

Poverties of Nation: *The Ends of the Earth, "Monetary Subjects without Money," and Postcolonial Theory*

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The significant turn over the last decade or so from a tacitly nation-centered to a "postnational" literary and cultural studies is a fact as pointless to ignore or dismiss as it is easy to convert into a mythology. The upsurge of critical discourse on questions of hybridity, migrancy, borders--as well as diaspora--does not warrant, as is sometimes thoughtlessly claimed, the summary disposal of the national as a critical, or literary-historical category. And the "theoretical" extravagances often uttered in the same breath that evokes the postnational--especially the mock-radical cult of the exile or migrant-as-a priori-subversive--are almost a reasonable excuse for taking one's intellectual exit cue at the first hint of the jargons in which they are advertised. But worse than investing utopian energies in an imagined politics of the "in-between" would be to throw out, along with postnationalism's prevalent, mystificatory forms of self-understanding, the historical and more immediately conjunctural and political changes expressed in this trend as such. For while the realities of migrancy and diaspora are not new--indeed, what could be older?--the pervasive sense that, jargons notwithstanding, these realities have come more and more to typify the contemporary experience even of dominant "nationalities" themselves is of a recent--and material--genealogy.

My view, as expounded in an earlier essay¹, is that this sudden and seemingly ontological collapse of nation-centeredness possesses a universal and perfectly discreet historical foreground in the collapse of the anti-colonial, national liberation movements that decisively shaped the epoch--the so-called "Bandung era"--stretching from the end of

the Second World War to, at the latest, the fall of Soviet-style socialism, ca. 1989². The question of what caused this collapse is as commanding as it is open-ended, and would take us far wide of our immediately critical mark in the present essay. (To answer reflexively, with the dominant wing of the institutionally sanctioned intelligentsia, "globalization," does little except confuse matters.) But we can perhaps get by here by observing that, although economic in the final analysis, the social failure of the national-liberation project, in both its "socialist" and non-"socialist" instances, is already misapprehended if it is equated with an unconditional "success" of the formerly colonizing, henceforth globally imperializing centers of capital accumulation. As Robert Kurz has asserted (in an argument to which we shall return below in more detail) the effective failure of the third (and "second") world's nationalist modernization projects, whether carried out or not in the name of an ideology of cultural nationalism, results from a deepening, global crisis of capital accumulation and capitalist reproduction that, in the very process of shifting the social burden of the crisis onto the once "newly industrializing" economies, also marks its own increasing incapacity to exploit this fact to advantage in expanding the basis of accumulation as a whole³. That is, the breakdown of the national-liberationist (and "socialist") models of development (Kurz's "collapse of modernization") is not compensated by some new phase of capitalist expansion and growth in the global economy, as the naive, or disinforming celebrants of "globalization" will have it. The attempt to carry out a "recuperative modernization" (Kurz's "*nachholender Modernisierung*") internally flawed as it may have been, could not withstand and was in fact the first to fall victim to the present global crisis of capitalism. Thus the "nation" as the theoretical centerpiece--and utopian imaginary--of national liberation doctrine suffers not only a dethronement but also a species of historical or dialectical curse: the "liberated" nation seems to point to no emancipatory nor even any ameliorative opening beyond itself, the philosophically-sanctioned univocal history that gave it ultimate meaning having, seemingly, "ended" along with it. ("*Soviel Ende war nie.*"--"Never were there so many ends.", as Kurz begins *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung*.)

It is this supplemental cancellation of historical consciousness, this particular "end of History" that, as I see it, is required in order to account for the strongly ideological affinities of poststructuralist or "textualist"--i.e., constitutively anti-historicist--radicalisms for the postnational and "postcolonial." The "ludic" politics of poststructuralism (to borrow Teresa Ebert's chillingly accurate term⁴) appear, at the last moment, to rescue a seemingly failed historical project by rescuing it in turn from any historically-grounded category of emancipation whatsoever. Analogously, the sense that the postnational is also the entry into the "posthistorical" foregrounds, I would suggest, the sudden emergence of a postnational "subject- position" as a focal point for utopian projection and investment. The "end," or suspension, of a nation-centered temporality clearly has its spatial equivalent in the perpetual displacement of "dissemiNation, etc."

