the black man's world view is juxtaposed with John Wayne's<sup>63</sup> and "any black man[s]" demand "give me liberty, or give me death" experiences the injustice of western society in contrast to "any white man in the world".<sup>64</sup>

It is also striking that Baldwin draws on masculinity as equivalent for freedom, self-sufficiency and full human status when he, for example, refers to "the difficulties, the obstacles, the very real danger of death [...] when [...] a black man attempts to become a man".<sup>65</sup> Manhood, as the counterpart to racial oppression, also appears in one of Baldwin's final remarks in the movie: "I'm not a nigger, I'm a man".<sup>66</sup>

Taken literally, this enhanced verbal representation of masculinity implies men at the forefront of defying racial oppression, that the male denomination of white supremacy is or has to be countered with a male energy as well. Again, this impression is countered by female representations in the imagery that are particularly present in scenes of political activism and protest:

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 0:46:45-0:46:59.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 0:39:39-0:39:43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 1:03:46-1:04:11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 1:08:40-1:08:47.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1:25:19.

1963's March on Washington<sup>67</sup> and Birmingham Campaign<sup>68</sup> or 2014's Black Lives Matter protests<sup>69</sup> – pictures of women often start or dominate the visual presentation of events.

When the narration claims that "a black man who sees the world the way John Wayne, for example, sees it, would [...] be [...] a raving maniac"<sup>70</sup>, Peck directly juxtaposes the mentioning of 'a black man' with a picture of a black woman protesting (illustration 2).<sup>71</sup>



Illustration 2: Photograph of a female black activist

Through these combinations, Peck provides an inclusive reading of Baldwin's black man that rather conveys the term as a derivative of a gender-neutral *mankind* than of male individuals in particular.

While the visual strategy apparently aims at undermining male specificity, Baldwin's rhetoric in itself is open to interpretation. In the least, his terminology suits patriarchal norms rather smoothly. While existing racial norms and power structures are sharply dissected and directly challenged, the rhetoric function of manhood rather reassures the underlying hegemonic power structure or, in the least, does not challenge it – which, using Connell's concept of complicity, leaves the door open to still profit from the patriarchal dividend. To overcome a subordinated status due to racial oppression, the male power claim of hegemonic masculinity potentially serves as a tool for empowerment which is only effective due to the stability of a hierarchic patriarchal logic.

### **Black Male sexuality**

The description of racial oppression includes a sexual component revolving around black masculinity that faces a marginalization by the depriving of

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 0:57:34-0:58:04.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 0:25:04-0:25:28.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 0:02:04-0:02:30.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 0:39:39-0:39:48.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 0:39:41.

sexual agency: "[B]lack men are still used, in popular culture, as though they had no sexual equipment at all".<sup>72</sup> This part of the narration mainly focuses on male black film stars Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte that are compared to "the Hollywood he-men".<sup>73</sup> Racial oppression shows itself here through its position within male hierarchies.



Illustration 3: Chiquita Banana Spot

In this case, the photographic and filmic material even enriches male specificity by showing the ridiculment of black male sexuality in a "Chiquita Banana" advertisement spot<sup>74</sup> (illustration 3) or the desexualization of the black man in a cartoon that shows him frightened in bed with a white woman.<sup>75</sup> Tackling the topic from another angle, filmic footage

from the 1960s shows a white woman protesting racial integration by holding up a drawing of a black man titled "Kiss me – I'm equal" (illustration 4).<sup>76</sup> The highly stereotypical drawing shows the man not only with an aggressive facial expression, but also naked with tribally connotated assets such as face painting, feathers or a bone in his hair, which also conveys the morbidity of this cultural image. In this instant, sexuality of black men is not neglected, but rather condemned as dangerous, and, considering the claim's sarcasm, undergoes explicit subordination.



Illustration 4: White woman protesting against integration

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 0:48:02-0:48:09.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 0:48:10-0:48:32.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 0:47:49-0:48:10.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 0:49:04-0:49:09.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 0:29:15.

On the other hand, the narration presents male sexuality not only as a main target, but also as a barrier to racial oppression. Baldwin opposes Sidney Poitier "as a man" to "the infantile, furtive sexuality of this country"<sup>77</sup> and classifies Poitier and Belafonte as "sex symbols, though no one dares admit that".<sup>78</sup> The famous men's sexuality withstands and threatens their structural devaluation and demands recognition: "The next time, the kissing will have to start".<sup>79</sup>

The narrative observations and filmic footage are powerful, but lack entirely the situations of other genders. Therefore, the disruptive power of sexuality might be applicable to other genders as well – yet since sexualities that are not connotated as male are left out of the discourse, it remains an open question to what conditions. In consequence, sexual oppression as well as empowerment does not go beyond the hierarchies and privileges of hegemonic masculinity.

#### **The Heterosexual Family**

The empowering potential of sexuality is shown as exclusively male, but able to realize itself in ways of both homo- and heterosexuality.<sup>80</sup> Yet in parts, Baldwin also seems to build on the validity of heterosexual family norms. In discussion with philosopher Paul Weiss during *The Dick Cavett Show*, he articulates an identification as a heterosexual, married man: "You want me to make an act of faith, risking myself, my wife, my woman, my sister, my children on some idealism".<sup>81</sup> Interpreting the unmarried Baldwin's remark as a kind of collective representation of black people in America, this representation is constituted by male agency and female objectification. Baldwin's argumentation is enhanced by a responsibility claim that derives from patriarchal hierarchies.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 0:48:10-0:48:20.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 0:48:20-0:48:25.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 0:49:10-0:49:14.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 0:48:53-0:49:14; 0:49:28-0:49:51.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 1:10:54-1:11:02.

