Writing Across Differences: Afro-Germans, Gender, and Diaspora, 1970s-1990s

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WRITING ACROSS DIFFERENCES: AFRO-GERMANS, GENDER, AND DIASPORA, 1970s-1990s

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my two loves. The first one is my adoring mother Glenda Natalie Florvil, and the second is my compassionate husband David Matthew Prior. Throughout the years, their support, guidance, love, friendship, jokes, and warm and delicious meals have kept me grounded, sane, focused, blessed, and fed. I am eternally grateful to them, especially for helping me become the woman, scholar, daughter, wife, and survivor that I am today.
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation, “Writing Across Differences: Afro-Germans, Gender, and Diaspora, 1970s-1990s,” explores the birth of the Afro-German movement, including its two organizations: The Initiative of Black Germans (Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, ISD) and Afro-German Women (Afro-deutsche Frauen, ADEFRA) in West and then reunified Germany. In it, I uncover the efforts of Black Germans to organize a diasporic and literary movement to confront discriminatory discourses and practices that simultaneously ignored them and positioned them as “Others” in postwar German society. Through their diverse literature and coordinated events, Black Germans enacted membership in the African diaspora, articulating and claiming an identity that supported a community and that both transcended and affirmed the nation. In this way, Afro-Germans established transnational connections with other Afro-diasporic individuals that did not preclude ties to Germany.

“Writing Across Differences,” moreover, maintains that Black Germans, as a multicultural population, used their literature, emotions, politics, and activism to unite across their differences, alleviate their isolation, forge personal connections, dismantle everyday racism, and gain recognition in Germany. By doing so, Afro-Germans cultivated alternative forms of kinship that helped them advance collective political and cultural goals in society. Yet, their efforts at solidarity and kinship were not without tensions and conflicts. Although Afro-Germans constituted a small minority population of approximately 500,000, their drive to create an inclusive diasporic identity and
movement enabled them to destabilize the persistent if often unspoken belief that Germanness was exclusively white and highlight the diversity of German culture and history. In tracing the evolution of this movement, my project also illuminates the emergence of an Afro-German intellectual and activist tradition inspired by Afro-Caribbean feminist Audre Lorde and her theories about emotions, poetry, the erotic, writing, the diaspora, and “connected differences.”
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INTRODUCTION:

SITUATING COMPOUND POSTCOLONIALITIES IN POSTWAR GERMANY

In the fall of 1986, Maria “Ria” Cheatom was a member of woman’s organization in Munich, Kofra (Community Center for women’s employment and living situation), where she saw a flyer for a social gathering in the area with black women.1 Later that day, Cheatom was seated at a women’s bar in Munich, when a fellow Afro-German feminist activist and future close friend Jasmin Eding approached. Eding asked her if she knew about the Afro-German anthology Farbe bekennen (later published in English as Showing Our Colors) and the recently founded organizations: The Initiative of Black Germans (Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, ISD) and Afro-German Women (Afro-deutsch Frauen, ADEFRA). Cheatom remarked that she was familiar with Farbe bekennen and had also seen the film Germans are white, Negroes cannot be German (Deutsche sind weiß, Neger können keine Deutschen sein), but had not heard of ISD or ADEFRA – although in reality, she was vaguely familiar with these organizations.2 Eding then discussed these associations and an upcoming event that Cheatom decided to attend. At this event, Cheatom was surprised to meet so many Black German women in the same

1 Kofra (Kommunikationszentrum für Frauen zur Arbeits- und Lebenssituation) was a women’s association established in 1983 in Munich. Please refer to chapter four for more information on Kofra.

2 Produced by Christel Priemers, Germans are white, Negroes cannot be German! (Deutsche sind weiß, Neger können keine Deutschen sein!) was a documentary film about Afro-Germans, which aired in 1986. Additional information can be found in chapter three especially n36 on this and other documentaries. See also Der Spiegel (Die schwarze Kasse des DGB), “Fernsehen Donnerstag, 29. 5,” 22/1986, p. 230.
space. She mingled and spoke with a number of women, including Eding, Elke Jank (later Ja-El), Judy Gummich, Ika Hügel (later Hügel-Marshall), and Christina and Domenica Grotke, and others – several of whom eventually became her friends in the Afro-German movement. After returning home from the event, Cheatom began to cry, realizing that her life would never be the same. Cheatom would later recall that this moment was her “Black Coming Out.”

I had an opportunity to meet Cheatom, as well as other founding members of ISD and ADEFRA, during my research trip to Berlin from 2011 to 2012. I draw attention to her story because it highlights several interrelated themes important to my dissertation. The first is that women were active in organizing the Afro-German movement from the early stages, and that the movement from its inception was concerned with both race and gender in West Germany and later reunified Germany. Second, many Black Germans had long experienced isolation in West and East Germany, and sought connections with one another that provided them with a sense of belonging. Third, Farbe bekennen, subsequent writings, and the movement more generally enabled Afro-Germans to

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3 In fact, it was the first time that Cheatom spent time with many Black Germans – a common refrain from the generation of Black Germans born in the period 1945 to 1970.

4 Maria “Ria” Cheatom, informal conversation, Sound recording. Berlin-Schöneberg, August 8, 2011. From The Author’s Private Collection, Real audio, MP3.

5 I use the terms “Afro-German” and “Black German” interchangeably throughout the dissertation with a few notable exceptions. For many, these were equivalent designations that recognized black as a cultural and political designation and acknowledged that not all Black Germans were of African descent. I do not mean to suggest that their black cultural and political identities were mutually exclusive. Today Black German is in frequent use and considered more inclusive. See Tina Campt, “Reading the Black German Experience: An Introduction,” in “Reading the Black German Experience,” eds. Tina Campt and Michelle Wright, special issue, Callaloo 26:2 (2003): 288.

6 While women were prominent activists, Afro-German men also organized during the initial stages of the movement, helping to create new traditions and practices. I discuss their involvement in chapters two and five.
creatively refashion a positive identity that affirmed their positions in Germany while empowering them to confront discrimination.

Yet, when and why did the Afro-German movement develop and what was its cultural impact on German society at large? The purpose of my dissertation is to answer these questions by contextualizing the birth of the Afro-German movement in late twentieth-century Germany. Utilizing diverse archival materials and interdisciplinary methods, my dissertation argues that Black Germans, as a multicultural minority population, – influenced by Afro-Caribbean and American feminist and poet Audre Lorde – turned to writing, emotional discourses, and diasporic activism in pursuit of recognition and equality as citizens and subjects within the German nation. Through their movement, especially the organizations of ISD and ADEFRA, Afro-Germans forged connections that enabled them to bridge their differences in Germany and across the African diaspora – engendering a “community of sentiment.”7 Black Germans also invented alternative cultural traditions and forms of kinship that helped them write the African diaspora into German history and transform notions of Germanness for themselves and the public at large. Advancing collective goals, Afro-Germans contested ubiquitous racist language, practices, and beliefs in post-Holocaust society while also highlighting the diversity of German identity and culture.8

7 “Community of sentiment” is a concept that I borrow from theorist Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai claimed that groups imagine and feel things together. These groups shared an imagination that often transcended the nation-state and led to collective action common in “diasporic public spheres.” Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4, 8, 10-11, 21-23, and 194-97. For additional works on imagined or emotional communities, see also Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1983; repr., New York: Verso, 2006) and Barbara Rosenwein, Emotional Communities: In the Early Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

8 Historian Claudia Koonz has shown how everyday practices and institutions of racism did not disappear after Hitler’s demise. See Koonz, The Nazi Conscience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). On works that have emphasized continuities, discontinuities, and permutations in German thinking after the
With the rise of a xenophobic climate in West and then reunified Germany, moreover, Black Germans, as well as other immigrants, refugees, and people of color, had to endure increasingly restrictive government legislation as well as verbal attacks and racial violence at the hands of extreme right-wing groups, including Neo-Nazis. The latter, in particular, often assaulted asylum seekers, immigrants, and native non-white Germans, including Black Germans. In addition to these developments, intense public debates emerged about multiculturalism, minority rights, and asylum seekers (Ausländerpolitik), with ethno-nationalist criticism coming from across the political


9 Eleonore Wiedenroth-Coulibaly and Sascha Zinflou, “20 Jahre Schwarze Organisierung in Deutschland – Ein Abriss,” in The BlackBook: Deutschlands Häutungen, eds. AntiDiskrimierungs Büro (ADB) Köln and cyberNomads (Frankfurt am Main and London: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Komminkation, 2004), 142. Wiedenroth-Coulibaly and Zinflou also listed individuals who had died at the hands of Neo-Nazis in Germany from the period of 1990 to 2001. Moreover, although attempts were made to reform the exclusionary citizenship policy, each state of the Federal Republic could apply its own rules to citizenship. In the 1970s and 1980s, naturalization was restricted to immigrants who had lived in Germany for at least ten years, and dual citizenship was granted under special and rare circumstances. See Deniz Gökтурk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds. Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4. In 1991, Germany introduced a law for foreigners, which “defin[ed] foreigners as entities to be controlled, monitored and expelled.” The new legislation deeply impacted migrant women, and if these women wanted to seek asylum in Germany, they had to testify that they were not pregnant. Entry into Germany could still be denied if they are found to be pregnant after a certain period of time after their testimony. See also Danielle J. Walker, “Report on a Council of Europe Minority Youth Committee Seminar on Sexism and Racism in Western Europe,” in “Thinking Through Ethnicities,” eds. Lorraine Gamman, Catherine Hall, Gail Lewis, Ann Phoenix, Annie Whitehead, and Lola Young, special issue, Feminist Review 45 (Autumn 1993): 124.

spectrum. Some white Germans continued to harbor a belief that their nation was homogeneously white while also believing that it had overcome racism after Hitler’s Third Reich. As recently as 2004, for example, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) party, echoing the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, claimed that, “Germany is not a classic country of immigration, and because of its history, geography, and economic conditions, it cannot be one.” Similarly, in the fall of 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel commented on the failure of multiculturalism, stating that, “immigrants needed to do more to integrate.” It is against this backdrop that Afro-German men and women created a movement to rally against racism in a German society that verbally, physically, and discursively marked them as both foreign-born and invisible as German citizens. These on-going developments also compelled Black Germans to engage in transnational political causes that attended to the global impact of racism as well as other forms of discrimination.

