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# African Dreams and Diasporic Anonymity: Jessie Fauset's and Anita Reynolds's North African Meditations

Jennifer M. Wilks\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Texas – United States

## Abstract

This paper explores the sometimes competing, sometimes complementary representations of North Africa in the works of two early 20th-century African American women writers: Jessie Redmon Fauset's essay "Dark Algiers the White" (1925), published in *Crisis* magazine, and the Morocco chapter (set in 1931) of Anita Reynolds' posthumously published memoir *American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World* (2014). I am interested in how, for both writers, Algeria and Morocco function as idealized, interstitial spaces between Europe and (sub-Saharan) Africa-and away from the United States-and as concrete, particular sites with their own rich history and culture. The women's respective encounters in Algiers, Algeria, and Tangier, Morocco, lead each to experience a degree of what I call "diasporic anonymity," which entails freedom from the constraints of bourgeois African American womanhood as well as local acceptance on levels not accessible to the white American and European women with whom they cross paths. The French-speaking Fauset, for example, is deemed safe to venture off the tourist path in Algiers because she is misread as a Martinican woman and, thus, part of the greater French colonial world to which Algeria also belongs. Although culturally and geographically incorrect, this diasporic recognition recasts black womanhood as a portable, mutable construct rather than a fixed, confined identity; it also reveals the class and color privilege behind such border crossing: despite their vastly different lifestyles, both Fauset and Reynolds, the *New Negro Woman* and the *American Cocktail*, were French-speaking, lighter-skinned, and middle class. The paper will conclude by considering how Fauset and Reynolds suggest or actively reflect on their privilege through depictions of their interactions with African women and observations about Algerian and Moroccan gender relations.

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\*Speaker