But for all of its mythical proclivities, the critical and philosophical thinking that gathers under the aegis of the postnational at least preserves an ethical sympathy with anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. One might suspect in certain instances that this is no more than a rhetorical pose, but the fact that the pose is felt to be necessary reiterates

the point. Between a critical text such as *Orientalism*, say, and *The Location of Culture* this sympathetic bond becomes a good deal less emphatic, but no one swearing by either text does so out a conscious loyalty to, e.g., the rationales of an IMF austerity plan. "Postcolonial" theory may be no less deserving of a rigorously historical materialist critique for all that; but even such a critique senses that it can appeal, in the last analysis, to certain commonly held values.⁵

The importance of such a common ethical perspective stands out much more sharply when one considers the other sorts of ideological fallings-out and about-faces that are being occasioned by the "postnational" historical crisis--and that often go unnoticed by the radical readers and humanists that gravitate to the "postcolonial." For the changes undergone as the older, romanticizing "third worldism" recoils from its own "end of History" can also follow a trajectory far more sinister and dystopian than postcolonialism's.

I have in mind, in this context, the recent, widely-sold and commented book by Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the Twenty First Century*⁶. Kaplan, who writes on "travel and foreign affairs" had gained considerable notoriety in February, 1994 with the publication in the *Atlantic Monthly* of what was to be a section of *The Ends of the Earth* entitled "The Coming Anarchy." In the latter he had warned "Western" governments and lending agencies of an impending social collapse in the poorest parts of the third world, especially sub-Saharan Africa. Along with other mainstream media "experts" like David Riesman and such praetorian academics as Samuel P. Huntington⁷ Kaplan has been granted a kind of secular pulpit from which to survey the dangers and 'threats to security' that are now felt to loom out of the post-Cold War shadows. Limiting my remarks to the first section of *The Ends of the Earth*, in which the author recounts his travels in West Africa, I want briefly to consider certain peculiarities of Kaplan's book that both distance it ethically but also, less obviously, link it ideologically to the "postnational" trend discussed above.

In his chapter entitled "Along the Gulf of Guinea," Kaplan interrupts the narrative of his journey from Togo across the border into Ghana to discuss a historical controversy as to whether the European slavers who preyed on the coastal region through which he is travelling had initiated the slave-trade or merely assumed a commanding role in a practice already long in existence in the tribal kingdoms of Ashanti, Dahomey and Yoruba. Citing both Roland Oliver's *The African Experience* and Basil Davidson's *Africa in History*, Kaplan somewhat reluctantly concedes the latter's argument that the international slave trade begun in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Iberian, Dutch and English merchants already marked the start of Africa's colonial subjugation to the European metropolis--and hence that a historically decisive change occurs as a result. Slavery, in the end, simply cannot be blamed on Africa itself--to what seems to be the mild regret of the author of *The Ends of the Earth*.

But even so, Kaplan asserts, slavery was not the "greatest burden inflicted on Africa by the Europeans...." (83) This, rather, was the "political map, with its scores of countries, each identified by the color of its imperial master...." (ibid.) European responsibility for the slave trade, as, overall, for Africa's colonial victimization, may be a fact, but "...cartography created facts by ordering the way we look at Africa and the rest of the world." (ibid., my emphasis) Citing Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Kaplan finds in maps the "totalizing, classificatory grid" that can (in Kaplan's words) "make possible such questionable concepts as the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Togo and Nigeria...." (ibid.) And now, with the ancillary fact-creating of such things as national census-takings and museums, Africa itself had been "artificially reconceived" (ibid.)--and this time by Africans themselves.

The Ends of the Earth, that is, offers up "theory" of nationhood quite familiar to the adepts of "postcolonial studies"--the nation as narration, invention, fiction or "imagined community"⁸--but does so for argumentative and ideological ends quite unfamiliar in this same context. For contemporary postcolonial critics on the order of an Anderson, Bhabha or García Canclini, the fictive or narrational foundations of nationhood assume theoretical importance out of an intellectual, and perhaps also political impetus to burst, or de-"essentialize" the national myth, to glimpse, in however utopian and historically-idealized a fashion, a form of polity cleansed of nationhood's frightening pathologies. In Kaplan's case, however, the nation--at least in its West African form--denotes an "artificiality" in relation to the truly "foundational" realities of tribe, terrain and climate. Sensing the nation as "fictive" does not, in Kaplan's account of West Africa, lead to the purportedly radical and enabling insight into the fictiveness or "liminality" of all forms of national and cultural identity--what might be termed the comedy of the postnational--but rather to the "tragedy" of nations that are not and never were "an organic outgrowth of geography and ethnicity." (71) To become merely a "narration," for *The Ends of the Earth*, is the greatest misfortune of nations--for it bespeaks the latter's loss of that which grounds "real" nations, that which, in fact, grounds all "narratives" as such--Nature itself.