The objectified status of the married woman becomes even more clear in another reference to heterosexual marriage in the narration that lists her among domestic properties: "No other country can afford to dream of a plymouth and a wife and a house with a fence. [...] [W]hen we talk about democracy, this is what we mean".<sup>82</sup> While the passage appears in the context of a criticism of white privilege, the collective 'we' suggests an identification with the enlisted values: The patriarchal component of cultural privilege does not become a part of its criticism, but its marriage concept again rather serves as a common identification ground that allows to present a parameter to identify injustice and therein channel racial subordination.

The appeals to a patriarchal structure of heterosexual marriage are sparse but striking – as a rhetoric reassurance of gender inequality contrasting Baldwin's insightful critique of structural injustice, but also considering that Baldwin appeals to the functionality of a sexo-social model that he himself did not adapt to. This may point towards a rooting of patriarchal structure in Baldwin's thinking, but just as well towards a sense of external necessity to verbally conform to corner values of hegemonic masculinity to be able to gain discursive recognition or even toleration. The editing of *I Am Not Your Negro* supports the latter notion by incorporating the 1966 FBI report on Baldwin that lists his engagement in the civil rights movement next to the assumption "that Baldwin may be an [!] homosexual and he appeared as if he may be one"<sup>83</sup> to conclude with the classification as a "dangerous individual".<sup>84</sup> The intersecting institutionalized oppression of race and sexuality and the criminalizing context show the severe social pressure related to male black homosexuality at the time. Combined with other visual and verbal allusions towards Baldwin's homosexuality<sup>85</sup>, the movie thereby comments and contextualizes impressions of heterosexual masculinity's self-evidence.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 1:05:47-1:06:14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 0:22:41-0:22:58.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 0:23:19.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 0:36:35; 0:57:56; 0:58:01; 1:14:00-1:14:09.

The movie's editing furthermore provides contextualization for heterosexual claims by including material that demonstrates the dominance of



Illustration 5: Film still from 1954 advertisement spot *The Secret of Selling the Negro*

heterosexuality and patriarchal division of labor in US mainstream culture, particularly the 1954 advertisement spot *The Secret of Selling the Negro* (illustration 5).<sup>86</sup> The clip that promotes black people's increasing buying power exclusively shows heterosexual families with stereotypical divisions of labor. Conformity to patriarchal structures appears as premise for social, or mere economic, authorization. Baldwin's heterosexual rhetoric, although with opposing political ambitions, also draws from the authorizing power that the assimilation to patriarchal norms promises. He thereby enters a rhetoric complicity with hegemonic masculinity to defy racial subordination. Again, the aim of racial equality profits from hegemonic male power, which simultaneously restricts its scope.

### **Conclusion**

The identification of masculinity patterns in Baldwin's criticism as well as in some of his rhetorical premises and their intersecting positioning within hegemonic masculinity's structure discloses a field of contradiction: On the one hand, Baldwin's deconstruction of the US-American white identity

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 0:51:45-0:52:42.

presents itself in parallelism to hegemonic masculinity. This parallel would consequently demand to shake the patriarchal power structure along with white supremacist power. On the other hand, Baldwin rhetorically relies on elements of hegemonic male power to strengthen his discursive position: Within the substantial structural criticism of power mechanisms remain elements of complicity with the criticized system that draws on the patriarchal dividend to contest racial subordination.

The disclosure of these contradictions can seem productive to detect the diverse influences within a body of work and to therefore get a deeper understanding of its potentials. Concretely, Baldwin's radical criticism of power structures can be used to examine and extend his own political argumentation regarding hegemonic masculinity.

The findings of this article aim, to a large degree, at the dynamics of Baldwin's rhetoric within the frame of the movie's selectiveness. On the other hand, they provoke further thoughts and questions regarding the particular framing through the movie's editing itself. The movie's composition contributes an important twist by emphasizing female representations and providing material that demonstrates the patriarchal and heterosexual normativity of the discourse that Baldwin acted on and that provide a contextualization as well as a diversifying visual commentary. But at the same time, it might be promising for further approaches to examine, for example by comparison with other texts and appearances of Baldwin, the process of selection more closely, especially with regard to stands on sexuality or gender.

It furthermore showed in several instances that the editing strategy of visual commentary does not repeal the rhetorical significance of hegemonic masculinity. Regarding this aspect, it might be interesting to think again about the possibilities and limitations of Peck's innovative documentary technique to narrate historical and social events by the arranging of one involved perspective. While the aspect of emotional and personal insight is particularly powerful, the complex of masculinity may show an ambivalence of this technique since the possibilities of including or commenting on crucial aspects that might be potentially problematic in the adapted perspective are limited so that the risk of reproducing them seems particularly high. The role

of masculinity within Peck's artistic approach therefore proves to be a productive access to dissect its intersectional as well as its intertextual intricacies.

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### **Filmography**

*I Am Not Your Negro* (USA/France/Belgium/Switzerland 2016, D: Raoul Peck).

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (USA 1967, D: Stanley Kramer).

### **Illustrations**

Illustration 1: Footage of the 2014 *Black Lives Matter* Movement (Peck, IANYN, 0:02:23)

Illustration 2: Photograph of a female black activist (Peck, IANYN, 0:39:41)

Illustration 3: *Chiquita Banana* Spot (Peck, IANYN, 0:47:50)

Illustration 4: White woman protesting against integration (Peck, IANYN, 0:29:15)

Illustration 5: Film still from 1954 advertisement spot *The Secret of Selling the Negro* (Peck, IANYN, 0:52:19)

### **Bio**

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