11 Neil McMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), esp. chapter seven and the conclusion. From the Social Democratic (SPD) party to the Christian Social Union (CSU) and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) parties, these politicians helped to engender discourses that claimed foreigners, namely Muslims and Turks, to be irreconcilably different.


Finally, my dissertation explores how the emergence of the Afro-German movement complicates understandings of Germanness, belonging, gender, politics, and the African diaspora. It also uncovers how Afro-Germans’ attempt at community building did not develop without ambivalences and conflicts. Through an examination of this small yet diverse community, I maintain that Afro-Germans refashioned their identities, gained recognition in society, and cultivated alternative forms of kinship through their literature, emotions, and activism, revealing how race and Afro-diasporic subjectivities mattered in Germany long after Hitler’s demise.

**Race and the African Diaspora in Postwar Germany**

In many ways, my dissertation is a part of the scholarly effort to examine the experiences, identities, exchanges, and actions of individuals of African descent throughout the world, finding new connections and narratives that shed light on the diversity of these peoples. These works have led to interesting discoveries, for instance, about the lives of African American convicts in eighteenth-century Australia or Afro-Brazilians’ mobilization in twentieth-century São Paulo. Some of this scholarship has

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15 See, for example, Dawne Y. Curry, Eric D. Duke, and Marshanda A. Smith, eds. *Extending the Diaspora: New Histories of Black People* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) and
attended to the differences and commonalities that new and old African diasporas share.\textsuperscript{16} Others have uncovered the power hierarchies and “diasporic asymmetries” that exist within narratives of colonialism and slavery that tend to privilege the Middle Passage and the “Black Atlantic” as the defining element in the global black experience.\textsuperscript{17} Shifting attention toward central Europe, in particular, my dissertation examines the experiences, identities, and agency of Afro-Europeans in postwar Germany. While Afro-Germans simultaneously occupied a marginal and invisible status in Germany, their mobilizing efforts unsettle scholarly narratives and traditional beliefs that still maintain that Germany was (and is) a country that had “blackness without blacks” and that race did not matter in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{18}

Scholars from diverse disciplines, such as Sara Lennox, Fatima El-Tayeb, and Tina Campt, have illustrated that the presence of blacks in Germany has been more than “colonial fantasies” and imagined “zones of contacts,” but rather a social reality that has a longer lineage than people in the general German public (or some academic circles)

\textsuperscript{16} Klaus Benesch and Geneviève Fabre, eds. \textit{African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination} (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004).


realize. Populations of African descended individuals have lived, worked, studied, and performed in Hamburg, Berlin, and other cities throughout Germany since the eighteenth century. Germans, moreover, have formed and adapted their ideas about citizenship and national identity based on their interactions with Afro-diasporic individuals, oscillating from fascination and exoticization to fear and hatred. By focusing on Black Germans’ cultural, political, and intellectual legacy, my work serves as a corrective within German history, emphasizing the ways that Afro-Germans remade race and the African diaspora in the postwar period.

Many scholars have already analyzed the published writings of Afro-Germans such as May Ayim, Helga Emde, Hans Massaquoi, and Ika Hügel-Marhsall, and the significance of these writings in the creation of an Afro-German identity and literary tradition. While this scholarship is significant in representing the agency and variety of


20 While German artist Albrecht Dürer sketched the “Head of a Negro” in 1508, it is unclear whether he saw this man in Germany or elsewhere. The literature on the African diaspora in Germany has grown considerably in the last fifteen years, and please refer to the following works that have informed this study: Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds. Blacks and German Culture (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt, eds. AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland und schwarze Deutsche — Geschichte und Gegenwart (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004); Paulette Reed-Anderson, Rewriting the Footnotes: Berlin und die afrikanische Diaspora (Berlin: Die Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, 2000); Peter Martin, Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Bewusstsein und Geschichte der Deutschen (Hamburg: Junius, 1993); Der Auslandsbeauftragte des Senats der Freien Hansestadt Hamburg, Afrikaner in Hamburg (Hamburg: Die Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, 1995); and Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp, eds. Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2011). Some scholars have argued that the presence of African descended peoples even predated the eighteenth century.

21 Patricia Mazón and Reinhold Steingröver, eds. Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000 (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Michelle M. Wright, Becoming
German minority voices, it neglects to explain what gave rise to the movement, including the structure, management, objectives, and specific activities of ISD and ADEFRA.\footnote{In some cases, these scholars have made fleeting references to the activities of ISD and ADEFRA.} My dissertation contributes to this burgeoning field of Afro-German history by offering the first sustained treatment of the movement. I demonstrate how Afro-Germans forged a diasporic community and engendered an identity, consciousness, and practices. In this way, I attempt to accomplish what historian Geoff Eley has urged scholars to do in \textit{German History from the Margins}, claiming that:

in weighing the importance of ‘the center’ and ‘the margins,’ my general point is that we need to address both—we need to explore minority viewpoints, open up neglected spaces, and reclaim the marginalized subjects and areas of the German past, while also relating them to the explicit and unconscious ways in which our understanding has been centered. Only by that means will the ‘centeredness’ of German history be properly unsettled and remade.\footnote{Geoff Eley, “How and Where is German History Centered?,” in \textit{German History from the Margins}, eds. Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, and Mark Rosemann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 282.}

Challenging West German claims to have expunged racism after the Nazis, the Black German movement explored the ways that racial beliefs and stereotypes shaped their everyday lives. My work also attends to the distinctly German character of the Afro-German movement, especially as they borrowed traditions that served to reinforce the idea that they were not only in but of the nation.\footnote{Still, some scholars and ordinary individuals tend to view Afro-Germans as displaced African Americans in Germany. Although there are some parallels, most Black Germans were born and socialized in Germany.} Afro-Germans exercised and

\begin{flushleft}
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expressed their Germanness through their writing and intellectual activism.\textsuperscript{25} Yet, Black Germans did not eschew connections to other Afro-diasporic and multicultural intellectual traditions.\textsuperscript{26}

Afro-Germans operated in a country deeply shaped by the tides of modern history, especially World War II and its aftermath. The atrocities of the Holocaust marked a watershed moment in the history of racism, helping to discredit scientific racism and the idea of race as a universal fact.\textsuperscript{27} The Allied occupation encouraged demilitarization, democracy, and denazification in West Germany. Yet, these policies often involved reinstating former Nazis in public administration as well as trade and industry and other private sector positions.\textsuperscript{28} In the immediate postwar years, moreover, discussions of race were considered taboo, and there was an individual and collective silence about and repression of the Holocaust. West Germany began to come to terms with its past (\textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung}) in the 1950s and in the 1960s, especially with the legal prosecution of former Nazis and with the 1968ers asking critical questions about the Nazi past.\textsuperscript{29} Later, scholarly, judicial, and legislative measures along with numerous memorials, museums, state- or privately-funded organizations, and grassroots projects helped to ensure that the history of the Holocaust would not be forgotten and that future


\textsuperscript{26} I refer to these influences in chapters one and three.

\textsuperscript{27} This shift can be seen throughout the globe, particularly in Latin America. See, for example, Nancy Leys Stepan, \textit{The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).


\textsuperscript{29} In the process of doing so, the 1968ers also employed insensitive comparisons to the Jews to describe their lives under a hostile West German government. See Dagmar Herzog, \textit{Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 156-162.
generations could indeed understand and learn from it.\textsuperscript{30} Even with all of these developments, however, anti-Semitism did not completely disappear in the postwar period, as, in some cases, prejudice against Jews became more muted and concealed.