And Nature, it seems, has a cultural, even a historical debt to collect. *The Ends of the Earth* blatantly avows its naturalism, proclaiming in its opening pages that the end of the twentieth century has become "a time when politics are increasingly shaped by the physical environment." "A brief moment marked by the Industrial Revolution, which gave humankind a chance to defend itself somewhat from nature, may be closing." (4) Here the double, even triple meaning of the book's title itself becomes starkly apparent--for it is not a "world," or even a "globe" across which Kaplan charts his pilgrim's course, but an "earth" whose "ends" (or extremes) offer a glimpse of an approaching apocalypse that it had perhaps been the "ends" (the telos) of the "earth" all along to inflict. "My goal," explains Kaplan, "was to see humanity in each locale as literally an outgrowth of the terrain and climate in which it was fated to live." (7) And Africa is the place to start--Africa, "alas, the inescapable center" in which our species was biologically destined to find its origin and in which, or so Kaplan hints repeatedly, it may have already begun its slide, propelled by uncontrolled population growth and new "luxuriating" viruses, into extinction. Africa, the "hottest" and, thus not accidentally, per Kaplan, the "poorest" region of the world (7), is "nature writ large." (4)

Kaplan's "scientific" sources for this freely acknowledged "neo-Malthusianism" will be obscure to postcolonialists, but include, above all, Thomas Homer-Dixon, a University of Toronto academic who propounds a "physical-social" (as against a "social-social") theory trained on "the security aspects of the environment." (298) Kaplan sets apart Homer-Dixon (along with collaborators Daniel Deudney and Vaclav Smil) from outright "neo-Malthusians" of the Paul Erlich, "life-boat ethics" variety; from "neo-classical" economics, with its belief in the limitless growth theoretically possible under free market conditions; and from "distributionists" (such as Amartya Sen) who blame the West for "exploiting the third world and devouring the planet's resources." (348) Homer-Dixon's "physical-social" theory accepts the fundamental neo-classical faith in "human ingenuity" but doubts that such ingenuity (in Kaplan's gloss) "materialize[s] automatically" and speculates that "some societies are more ingenious than others." (348) "...[I]ngenuity," agrees *The Ends of the Earth*, "is never evenly distributed." A "deficient social ingenuity" is perhaps the root cause of Africa's accelerating surrender to a Malthusian Nature--for "what good are new Western vaccines in an anarchic African country where health clinics are constantly being vandalized or having their electricity cut?" (349)

The Ends of the Earth is rather more generous in the quotient of "social ingenuity" it assigns to India and China, areas that, unlike Africa, have at least embarked on "industrial revolutions" of their own. But it's not imprecise, I think, to identify Kaplan's intellectual and "theoretical" affinities as "eco-fascist." Kaplan cannot quite permit himself to embrace the blatantly racializing Eurocentrism of his most favored literary authorities and progenitors, above all Richard Burton, Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. For example, he very cautiously defends Conrad's *The Nigger of the Narcissus* from the charge of racism by posing the question to an African cleric in Sierra Leone, who stoutly defends the novel as "progressive for its time." (35) Burton's racially-slanted account of Liberia is cited, together with Basil Davidson's disparagements of the same, but Kaplan comes indirectly to the former's defense by questioning whether postcolonial Liberia today is not worse off than it was when Burton visited in 1862. (24-25) Kaplan is still too much the post-Vietnam intellectual not to disguise his Eurocentrism. But the peculiar logic of his position reveals just what separates him from the Victorian-colonialist racism of a Burton or Conrad. For the latter, African "inferiority", however deep-seated it was presupposed to be, still appealed to the white European's responsibility to undertake a paternal act of "civilization" through direct colonization. It denoted a seeming natural-historical imbalance, which it was Europe's providential destiny to correct. For *The Ends of the Earth*, it signifies only that even this ethically dubious effort was perhaps "naturally" doomed from the start. Burton's patronizing Eurocentrism was, Kaplan implies, wasted on Africa. Conrad's virtue is that, according to *The Ends of the Earth*, he wrote strictly from what he, in the "impregnability" of his "personal experience," "saw heard and felt." (36) Claiming the same, monadic and directly empirical authority for his own narrative, Kaplan "sees" an environmentally-produced "anarchy" that nothing--neither the national liberation movements themselves, nor even the European colonizers whom they overcame and expelled--can or could have staved off. Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, which *The Ends of the Earth* evokes in its account of Freeport, Sierra Leone, suggests to Kaplan how the guilt of the novel's hero (a British colonial police official) over an adulterous affair may have been all that could preserve his last few ties to

"civilization" in an "evil," naturally corrupting place. (In the tropical heat, people are more likely to take their clothes off.) It seems never to have occurred to Kaplan that, for all of Greene's conservatism and racial cynicism, the inexorable corruption portrayed in *The Heart of the Matter* might disclose some "organic" connection to the nature of the colonial system itself. Such matters have now, at the "ends of the earth," become irrelevant, it seems. Thus understood, Kaplan's tale of postnational, eco-fascist vagabondage reaches perhaps its most astonishing climax in its story of a passage through civil-war-ravaged Liberia. The surrounding tropical forests, with their absence of "crisp borders," denote, "rather than a particular country...merely a particular place on the planet." "It seemed to me that the myths that might emerge from such a landscape were either too local (connected with tribe) or too general (connected with the earth) to sustain nationhood." (26) How, then, explain the civil war itself? What were the opposed sides killing each other for, if not for possession of a state, a nation? Kaplan cannot say, for "there was no economy here, nothing...." (27) "It occurred to me that, perhaps, the forest has made the war in Liberia," confesses Kaplan. And yet he has seen nothing to make this theory credible, no "factual basis"-- "merely a traveler's intuition." (ibid.)

In *Imperial Eyes*, her fine critical study of 18th and 19th century European travel writing on Africa and Latin America, Mary Louise Pratt sums up this literature neatly as one that "narrates place and describes people."⁹ One could ask for no more extreme an instance of this perverse form of myth than Kaplan's "the forest had made the war...." Africans, it now appears, can no longer be conceded even that minimal degree of historical agency entailed in making war on each other. Nature, in its re-absorption of the short-lived African nation-state, its collapsing of the nation's very mythic underpinnings back into what Kaplan, without argument, presumes to be its spontaneous cultural generativity (but how do myths "emerge" from landscapes?) is left as the only historical player capable of action in this meta-narrative. At once hero and villain, it mocks even the Western efforts to act in the place of Africa's postnational, re-barbarized subjects. "The Slave Coast was ready to be recolonized, if only the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English would agree to come back with their money" (80), but, of course, they're not coming back, not just because without the "Soviet threat there is nothing [in Africa] to interest them" (57), but because even the agency of colonization must meet with some minimally social or cultural substance in order to realize itself. Burton, Stanley, even Cecil Rhodes could still believe in an African Nature of Enlightenment lineaments, one that would cede to "civilizing" efforts if strenuously and patiently enough applied. But the Nature of Kaplan and Homer-Dixon, the Nature that "made the war in Liberia," is the Nature of Hobbes, not of Montesquieu or Locke, much less of Rousseau. In its Malthusian absolutism and vengefulness, it ceases, even, to be Darwinian, unless the supposed self-annihilation of social order ("anarchy") can be somehow thought of as a form of adaptation.

In any event, *The Ends of the Earth* makes for a macabre demonstration of how the mythical underside of the postnational bonds as readily with new hybrids of eco-fascism as it does with postcolonialism or poststructuralism. The latter, in their "comic" discovery of the narrative, discursive or just simply cultural constructed-ness of "nation" and other deceptively naturalized or "essentialized" givens of social existence, find themselves not

only on the far side of admittedly oppressive forms of identity, but of history as well-- what I have elsewhere termed the "textualist fallacy." "Culture" becomes the newly pertinent sphere of agency, leaving one to speculate in endlessly metaphysical gyrations just how the constructed is to do the constructing. But such aporias at least leave culture in a relatively innocuous condition of abstract relativity. What happens when this same de-historicizing fallacy reads "culture" in an absolutized, re-"essentialized" mode as, finally, the responsibility of its constructed subjects is evident in Kaplan's eco-fascist postnationalism. (The "end was nigh," he concludes after his sojourn in the fictive, cursed 'nation' of Sierra Leone, in the "failed battle" to "equalize cultures around the world." [54]) "Nature" is how the constructed is to do the constructing--or de-constructing. And Nature has determined that certain of us undergo a particularly ruthless and 'personally experienced' form of deconstruction.

I'll reiterate, here, a point made earlier: that there are important tactical reasons for drawing a line between the "ludic" postnationalism that inhabits the "growth-sector" in much literary and cultural studies and the much more toxic variety represented in *The Ends of the Earth*. But this is not to say that the former can in any way be adopted as the latter's corrective, or even palliating replacement. The strategic absence in Kaplan's dismal and reactionary vision of the postcolonial is not any orthodoxly deconstructive logic of the "other"--not "dissemiNation" as the antidote to Nature--but the full, contemporary historical reality of global capitalism itself.