Additionally, what scholars have termed a “new racism” emerged in postwar West Germany and elsewhere (Britain and France) and provided an ideological revision of traditional biological racism predicated on cultural difference. Instances of anti-Semitism could trigger revulsion among some West Germans, but other forms of racism, including anti-black racism, remained relatively unaffected in beliefs, institutions, and quotidian practices. Much of this was due to the pervasiveness of Western colonial stereotypes, negative presumptions, as well as the sexualization of non-white bodies, leading to both overt and subtle forms of anti-black racism.\textsuperscript{31} German children’s and youth literature, for example, presented depictions of Africans as ugly, ignorant, exotic, savage, and lazy. West German toys such as “Hit Darky” (Haut den Bimbo) from 1950; games such as “Who is afraid of the black man?” (Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann?); or children’s songs such as “Ten Little Negroes” (Zehn kleine Negerlein); or hiking songs such as the “Negro Revolt in Cuba” (Negeraufstand ist in Kuba) continued to perpetuate stereotypical images of individuals of African descent, stressing their inferiority and how they did not belong.\textsuperscript{32} In daily encounters with white German

\textsuperscript{30} See also Veronika Fuechtner, “Germany’s knowledge of its racist past has blinded it to its racist present,” Quartz, January 4, 2013, \url{http://qz.com/39325/germanys-knowledge-of-its-racist-past-has-blinded-it-to-its-racist-present/} [Accessed January 4, 2013].


\textsuperscript{32} Opitz, Oguntoyé, and Schultz, eds. \textit{Showing Our Colors}, 126-29.
compatriots, Afro-Germans often faced a barrage of questions concerning where they were from and when they would return to Africa. Some white West Germans used insensitive labels for common commodities, including chocolate ice cream (Eismohr), Coco-Cola (Negerschweiß), and blood sausage (Negerpimmel). At the same time, however, there also remained a sensitivity concerning the topic of race – including within mainstream and leftist political movements, such as the West German feminists. This sensitivity, however, often limited public discussions about the persistence of racism, even as discussions of the Holocaust became relatively common.

“Compound Postcolonialities” in Postwar West German Society

The issue of postcoloniality in relation to German history is complicated. Unlike other European powers, Germany possessed European colonies in Asia and Africa only briefly. Furthermore, German scholars have, with a few notable exceptions, been less concerned with establishing postcolonial theories and analyses than their peers in other countries. Only (relatively) recently have German minorities and scholars began to write postcolonial commentaries. As theorist Monica Albrecht has noted:

Whereas British and French postcolonial thought was developed in large part by intellectuals who came from former colonies to the metropolises of their colonizers, Germany’s own colonies did not produce any comparable postcolonial leaders. Postcolonial theories thus emerged out of an anti-colonial resistance discourse to which subjects to German colonialism did not contribute; postcolonial studies did not produce a German Gandhi or

33 Negerschweiß literally translates into Negro sweat, and remained a postwar term for the American commodity. Negerpimmel is a vulgar and colloquial term for blood sausage (blutwurst), which often has a black casing. There are other insensitive German labels that I mention in chapters one and three.

34 In Germany, this scholarship started to appear in the late 1990s and early 2000s. See, for example, Rodríguez Encarnación Gutiérrez and Hito Steyerl, eds. Spricht die Subalterne deutsch?: Migration und postkoloniale Kritik (Munster: Unrast, 2003) and Kein Nghi Ha, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, and Sheila Mysorekar, eds. Re/visionen: Postkoloniale Perspektiven von People of Color auf Rassismus, Kulturpolitik und Widerstand in Deutschland (Munster: Unrast, 2007). Several of these authors were born to immigrant parents in Germany or migrated with their families to Germany when they were young children. Some of this scholarship also coincided with the publication of revisionist German colonial history from the 1990s.
Franz Fanon who could have functioned to increase public awareness of Germany’s role in the history of European colonialism and of German postcoloniality. Albrecht further adds, “there are almost no writers whose experience has been shaped by German colonialism,” and “there is no phenomenon in Germany that one could call ‘the Empire writes back.’”

Yet, modern German history, as I argue, has been marked by “compound postcolonialities” that pertain to immigrants, refugees, minorities, and even Germans themselves. The postwar period, in fact, helped to create a space for “postcolonials,” who were indirectly and directly shaped by Germany’s scientific explorations, missionary trips, and colonial excursions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, World War I, and Hitler’s imperial ambitions in Europe during the twentieth century. Moreover, postwar World War II West German society became ethnically homogeneous with

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36 Albrecht does acknowledge an exception, Kum’a Ndumbe III (4). See also Sara Lennox, “Postcolonial writing in Germany,” in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Ato Quayson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. 624-631. Lennox also mentions that Dulla Misipo was a postcolonial writer in the same article. Both Ndumbe III and Misipo were from Cameroon.


38 Sara Lennox demonstrated a similar point, in which she traced diverse forms of postcolonial literature in Germany. See Lennox, “Postcolonial writing in Germany,” 620-48.

39 Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008) and Shelley Baranowsk and Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. chapters four through six. Hitler had imperialist ambitions in overseas territories, but also in Eastern Europe (colonizing white Europeans) in order to obtain living space (*Lebensraum*) for the German community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). The failure of the Third Reich and its imperialist missions in the East during and after World War II also served as a decolonizing moment.
thirteen million German expellees from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. But it also became distinctly multicultural with the influx of millions of displaced people including European Jews, global refugees, and French, British, and American Allied occupation forces. East Germany was in many ways fairly akin to a colony of the Soviet Union than it was an independent country. Later, West and East Germany had immigrants, former prisoners of war, guest workers, as well as diverse international students from Iran, Africa, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, and other “Third World” countries during the Cold War. Taken together, these individuals helped to constitute what I refer to as “compound postcolonialities.”

These “postcolonials” brought with them new ways of life and beliefs that often unsettled yet affirmed how Germans conceived of racial difference and instituted processes of racialization. For example, Jews in displacement camps continued to experience forms of anti-Semitism, demonstrating continuities with the Third Reich and the Weimar Republic. The presence of many international individuals, particularly African Americans, caused heightened concern with whiteness in the immediate postwar years. As these groups of people converged on German soil, they informed how the West

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40 Approximately three million Germans, mostly from the Czech Sudetenland, were expelled. In Judt’s *Postwar*, he stated that, “From Hungary a further 623,000 Germans were expelled, from Romania 786,000, from Yugoslavia about half a million and from Poland 1.3 million. But by far the greatest number of German refugees came from the former eastern lands of Germany itself: Silesia, East Prussia, eastern Pomerania and eastern Brandenbrug” (26). In total, one and a half million Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Yugoslavs, and Soviet nationals remained in West Germany. Individuals from the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania also stayed in displaced camps. See Judt, *Postwar*, 29-31. Moreover, some of the British and French occupation forces were from the colonies.

41 African Americans troops were a part of the Allied forces. There were ethnic German expellees from the East as well as European Jews in displacement camps (DP) in West Germany. Guest workers came to West Germany from Italy (1955), Greece (1960), Portugal (1964), Turkey (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968). By the late 1960s, the Turkish guest workers constituted the largest population of foreign labor. In 1973, West Germany ended its bilateral agreement with Turkey. Students and families from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa also migrated to West Germany. East Germany also coordinated a similar guest worker program with Korea, Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, Cuba, as well as other communist countries.
German government reconstructed its identity and policies on citizenship. While Eastern Europeans in West Germany were phenotypically white, their presence (and their circumstances of relocation) similarly presented an example of postcolonialism. Several “postcolonials” were involved in the West German student movement and were vocal opponents of Western imperialism (particularly in Vietnam), while others worked in factories or attended universities. African American soldiers and activists and international guest workers, students, and asylum seekers – although they were not formally ruled by Germany –, were economically, culturally, and politically ruled and connected to Germany in what historian Uta Poiger calls an “informal empire.”

Due to Germany’s early experiences with “decolonization” after World War I, I also position West (and East) Germans as “postcolonials” during this period. Undergoing and feeling the sense of loss and defeat twice contributed to West Germans’ postcolonial state of mind. Germans experienced a tremendous amount of social, political, cultural, and corporeal upheaval during and after the Second World War. With occupations from Hitler, the British, American, French, and Soviet forces, they had to mediate their positions and identities in a changing society. Moreover, West German “postcolonial” identity revolved around multiple narratives of victimization, but eventually evolved (albeit gradually) into a point of recognition about their complicity as perpetrators and executioners under the Third Reich.

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42 Uta G. Poiger, “Imperialism as a Paradigm for Modern German History,” in Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History, eds. Frank Biess, Mark Rosemann, and Hannah Schlisser (New York, Berghahn Books, 2007), 177-199 esp. 178. Poiger tried to show how imperialism and empire could be employed as paradigm for German history after 1945. In it, she defines “a formal empire as the effort to build structures of governmental and military control beyond German borders; by informal empire I mean efforts to control areas and peoples outside of Germany through economic and political means” (178). Her definition did not necessarily include African Americans.