I want to conclude this reading of Kaplan's text in the manner of an ideology-critique by sketching in, however crudely and abstractly, this absence--something that leads me again to Kurz's *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung*. I am far from well-versed in current political-economic research, especially as relates to Africa, but I do think that Kurz's theory of what he terms the "postcatastrophic" societies of the third and formerly second worlds (with the first in some ways already visibly on the post-catastrophic horizon) provides a uniquely illuminating standpoint from which to undertake the historical and dialectical exposé of the eco- or neo-fascist "postcolonialism" of *The Ends of the Earth*.

I will have to be concise here, but Kurz's central theoretical insight or claim is easily summarized: it holds that, in the wake of the most recent scientific and technical revolution in capitalist production (its "*Verwissenschaftlichung*") the degree of capital-intensity (Marx's "organic composition of capital") has become so great as to limit the very ability of capital to absorb labor-power and overall productive capacity except in a constantly diminishing ratio. Capitalism becomes, in Kurz's phrase, "*ausbeutungsunfähig*"--"unable to exploit": "the total global mass of productively exploited labor, as a result of the permanently rising level of the productive forces, declines absolutely for the first time in the history of capitalism." (263)¹⁰ Such enormously enhanced productivity, that is, leads not only to a classic crisis of over-production in which existing world markets are unable to absorb the increased flow of commodities, but to a general crisis of social reproduction in which the labor power of millions, if not billions of newly proletarianized residents of the South and East becomes

superfluous to the economic needs of capital. "Human beings are cut off from the the capitalist conditions placed on the satisfaction of their needs." (263)¹¹ "Postcatastrophic" societies arise "that are bound to the global circulation of money by only the thinnest of threads." (191)¹² Efforts to initiate a rapid process of "primitive accumulation" of capital, whether made under the banners of Soviet-style socialism or third worldist national liberation--the revolutionary drive to what Kurz terms a "recuperative modernization"--could not but ultimately come to grief, since "the level attained by the enormous stocks of capital in the West, a level presupposed if any further growth is to result, is no longer attainable--within the existing commodity logic--in other regions of the world (198-9)¹³ "Such constant increases in productivity, increases that exceed the bounds of comprehension of commodity production, cannot but react with catastrophic force on any recuperative processes of primitive accumulation." (221)¹⁴ Ripped from their traditional village or tribal social-economies and herded into the new, gargantuan urban slums of the third world--where they were to have become the new, global proletariat--an enormous mass, literally billions of human beings find themselves in the limbo of "*Geldsubjekten--aber ohne Geld*"--"monetary subjects, but without money." (223)

The resulting collapse of the postcolonial political and economic institutions that had arisen in the course of now abandoned strategies of capitalist modernization leads to the "*sekundäre Barbarei*" of civil and ethnic wars and their accompanying "Ersatz" ideologies of religious and tribal fundamentalisms and virulent neo- and sub-nationalisms. (see Kurz, p. 208) That is, the very same historical dialectic that, in its initial stages, had produced the modern nation state as a center for the accumulation of capital and for the erection and administration of a generalized system of commodity exchange, having reached (at least in Kurz's view) its terminal crisis, now works in turn to undermine and destroy the nation state at its weakest points.

This is the immediate reality recorded by Kaplan in his street-level travels through Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Egypt, Turkey, etc., with only a knap-sack on his back but with Burton and Conrad--and Homer-Dixon--heavy in his thoughts--a reality whose paradox is to have been historically and culturally generated but "naturally", even "environmentally" condemned to extinction. With a few melancholic regrets, but inevitably, given his entrapment in the purely immediate, fragmentary forms of appearance of the "post-catastrophic" world order, Kaplan reverts to the inveterate dualities of a Western, European "civilization" versus a naturalized "barbarism," leaving the nation hovering somewhere in between. The "end of History," at least in the third world, (but, if we are not careful to contain the spread of "anarchy," perhaps in our own backyards as well¹⁵) is the final, doomed return to Nature. But, held up against Kurz's theory of the postcatastrophic, Kaplan's eco-fascist naturalism discloses itself as the exact, ideological inversion of the reality he "personally experiences." It is not "the forest" that makes civil war in Liberia--or Rwanda, Zaire, etc.--but "monetary subjects without money," i.e., human beings whose agriculturally and village-based "natural" economies having been violently and summarily uprooted and undermined now find themselves marooned in an absolute and unremittingly historical space of "modernity" that seems to lead neither forwards nor backwards. It is the historical space of "*sekundäre Barbarei*"--and no one

more fully and truly embodies its spirit than Kaplan himself, along with his likenesses among the hordes of late-imperial and retro-colonial skills.