Furthermore, an emergent group of “postcolonial intellectuals” – May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Zafer Şenocak, Zehra Çirak, and others – also contributed to and wrote themselves into postwar public culture, initiating discussions about the persistence of discrimination in Germany. As a result of their experiences, these “postcolonial intellectuals” established profound interest in transnational networks and non-profit organizations in Germany and elsewhere, as many of them attempted to negotiate and carve out a postcolonial space that often involved combining African, American, Asian, and European perspectives. All of these overlapping experiences of contested and multivalent postcolonialities shaped how West Germans reconstructed and reimagined their identities, citizenship, culture, and nation.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation begins with a chapter on Afro-Caribbean and American feminist, poet, and educator Audre Lorde and her time in West Germany, beginning with her visit as a guest professor at the Free University in 1984 and ranging up to her death in 1992. This chapter establishes Lorde’s importance to Black German women. Afro-German women’s interactions and exchanges with Lorde influenced them to turn to writing to recover and promote their history through Farbe bekennen and to help found the Black German movement. Through effusive correspondences to Lorde and through their literature, Afro-German women continued to maintain personal and affective connections to Lorde, as well as others, reflecting their desire for community and belonging.

Chapter two examines the birth of the Afro-German movement, including the organizations of The Initiative of Black Germans (ISD) and Afro-German Women (ADEFRA). For many Afro-Germans, Farbe bekennen served as the catalyst for the
movement, ushering in an approximately ten-year period – 1985 through 1996 – of enthusiasm, motivation, and activism. ISD and ADEFRA branches eventually emerged in major cities and university towns across West and then reunified Germany. Developing alongside other countercultural and alternative movements of the period, ISD and ADEFRA emphasized the persistence of everyday racism in beliefs, practices, and institutions in postwar Germany, particularly through their events, national meetings (Bundestreffen, BT), Black History Month celebrations, and magazines (afro look and Afrekete). In doing so, they attended to the interplay of racism, sexism, and homophobia. By contextualizing Afro-Germans’ early stages of mobilization, I illustrate how they forged connections to one another that helped them alleviate years of isolation and offered them a sense of solidarity and visibility in Germany.

My third chapter focuses on the centrality of writing and intellectual activism in the Afro-German community. In it, I show how Afro-German female activists and intellectuals wrote themselves into a postwar German public culture that denied their existence. During the postwar period, writing was one of the main modes of communication and protest, with a number of West German intellectuals and feminists using it to interrogate the character and potency of their ideas and society. Here, I argue that Afro-Germans were no different from their white German postwar compatriots, and that participating in this German tradition affirmed their Germanness. Afro-Germans also borrowed and reworked practices and styles from other Afro-diasporic individuals.

For many Afro-Germans, including Katharina Oguntoye, this period was considered the heyday of the movement with an explicitly transnational turn in the late 1980s early 1990s. After May Ayim, a Black German poet and often spokesperson for the movement, committed suicide in August 1996, the tenor of the movement changed. ISD and ADEFRA still exist.
that demonstrated how they were “living and telling their truths.” In the process, Black Germans also became multicultural intellectuals.

Chapter four explores Afro-German women’s involvement in ADEFRA and its literary magazine Afrekete. Focusing on the new interpersonal relationships that Black German women formed with each other through its organization and publications, I contend that these activists and intellectuals established a feminist and queer black diasporic project that helped them achieve recognition and combat multiple forms of oppression in West Germany. Although problems emerged with Afro-German women’s efforts at solidarity, ADEFRA and Afrekete still helped them learn and negotiate their feminist, queer, and diasporic identities and histories.

The final chapter considers Afro-Germans’ efforts at transnational and translocal activism through ISD’s annual Black History Month celebrations in Berlin and the 1991 Cross Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute, which members of ADEFRA and ISD helped to organize. Black Germans used these events as tools to advance their diasporic activism. Afro-German women, in particular, also engaged in coalition building with other marginalized communities in Germany, including women of color authors and lesbians. This chapter also examines how Afro-German women’s participation and organization in groups and events such as Literature Women (Literatur Frauen) and the Berlin Lesbian Week (Berliner Lesbenwoche) revealed their interest in establishing cross-ethnic alliances and projects. Through their involvement in these events and organizations, Afro-German women, in particular, demonstrated how entangled local, national, and international issues and politics were.
Each of these dissertation chapters examines diverse aspects of kinship and belonging: in chapter one, emotions and correspondences; in chapter two, community and mobilization; in chapter three, intellectual activism and literature; in chapter four, Afrekete and ADEFRA; and in chapter five, translocal and transnational politics and diasporic activism. In this way, I show how emotions, race, gender, and activism intersected in the Afro-German case while also drawing attention to the problems that arise with practices of solidarity.

I conclude my dissertation with a brief epilogue on contemporary Germany’s persistent issues with race. Widespread outrage about blackface theater performances along with public uproar about expunging insensitive language from children and youth’s books proves how much the Black German movement remains relevant and crucial. A cast of white German characters – journalists, actors, directors, politicians, and intellectuals – continue to advance the myth of a Germany without people of African descent, eschewing political correctness (the dreaded American import) in the process.

Sources

I tried to find diverse primary sources to help me detail different aspects of the Afro-German movement, and I have spent time in archives in Germany and the United States to locate them. But uncovering these sources has been difficult since there is no archive of the Afro-German movement. Fortunately, The Collection of Audre Lorde at Spelman College in Atlanta, The Audre Lorde Archive at the Free University in Berlin, and, even more so, the private collections of individual Black Germans, have provided access to not only Afro-German publications but also private correspondences. These private collections, including those of May Ayim (recently moved to the Free
University), Katharina Ogundoye, Ricky Reiser, and Maria Cheatom have been especially valuable in affording a look at the inner life of the movement. During my time in Germany, moreover, I also engaged in long conversations with an older generation of Black German activists. These women opened up their homes and personal collections and offered information about the movement, including its main actors, events, goals, and tensions.

I also use published writings, correspondences, transcripts, speeches, films, photographs, programs, brochures, agendas, and flyers from ISD and ADEFRA. I rely on these sources to analyze the perspectives, emotions, motivations, problems, objectives, and outcomes of Afro-Germans and their organizations. These sources enable me to show how Afro-Germans disseminated their ideas and coordinated activities that continued to give the organizations of ISD and ADEFRA visibility in postwar West German culture.
CHAPTE R O N E

AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENTS: AUDRE LORDE AND AFRO-GERMAN WOMEN

After Audre Lorde’s tragic death from liver cancer on November 17, 1992, colleagues, scholars, activists, and friends organized numerous tributes in cities throughout the world, paying homage to Lorde and her life’s work. Honoring Lorde, the Modern Times Bookstore in San Francisco held a memorial on November 29th, with two Afro-German women, Yvonne Kettels and Yara-Colette Lemke Muñiz de Faria, in attendance. These women presented their eulogy on behalf of Lorde’s “Afro-German sisters.” Before they read the eulogy, Kettels briefly reminisced about her experiences with Lorde, remarking:

I recall the first time I met you—about five years ago—in Berlin at a breakfast gathering for sisters and brothers. We were so few. Back then I wasn’t able to speak to you because my English wasn’t developed enough. I guess I was too shy. But we communicated anyway with our hands and feet, connecting as sisters. I wonder how many of you here in the U.S. realize what a great influence Audre had on us, Afro-German women/lesbians and brothers. Did you know that there were strong connections between Audre and Germany? She was the light in our eyes, rising like the sun, giving warmth and love, sharing the world, her experience, her knowledge, incomparable, unforgettable, strong.  

Kettels established a transnational link between Lorde and Afro-Germans as well as a sisterly bond between Lorde and herself, in which they communicated non-verbally with their hands and feet. Their bodily gestures showed how both women did not suppress their genuine feelings for each other. Kettels also described how Lorde consciously forged relationships with the women and men of the global African diaspora.

With their eulogy, these German women of diaspora explained that, “Her death hit us hard, even though we knew about her health situation. It is difficult to describe in words what Audre meant to us, Afro-German, Black women/lesbians. . . And what she will mean to us way beyond her death.” Privileging female social bonds, Afro-German women claimed her as their “sister, mother, [and] companion in struggle.”

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3 “A Eulogy for Audre Lorde,” p. 7, Box 52, Folder 742, CAL.

4 Ibid.
the first prominent black female intellectual with whom many Afro-Germans had sustained contact.\(^5\) Growing up in majority white communities, Afro-Germans most often lived with their white German mothers or family members, in orphanages, or with foster families. As a result, Black Germans often had limited to no contact with their relatives or individuals of African descent. Because of that, Afro-Germans’ dynamic kinship with Lorde served multiple functions in their lives. Afro-German women claimed that Lorde’s “inspiring power and love . . . gave us faith and courage to move out of our isolation, to come together and fight against racism, sexism, and homophobia.”\(^6\) Moreover, Lorde “led us toward our self-confidence, taught us to use our own experiences and skills to make change happen. Her engagement for Black women worldwide and her encouragement to write and publish a book about ourselves, which


turned out to be *Farbe bekennen (Showing Our Colours)*, changed our lives.”

Lorde motivated these women to believe “in their growing power, in the power of formerly silent Afro-German women and men, young and old, to create and unite change countrywide.”

Afro-German women assigned Lorde a critical role in their development, stating passionately that, “her life’s work is a bequest to us.” Kettels, Lemke Muñiz de Faria, and their other Afro-German sisters honored Lorde and highlighted the indelible mark she left on them individually and collectively. At the end of the eulogy, the women concluded with a quotation from Lorde’s preface in *Showing Our Colors*: “Women of minorities, companions in struggle. . . .We are greeting you!” Underneath the text laid the names of more than ten Black German women.

These women not only affirmed their transformative and encouraging relationships with Lorde, but they also sought further connections and solidarity with other “companions in struggle,” who attended the memorial. Yet, even as they recognized Lorde after her death, Afro-German women were well aware of her importance while she was still alive, for they had continuously expressed appreciation and admiration of Lorde in their correspondences and actions. Afro-German women

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7 Ibid., 7-8.

8 Ibid., 8.

9 Ibid. As a matter of fact, Afro-German women in ADEFRA-Munich, one of the Afro-German women’s groups, named their community center after Lorde’s biomythography, *Zami*.

10 Ibid. The following Afro-German and black women signed the eulogy: “May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Ajoke Sobanjo, Guy St. Luis, Kim Everett, Ina Roder, Peggy, Peppa Gabriel, Abenna Adomako, Muna El-Khawad, Elisabeth Abraham, Elke Jank, Eva V. Pirch, Ria Cheatos (sic), Judy Gummich, Jasmin, Gabriella Willbold, Tina Campt, Ika Huegel, Helga Emde, Marion Kraft, Katja Kinder, Zariama Harat, Patricia Saad, Nicola Laure Al-Samarei (sic), Farida Corinna, Marion Gottbrath, Sarah Schnier, Natalie Asfaha, Yvonne Kettels, and Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria.” Several of the Afro-German women’s names are spelled incorrectly in the original document. Here I use the term “black women” because a few women were actually African American, but had resided in Germany for several years, including scholar Tina Campt. Afro-German women also included a poem entitled “Audre” on the last page of the eulogy, which I have included in the Appendix A.
were drawn to Lorde and her commitment to combat multiple forms of oppression worldwide and appropriated her ideas about the diaspora, writing, emotions, the erotic, and heterogeneity into their lives and work.

This chapter contends that Afro-German women’s interactions and relationships with Lorde laid the groundwork for their practice of diaspora, which helped them fashion a hyphenated identity, rework their notion of belonging, and forge a community in majority white East and West Germany. More so than Afro-diasporic communities in the U.S. and Caribbean, Afro-Germans were and are extremely diverse, lacking a longstanding identity and a commonality outside of their German socialization and heritage and skin color; therefore, Lorde served as a linchpin, where Afro-Germans filled a void by creating a community through their writing and emotions. 11 Here, I borrow sociologist Rogers Brubaker’s definition of diaspora. “In sum,” Brubaker states, “rather than speak of ‘a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’ as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on.” 12


12 Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 28:1 (January 2005): 13. Critical theorist Alexander Weheliye has made a similar argument with regards to the Afro-German community. He argues that diaspora is not a natural or bounded community and that some Afro-German artists and other scholars need to have a more complex understanding of diaspora. In fact, Weheliye posits that Afro-German subjectivity functions as a liminal space allowing for an understanding of culture that avoids the simplistic idea of “pure” or “whole” nations or natural communities. Alexander G. Weheliye, “My Volk to Come: Peoplehood in Recent Diaspora Discourse and Afro-German Popular Music,” in Black Europe and the African Diaspora, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Tricia Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 161-179. Historian Tina Campt also has argued that Afro-Germans occupy “a type of interstitial space—implicated and intertwined, though not fully encompassed by such a model of diaspora/diasporic relation.” Campt, “The Crowded Space of Diaspora,”102. For additional ideas on liminality, thirdspace, and borderlands, see also Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994); Karein Goertz, “Borderless and Brazen: Ethnicity Redefined by Afro-German and Turkish German Poets,” The Comparatist 21 (1997): 68–91; and Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987; repr., San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007).
Black Germans, inspired by Lorde, began to engage in African diasporic projects, developing new local, national, and international connections. Creating positive and energetic spaces enabled Afro-Germans to cultivate affective, diasporic, and familial ties to Lorde and other Afro-Germans. In particular, the emphasis on and expression of respect, love, longing, admiration, and isolation emerged as critical components in the early stages of the Afro-German movement. Afro-Germans projected their emotions, allowing them to mediate between the individual and the collective. Exploring Afro-German women’s connections to Lorde demonstrates not only how emotions helped this

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community cohere and constitute their collective practices and goals, but also served as a tool in their creation of new transnational, diasporic identities and linkages.

The first section of the chapter explores Lorde’s prominence as an intellectual, activist, and scholar prior to her arrival in West Germany, seeking to describe her importance internationally. It also attends to the initial planning, preparation stages, and justification for Lorde’s trip to West Berlin. In the second section, I assess Lorde’s public readings, interviews, and published works and explain her ideas about writing, emotions, and difference by focusing on how these ideas empowered Afro-Germans. The third section examines Lorde’s influence on individual Afro-Germans through *Farbe bekennen* and their correspondences, in which Afro-German women shared their feelings and experiences. Lorde’s presence in Germany encouraged Afro-German women, in particular, to be conscious of their subjectivity within the collective by taking into account the function of poetry, emotions, the erotic, the diaspora, and female fellowship and how these elements informed their identities.

**Lorde’s Early Years**

Who was Audre(y) Geraldine Lorde and what experiences shaped the early stages of her life?14 When did her writing garner attention and what significant contributions did she make prior to her arrival in West Germany? In unpacking these questions, I will trace Lorde’s prominence as a scholar, writer, and activist, ultimately explaining how she developed and relied upon extended kinship networks with white and Afro-Germans in West Germany. Lorde was the youngest of three daughters born on February 18, 1934 in

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14 Lorde dropped the y in her name at an early age, as she discussed in *Zami*, 24.
Harlem, New York to immigrant parents from Grenada and Barbados. Legally blind from a young age, Lorde learned to read and talk about a year before she began school at the age of five. She was also a stutterer, which is part of the reason why writing became “the next best thing” for her. Lorde remarked that, “the ability to read poetry—the music that sang in my head—was an incredible high for me. I used to get stoned on poetry when I was a kid.” Reciting poems gave Lorde a space to express her emotions. As a result of her disabilities, Lorde began an intimate and intense relationship with words and writing, especially “when [she] was still too afraid to deal with [her] feelings [she] wrote poetry about them.” Writing provided Lorde with solace and served as an act of self-preservation, especially as she navigated difficult relationships with her parents and older siblings. Lorde’s parents maintained a strict household, where they attempted to keep the outside world out of their home. Lorde’s mother, in particular, was a disciplinarian and continuously reprimanded her, expressing disapproval both verbally and physically. Within these strained relationships, Lorde sought affection to little avail. She also feared her parents, believing they did not love her. Lorde also envied her sisters’ close friendship with each other. As a result, Lorde described feeling as an

15 Her father Frederic Bryon Lorde came from Barbados and had previously been married with children before marrying Lorde’s mother Linda Belmar in Greenville, Grenada in 1923. Lorde’s sisters, Phyllis and Helen, were born in Harlem in 1929 and 1931 respectively.

16 Lorde, Zami, 21.


19 Lorde described learning about poetry through her “mother’s strangenesses” and her “father’s silences.” De Veaux, 17 and James P. Draper, “Audre Lorde,” Black Literature Criticism, vol. 2 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 1275. She discussed these difficulties with her family, especially the combative mother-daughter dynamics in Zami.
outsider within her parents’ household. Oftentimes, Lorde’s mother expressed a feeling of alienation from the home and city that she lived in and hoped that “they would one day return to their real home [in Grenada].” Influenced in part by this internal familial dynamic, Lorde later used her outsider status as a source of empowerment and embraced her multiple identities as a poet, writer, warrior and lesbian (to name a few). Ultimately, Lorde’s experiences with her family informed her ideas about emotions, women, community, and difference.

Lorde developed her academic prowess further at Hunter High School, a small girls’ school that some of the brightest students in the city attended. Hunter became her “spiritual home” even though it was not racially diverse—with only four black girls in 1947. She established solid friendships with a small group of young women, who later called themselves “The Branded.” Her friendships with these women allowed Lorde to “share feelings and dreams and ideas without fear.” With this community she could openly express desires, frustration, and satisfaction. On the one hand, through her connections with her fellow female community of poets, she satisfied her need for acceptance, affirmation, love, and “intellectual parity.” On the other hand, this

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20 Some of this sentiment also often revolved around the fact that Lorde had a darker complexion than her mother and sisters. Lorde considered herself to be dark, although outside of her family she would have likely been considered to be of light complexion.

21 De Veaux, 17.

22 Ibid., 23.

23 Lorde, Zami, 81 and de Veaux, 26. Some of “The Branded” included Gloria Pages, Joan O’Malley, Diane di Prima, and Gabriel Bernhard. The Branded and Lorde maintained their friendships after high school, and she described these connections in Zami, 105, 120, and 122. She also established a lifelong friendship with di Prima.

24 Lorde, Zami, 82.

25 De Veaux, 31.
community was only supportive of her femaleness not necessarily of her blackness, and many of these relationships did not extend beyond school grounds—this was something that she also experienced in the women’s movement in New York. Lorde also had a circle of black friends, but tended to keep the two groups separate from one another. By and large, Lorde’s early social interactions and exchanges were with whites. It was also at Hunter that “writing poetry became an ordinary effort, not a secret and rebellious vice.” Providing community, Hunter solidified and crystallized Lorde’s love and appreciation of poetry and also introduced her to a supportive network of women.