In conclusion, however, there's no reason to credit postcolonial theory with having superseded this same grotesque mystification. While it rests on an adamant prohibition of Kaplan's retro-colonial nostalgias, postcolonialism's purely cultural and discursive radicalism, its celebration of postnational hybridities as if nationalism were no more than a question of subject-positions, offers not the slightest critical purchase on the all too real immediacies narrated by Kaplan. Where *The Ends of the Earth* attributes the social catastrophe of a progressively nonreproductive global capitalism to "natural" factors external to its logic, postcolonial theory misreads this logic itself as if the globalized exchange of culture and identities were not bound to the same acutely dysfunctional system that replaces older, bad forms of cultural-nationalist "essentialisms" with newer, ever more sinister ones. Postcolonialism forgets, or never grasps, that the flip-side of "hybridity" "diasporic consciousness," etc. is the post-catastrophic holocaust of "monetary subjects without money."

Notes

[1](#) "DetermiNation: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Problem of Ideology" in *Dimensions of Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Fawzia Afzal-Khan (Durham: Duke University Press) forthcoming.

[2](#) On the "Bandung Era" see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York, London: Verso, 1992).

[3](#) Robert Kurz, *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung: Vom Zusammenbruch des Kasernsozialismus zur Krise der Weltökonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 1991).

[4](#) See *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire and Labor in Late Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

[5](#) See, for further discussion of this point, my "Postcolonialism's Unsaid" (review essay, Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory*) *minnesota review* numbers 45 & 46 (Fall 1995 & Spring 1996).

[6](#) (New York: Random House, 1996).

[7](#) See Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations: The Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[8](#) In his earlier account of a sojourn in Togo, Kaplan describes it as a "country...less fact than fiction." (70) Its capital, Lome, is a place that "seemed to lack foundation." (71) Of Sierra Leone--a place in which "borders were crumbling, and they weren't all geographical"--Kaplan poses the question to a Catholic relief worker: "is [it] a country?" (66)

[9](#) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992) p. 213.

[10](#) [My translations here and throughout. Original citations listed in footnotes.] "*die globale Gesamtmasse der produktive vernutzten abstrakten Arbeit sinkt aufgrund der permanent gesteigerten Produktivkraft erstmals in der kapitalistischen Geschichte auch absolut....*"

[11](#) "...[D]ie Menschen werden von den kapitalistischen Bedingungen ihrer Bedürfnisbefriedigung abgeschnitten."

[12](#) "...die nur noch durch wenige dünne Adern mit dem globalen Blutkreislauf des Geldes verbunden sind."

[13](#) "...die Basis des gewaltigen westlichen Kapitalstocks, von der aus die weiteren Steigerungen erfolgen, kann innerhalb der Warenlogik in den anderen Weltteilen insgesamt nie mehr erreicht werden."

[14](#) "*Diese stets zunehmende und über das Fassungsvermögen der Wareproduktion hinauswachsende Produktivität konnte nicht ohne katastrophale Rückwirkung auf die nachholenden Prozesse der ursrpünglichen Akkumulation bleiben.*"

[15](#) Kaplan quotes from a letter from a friend, and U.S. diplomat in Africa: "The greatest threat to our value system comes from Africa. Can we continue to believe in universal principles as Africa declines to levels better described by Dante than by development economists? Our domestic attitudes on race and ethnicity suffer as Africa becomes a continent-wide "Wreck of the Medusa.'" (4) Note that this decline is not a subject for economics, only for myth and metaphysics. Kaplan himself sounds a similar warning: "It may be easy to say that a place like Sierra Leone does not matter, but if we don't care at all about such places, why should, for instance, suburbanites in Tucson care about the inner city in Philadelphia? To be completely heartless about Africa, I mean to suggest, is to start down a path which imperils our own nationness." (68) Here Kaplan comes uncannily close to a historical insight that, however, his "environmental" apology for global capitalism cannot develop further. One must not remain "heartless." But moral sympathy will have to be its own--and Africa's--only reward. Since even Western aid programs can do nothing but stimulate further population growth, Africa, with all the moral "care" that can be mustered for the occasion, must be set, "Wreck of the Medusa"-fashion, adrift.