Lorde’s passion for writing remained after she graduated from high school in 1951 and attended Hunter College, majoring in English. Lorde also participated in the Harlem Writers Guild, which evolved from the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (CAN) in 1950, although Lorde was not a regular attendee of the Guild. Her sporadic attendance at the Guild, however, did expose her to discourses on black consciousness and facilitated her writing talents, especially with mentorship from John Henrik Clarke,

26 Hammond, 34 and de Veaux, 27.

27 Lorde, Zami, 83.

one of the organizers of the association. The other organizers were Rosa Guy, John Oliver Killens, and Walter Christmas. The Guild became a space for many African-American writers, including Maya Angelou. Lorde’s biographer claims that while gaining a literary home, Lorde still felt isolated from the largely black male and heterosexual composition of the group, although Lorde was not publicly out as a lesbian at the time. Lorde was also not involved with the Black Nationalist Movement in Harlem and increasingly spent time with white lesbians in the village—elements that did not sit well with some of the members of the Harlem Writers Guild. De Veaux, 39. For more on the Harlem Writers Guild, the postwar Left, and the Black Arts Movement, see de Veaux, 91-93; Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism*; Rebeccah E. Welch, “Black Art and Activism in Postwar New York, 1950-1965” (PhD dissertation, New York University, 2002); Maureen Catherine Heacock, “Sounding a challenge: African-American women’s poetry and the Black Arts Movement” (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 1995); and Angela Bowen, “Who said it was simple: Audre Lorde’s complex connections to three U.S. Liberation Movements, 1952-1992” (PhD dissertation, Clark University, 1997).


with students that eventually led her to develop her theory of difference.\textsuperscript{32} It was her experience teaching in Mississippi that fostered her desire to teach when she returned to New York.

Although Lorde’s career had only just taken off, in ways she had gone through a formative intellectual and emotional passage. For the rest of her long life, Lorde would continue to work through and address themes she had encountered as a child, adolescent, and junior scholar. Throughout her career she remained especially sensitive to the ways in which gender, class, and racial prejudice could reinforce each other. Both resilient and wary, she also understood how opponents of racism could give voice to class and gender stereotypes, and how likewise the struggle against gender and class prejudices often became ensnared in racism. It is for these reasons that she became an early proponent of “intersectional” analyses and activism that attended to multiple forms of prejudice. Late in her career, at the age of 50, she would take this sensitivity, as well as her longstanding commitment to writing as a form of self-definition and resistance, to West Berlin, where by her own accounts she had some of the most invigorating years of her life.

It was white German feminist Dagmar Schultz who was instrumental in bringing Lorde to West Berlin. Schultz initially met Lorde at the 1980 United Nations World Conference on Women in Copenhagen where she immediately extended an invitation to Lorde to teach at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin.\textsuperscript{33} Then, Schultz met Lorde a second time at the National Women’s

\textsuperscript{32} De Veaux, 96. She also met her white partner Frances Clayton, who was a Visiting Professor of Psychology from Brown.

\textsuperscript{33} Dagmar Schultz, “Audre Lorde – Her Struggles and Her Visions” (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung and Gunda Werde Institut: Feminismus und Geschlechterdemokratie, n.d.): 1, \url{http://dagmarschultz.com/downloads/audre_lorde.pdf} [Accessed 4/18/2012]. A revised version of her presentation was published in German in \textit{beiträge zur feministischen theorie und praxis} 34 (1993) and
Studies Association (NWSA) conference in Connecticut in 1981. Upon hearing the keynote addresses of Lorde and Adrienne Rich at the NWSA, Schultz felt a call to action. In a letter to Lorde, Schultz wrote, “I want to tell you how deeply moved I was by your address at the NWSA that is, by your honesty, your willingness to confront and share and, of course, by the beauty and strength of your language, your voice, your presence.”

In the letter, Schultz asked Lorde again if she would consider teaching at the J.F.K. Institute and also if she could publish and translate Lorde’s NWSA keynote address and essay “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” through the Sub Rosa women’s press.

Founded in 1974, Sub Rosa focused on topics concerning women’s health and politics. Under Schultz, who became the co-owner in 1982, Sub Rosa translated the texts of Lorde and Rich, which became a compilation of essays entitled Macht und Sinnlichkeit (Power and Sensuality) in 1983. Underlying Schultz’s anti-racist perspective was a desire to change the direction of the West German women’s movement and an


34 In fact, de Veaux, Lorde’s biographer, revealed that, “Lorde also received a letter from Dagmar Schultz, a German woman she’d met and spoken with briefly in Copenhagen who had attended the NWSA Convention” (295). See Gerund, “Sisterly (Inter)Actions,” 1, esp. n3. Gerund believed that there were slight differences between Schultz and de Veaux’s accounts.


36 In the films Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984-1992 and Litany for Survival, Schultz remarked how Lorde later confided that she believed Schultz worked for the CIA.

understanding of global feminism as embodied by Lorde and her writings. Afro-German women quickly responded to the German edition of Lorde and Rich’s essays; however, the work did not initiate a mainstream dialogue about race and racism in Germany.\textsuperscript{38} Germanists Sara Lennox and Fatima El-Tayeb suggest that Lorde’s presence as an Afro-Caribbean and American woman in West Berlin helped to create open discussions about racism that had not previously existed in Germany, particularly as Lorde forced white West German feminists to recognize their exclusionary practices.\textsuperscript{39}

Though Schultz assisted with Lorde’s sojourn to West Germany, it involved years of planning and negotiation on the part of university officials and Lorde, and meeting Afro-German women only served as “one of [her] goals on this trip.”\textsuperscript{40} Early in the fall of 1982, Dr. Horst Hartwich, the Free University’s Director of External Relations, sent an official invitation to Lorde to teach at the university in the summer semester of 1983.\textsuperscript{41}

After Lorde completed and returned a “Personal Questionnaire for Guest Lecturers,” Dr. Hartwich wrote her about the terms of the contract, which included defraying travel costs


\textsuperscript{39} According to Lennox in “Divided Feminism,” Schultz’s article in \textit{Courage} in 1981 may have started the conversation about racism and anti-Semitism in the West German women’s movement. But even a conference in 1984, entitled “Sind wir uns denn so fremd?,” in Frankfurt did not influence the larger women’s movement. Lennox provided an overview of the women’s movement in Germany. See Lennox, “Divided Feminism,” 482 and 501 n3. After World War II, a collective silence or even amnesia emerged around discussions of race, and then later, biological and/or racial differences became re-coded as cultural. See McMaster, \textit{Racism in Europe}.


\textsuperscript{41} The summer semester at the Free University began April 1 and ended September 30.
from New York to Berlin and a monthly salary of 4,500 DM.\textsuperscript{42} In a return letter, Lorde declined the position at the last-minute because “the offered monthly salary of 4,500 DM, after US taxes, is not enough for me to maintain my children in their present situation here as well as support myself abroad.” She apologized for her belated response and for any inconvenience that she may have caused, but hoped that they could “certainly re-open discussions” at a later time.\textsuperscript{43}

In the summer and fall of 1983, negotiations began again. This time Lorde wasted no time in communicating that she needed a reasonable financial arrangement because she would be on leave without pay from Hunter College in New York, and desired a salary that would be equivalent to half of her $49,000 salary.\textsuperscript{44} After correspondence with university officials, Dr. Hartwich responded that for teaching in the summer semester of 1984 the university would offer a monthly salary of 6,000 DM gross, and that they would also take care of her accommodations and reimburse travel expenses. But she would be required to pay taxes either in Germany or the United States.\textsuperscript{45} After making a firm commitment to teach at the Free University, Lorde traveled to Germany in order “to meet Black German women, for [she] had been told there were quite a few in Berlin.”\textsuperscript{46} Black German women were moved by the fact that a well-known feminist such as Lorde wanted to learn about them and befriend them.

\textsuperscript{42} Dr. Horst Hartwich Freie Universität Official Letter to Audre Lorde, October 4, 1982. Box 60, Audre Lorde Archiv in the Universitätsarchiv of the Freie Universität (FUALA hereafter); and Dr. Hartwich Freie Universität Official letter to Audre Lorde, November 12, 1982. Box 60, FUALA.

\textsuperscript{43} Audre Lorde letter to Professor Krippendorff, January 10, 1983. Box 60, FUALA.

\textsuperscript{44} Lorde letter to Dr. Hartwich, September 30, 1983, FUALA and de Veaux, 327-38.

\textsuperscript{45} Dr. Hartwich letter to Lorde, November 15, 1983, FUALA.

\textsuperscript{46} Lorde letter to Dr. Hartwich, December 10, 1983, FUALA; Lorde, \textit{A Burst of Light}, 56; and Byrd, Cole, and Guy-Sheftall, 87 and 169.
Feeling and Connecting in the City: Audre Lorde and Black Germans

Lorde’s stint as a visiting professor in the summer semester of 1984 at the John F. Kennedy Institute not only helped to make a lasting impression on the students she encountered, but also on her. Several Afro-German women, including Katharina Oguntoye and May Opitz (later Ayim), attended some of her literature courses, and in so doing, began to realize that their blackness and Germanness were not incommensurable and that they were also a part of the transnational African diaspora. Afro-Germans’ white compatriots often made them feel as if being Black and German were incongruous by having them constantly explain their existence or calling them derogatory terms such as “darky” (Bimbo), “colored” (Farbige), “mixed-breed children” (Mischlingkinder), “Negro mixed-breed” (Negermischling), and “occupation babies/children” (Besatzungskinder). Prior to Lorde’s arrival, some Afro-Germans had

47 Lorde, 57 and Byrd, Cole, and Guy-Sheftall, 88 and 170. Lorde taught three courses at the Free University (FU): “Contemporary Black Literature,” “The Poet as Outsider,” and “Contemporary Women’s Poetry.” Dr. Horst Hartwich Freie Universität Official letter to Audre Lorde, 10/4/1982, FUALA; Hartwich Freie Universität Official letter to Lorde, November 12, 1982, FUALA; and Westhusen Official Letter to the Präsidenten der Freien Universität Berlin Zentrale Universitätsverwaltung (Frau Handschuhtmacher), January 5, 1983, FUALA. I should note that had Lorde arrived before 1984 the direction and tenor of the movement could have been different.

48 After Opitz reconnected with her father and roots in Ghana, she later used the pen name Ayim, although she did not legally change her name. See Magaret MacCarroll, “May Ayim: A Woman in the Margin of German Society” (Florida State University, Master’s Thesis, 2005), 61 esp. n3.

49 Oguntoye discussed some of the seminar dynamics and remarked how Lorde gave the few Black students in her courses an opportunity to openly speak and express their thoughts. See Oguntoye, “Mein Coming-Out Schwarze Lesbe in Deutschland,” in In Bewegung bleiben: 100 Jahre Politik Kultur und Geschichte von Lesben, eds. Gabriele Dennert, Christiane Leidinger, and Franziska Rauchut (Berlin: Querverlag, 2007), 162-63 and Oguntoye, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen: 20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung” (interview), in Euer Schweigen Schützt Euch nicht: Audre Lorde und die Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland, ed. Peggy Piesche (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 2012), 24. Oguntoye also revealed that Lorde met with the Black female students separately outside of class.

maintained a diasporic and/or race consciousness through reading African-American, African, and Caribbean literature; however, many of them developed a new consciousness as a result of interactions with her, and in the seminars with each other. Lorde reflected:

For me, Afro-German means the shining faces of May [Ayim] and Katharina [Oguntoye] in animated conversation about their fathers’ homelands, their comparisons, joys, disappointments. It means my pleasure at seeing another Black woman walk into my classroom, her reticence slowly giving way as she explores a new self-awareness, gains a new way of thinking about herself in relation to other Black women.

Lorde motivated the “German women of the diaspora” to seek recognition in German society, which led to the creation of the self-empowering terms “Afro-German” and “Black German,” and several of these women also appropriated the term Black German.

Frauenverlag, 2006), 18. The Nazis applied the concept of Mischlingskinder to “half-Jews” during their reign, but it also came to represent mixed-race children of African American descent after the Allied presence in 1945. The Allied (U.S.) occupation ushered in a large influx of African American soldiers in Germany. Many of these soldiers had relationships or “fraternized” with white German women. For more on German postwar race relations, refer to: Fehrenbach, Race After Hitler; Chin, Fehrenbach, Eley, and Grossmann, eds. After the Nazi Racial State; Yara-Colette Lemke Muñiz de Faria, Zwischen Fursorge und Ausgrenzung: Afrodeutsche “Besatzungskinder” im Nachkriegsdeutschland (Berlin: Mertopol Verlag, 2002); Timothy Schroer, Recasting Race after World War II: Germans and African Americans in American-Occupied Germany (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2007); Maria Höhn, GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GI’s, and Germany (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2010).

51 Some Black Germans recognized that they were different based on their skin color and exclusion in Germany. Others consciously sought and read books by African American, African, or Afro-Caribbean authors, and some also listened to music by African-American, African, and Afro-diasporic artists. See also El-Tayeb, “‘If You Can’t Pronounce My Name, You can Just Call Me Pride’: Afro-German Activism, Gender and Hip Hop,” in “Gender, Sexuality, and African Diaspora,” eds. Sandra Gunning, Tera Hunter, and Michele Mitchell, special issue, Gender and History 15:3 (November 2003): 459-485. El-Tayeb’s article was reprinted in Sandra Gunning, Tera Hunter, Michele Mitchell, eds. Dialogues of Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality, and African Diasporas (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 64-90.


53 The designation “Black German” not only includes Germans of African descent, but also Germans of South Asian, Turkish, and Arabic heritage.
as an inclusive political designation much like the concept of “Black British.” Lorde also inspired them to document their individual and collective histories. Creating new inclusive designations also encouraged many Afro-Germans with mixed-race heritage to position themselves within the African diaspora. Fatima El-Tayeb has noted, “. . .it is obvious that Audre Lorde’s impact on the early Afro-German movement can hardly be overestimated, representations by [Anne] Adams and others of Lorde as the mother of the Afro-Germans, creating the community through symbolic and literal act of naming, are problematic nonetheless.” El-Tayeb was troubled by this U.S.-centric position that situates the Afro-German community only in relation to African American experiences. El-Tayeb raised a valid point that scholarship must turn away from privileging African Americans as well as masculine narratives of the diaspora. These narratives continue to engender hierarchies within the diaspora and promote a limited understanding of the diaspora that presumes the African American case is the only model. Yet, El-Tayeb failed to fully understand that several Afro-Germans have assigned Lorde a symbolic role

54 In 1979, the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) was established to support Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women. See their website [Accessed June 18, 2012]. For more on some of the campaigns of the SBS, see Pragna Patel, “Third Wave feminism and black women’s activism,” in Black British Feminism: A Reader, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 255-268.


56 El-Tayeb, European Others, 64.

as the mother of the movement, who motivated them through her words and activism. Yet, it is important to note that not all Afro-Germans shared these views.

Lorde established herself as the mother of the Afro-German movement through her publications, seminars, and public readings. In those works, Lorde elucidated her perspective on poetry, emotions, and the erotic by demonstrating how intertwined they were in diverse aspects of women’s lives. For Lorde, poetry resided within each woman, and “each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The women’s place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface, it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.” In this way, Lorde stressed the significance of tapping into a reservoir of emotions that existed within women, and it was critical that women acknowledged that this source could be creatively used to deal with an often sexist, racist, homophobic, and patriarchal society. Lorde stated:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock of experiences of our daily lives.

58 In an informal conversation with Maria “Ria” Cheatom in August 2011, Cheatom remarked that Lorde was “the mother of the movement.” Interviews with Afro-German female activists Judy Gummich, Marion Kraft, and Jasmin Eding in the film Audre Lorde—The Berlin Years, 1984-92 also reflected a similar point. Oguntoye also claimed Lorde as a mother figure (Mutterfigur), especially in “Mein Coming-out als Schwarze Lesbe in Deutschland,” 162.

59 For instance, Ika Hügel-Marshall saw Lorde as an important figure, but not necessarily the mother of the Afro-German movement. It is also hard to ascertain how Afro-German men felt about Lorde.


She considered poetry to be “a vital necessity” that not only served as a form of expression, but also as a form of resistance, survival, and community building. Above all, poetry helped women identify and validate their thoughts and ideas, and gave “the nameless” a platform where they could be heard. For Lorde, “The Black mother within us – poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that dream.”

Lorde imbued poetry with deep-seated meaning, and believed that poetry had the ability to turn “our hopes and fears” into a positive act that reflected and reconstituted the materiality of individuals’ lives. “Lorde claimed,” according to El-Tayeb, “poetry as a radical, feminist form of expression exactly because of its association with qualities disvalued within Western intellectual tradition—emotion, intuition, collectivity, nonlinearity, and the oral—qualities that had also been attributed to women and people of color.”

In an interview with U.S. feminist and close friend Adrienne Rich, Lorde relayed how poetry became so critical in her life. She limned that:

When you asked how I began writing, I told you how poetry functioned specifically for me from the time I was very young. When someone said to me, “How do you feel?” or “What do you think?” or asked another direct question, I would recite a poem, and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, the vital piece of information. It might be a line. It might be an image. The poem was my response.

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62 Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” 38.

63 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 47.

Poetry enabled Lorde to communicate a complex set of emotions, and it was her language of choice and a habitual form of expression, remaining a powerful resource for her intellectually, emotionally, and politically. Reiterating her ideas about poetry in an interview conducted by Schultz, Lorde replied that, “I think that poetry, as I have said before, is the architecture, the skeleton of our lives I think that it allows us to formulate visions of the future without which we cannot really know the direction in which we are working.” Poetry, and the variety of emotions it affirmed, provided a firm foundation from which one could develop ideas that would eventually “transform the silences.”

Privileging poetry and emotions, Lorde also described the erotic as “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.” She explained that the erotic had been debased and neglected in Western society, where it became synonymous with women’s inferiority. Lorde addressed the common images of women as irrational, emotional, and hysterical that have long permeated Western thought, and posited that these representations of the erotic have often stripped women of promise and agency.

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Yet Lorde also cautioned women not to distrust this powerful source and, in particular, not to confuse it with pornography. “Pornography,” she maintained, “is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.” By relying on the erotic, women could re-evaluate their sense of self and their emotions. This type of self-reflection enabled women to achieve respect and cultivate better versions of themselves. Reiterating the erotic’s role, Lorde professed that, “For the erotic is not a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.” Moreover, she stressed that:

> The very word of erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

As an affirmative force for women, Lorde admitted that, “Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision – a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.”

But it was not only positive emotions that were constructive for Lorde, as she also clarified that “anger is a very healthy emotion. It helps tell us something, it also helps

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70; originally published in Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 261-68. In Evans’s interview, Lorde stated that, “Women have not been taught to respect the erotic urge, the place that is uniquely female. So, just as some Black people tend to reject Blackness because it has been termed inferior, we, as women, tend to reject out capacity for feeling, our ability to love, to touch the erotic, because it has been devalued. But it is within this that lies so much of our power, our ability to posit, to vision. Because once we know how deeply we can feel, we begin to demand from all of our life pursuits that they be in accordance with these feelings.”

70 Lorde, 54.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 54-55.

73 Ibid., 55.
move us in to action for change. That’s the way I use my anger. I try to change the things that make me angry in whatever way I can.”\textsuperscript{74} Lorde used anger as a “liberating and strengthening act of clarification,” that she deliberately employed to describe her vision of society.\textsuperscript{75} “Every woman,” Lorde opined, “has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change.”\textsuperscript{76} There was utility in channeling anger, which helped Lorde scrutinize and tackle diverse forms of oppression – racism, sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism. Once people verbalized these problems, they could resolve them, opening lines of dialogue and change where there was once silence. She believed that anger was an appropriate and honest reaction, and when individuals respected and accepted the range of emotions, – anger, fear, hope, and terror – then they could create literature that encouraged them to discover new strengths and opened up possibilities for personal growth.\textsuperscript{77} Lorde’s ideas resonated with Afro-German women.

For Lorde, feelings and the emotional work that poetry symbolized shaped her literature and diasporic and feminist politics – aspects that were all interrelated in her

\textsuperscript{74} “Reading and discussion in Dagmar Schultz’s seminar ‘Racism and Sexism’ at the JFK Institute of North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin,” July 7, 1984, p. 5. Band 6, FUALA. Lorde also discussed the significance of other “negative” emotions such as pain and fear in her works. See Nina Winter, “Audre Lorde,” in \textit{Interview with the Muse: Remarkable Women Speak on Creativity and Power}, Nina Winter (Berkeley: Moon Books, 1978), 72-81.


\textsuperscript{76} Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” 127.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, 128 and 129.
life. At a reading at the Chocolate Factory (Schokofabrik) in West Berlin, Lorde said, “I think we need to deal with our feelings and to put them out there to arm them, to give them teeth and hands to work.” The Schokofabrik, also known as the Schoko, was a women’s center located in a former chocolate factory in Kreuzberg that began in the 1980s. It was a project undertaken by the German feminist women’s movement with the goal of supporting women, lesbians, and young girls. During this event, Lorde spoke using imagery that personified emotions by giving them corporeal qualities that gave them more urgency. Similarly at a reading in Hannover, Lorde maintained that it was our responsibility as individuals to “use our power in the service of what we believe” and to eradicate injustice in society.

During her readings in West Germany, Lorde frequently introduced herself as a “black, lesbian, feminist, warrior, poet, mother, and African Caribbean American woman,” and used these monikers to show how inextricable her identities, activism, and writing remained in her life. Clarifying this point, Lorde stated that, “When I say I am a

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Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both these fronts are inseparable.” She also noted, “When I say I am a Black Lesbian, I mean I am a woman whose primary focus of loving, physical as well as emotional, is directed to women. It does not mean I hate men.”

At a guest lecture in Schultz’s seminar “Racism and Sexism,” Lorde remarked, “As I say as a 49 year old black feminist lesbian socialist mother of two, one including a boy, there is always something wrong with me, there is always some group of people who define me as wrong. It is very encouraging, I learn a lot about myself and my identities that way.”

Lorde valued her multiple identities and the ability to define herself on her own terms. Afro-German women in turn imbibed Lorde’s ideas about writing, emotions, the erotic, and identity.

As figure 1.1 below illustrates, Lorde was committed to cultivating, accentuating, and validating her persona. In the image, Lorde stands in a West Berlin park in 1984 and appears to embrace being – a lesbian, black woman, cancer survivor, feminist, and academic – in this European environment. Lorde wryly smiles into the camera with her funky shaped glasses and colorful shirt and vest, and the camera captures her charisma. Through her clothing and mannerisms, Lorde denotes a relaxed and confident

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84 Lorde had a significant impact on other Afro-European and women of color women across the globe in the 1980s. Stella Bolaki and Sabine Broeck’s forthcoming edited collection Audre Lorde's International Legacy: Essays on Encounters, Creativity and Activism through the University of Massachusetts press will explore this dynamic. See De Veaux, Warrior Poet, 340-345. Lorde also captured some of experiences with other Afro-European and women of color in A Burst of Light.
demeanor. She remains unabashed about her body, especially as the viewer can see the shape of one breast.\textsuperscript{85} Lorde commands the camera’s attention and does not only allow it to be a passive spectator in her afternoon experience, but rather it becomes a tool that she employs as a prop to help express herself.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Figure 1.1 Portrait of Audre Lorde in a Berlin park in 1984\textsuperscript{86}}
\end{figure}

Lorde’s literature, seminars, interviews, and readings, moreover, imparted experiential and affective knowledge and reflective practices about writing, emotions, and the African diaspora to Afro-Germans – particularly Afro-German women.\textsuperscript{87} Lorde had a mastectomy when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1978. See Lorde, \textit{The Cancer Journals} (1980; repr., San Fransisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1997).


\footnote{87 Here, I am in agreement with scholars who suggest that feelings are a form of knowledge. See Clare Hemmings, “Affective Solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation,” in “Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory,” eds. Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, special issue, \textit{Feminist Theory} 13:2 (August 2012): 151 and Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, “Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory,” special issue, \textit{Feminist Theory} 13:2 (August 2012): 119-120. Also of note, critical theorist Sarah Ahmed argued that emotions are forms of cultural practices. She also contended that kinship and family are social practices, allowing different articulations of the concepts of family and kinship to emerge. In this case, these alternative intimacies were no longer based}
did not see poetry as a performance per se because “it is something we create together that will empower us all,” yet “it is something that we share and hopefully we each take from this place something that makes us more who we wish to be.” Yet her readings of published works throughout East and West Germany and seminars at the Free University operated as performances. Lorde’s biographer Alexis de Veaux writes in *Warrior Poet* that her “narratives were self-conscious, literary performances; an excavation, and synthesis, of memory, imagination, and truth.” “Performances,” according to critical theorist Diana Taylor, “function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity. . .” Lorde’s readings emerged as diverse forms of performance that elicited love, warmth, courage, and solidarity and suffused her feminist and diasporic sensibilities. Lorde’s performances were public events and literary and oratory practices that helped bring people together across cultural norms. See Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Practice of Emotions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 153. As a field, the history of emotions has grown tremendously, and I have included a few works that have informed this study: Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, eds. *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Biess, “‘Everybody Has a Chance’: Civil Defense, Nuclear Angst, and the History of Emotions in Postwar Germany,” *German History* 27:2 (2009): 215-43; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds. *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Thomas J. Scheff, “Emotions and Identity: A Theory of Ethnic Nationalism,” in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 277-303; Stehle and Weber, “German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup, and Multicultural Belonging,” 103-124; Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2011); Forum “History of Emotions,” *German History* 28:1 (March 2010): 67-80 (with Frank Biess, Alon Confino, Uffa Jenson, Lyndal Roper, Ute Frevert, and Daniela Saxer); and “AHR Conversation: The Historicual Study of Emotions,” *American Historical Review* 117:5 (December 2012): 1487-1531 (with Nicole Eustace, Eugenia Lean, Julie Livingston, Jan Plamper, William Reddy, and Barbara Rosenwein).

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88 “Reading in Dresden,” 05/29/1990, p. 2. Band 24, FUALA.


90 De Veaux, 13.

and linguistic differences. With these diasporic connections to Lorde, Afro-Germans gained self-awareness and enthusiasm, and it is this knowledge that they used to mobilize the movement. Lorde’s performances, in this case, served as “acts of transfer” for Afro-Germans – offering Black Germans the tools they needed to claim recognition in society and challenge discriminatory practices based on conventional understandings of Germanness. Using her poetry as an edifying and subversive act, Lorde incited social and political change by transforming people’s feelings.92

Lorde envisioned that her literary productions served as tools possessed with an affective and a curative quality and an ideological function.93 On a basic level, poetry should be written, read, or spoken, but it should also be valued, felt, and applied. More importantly, emotional expressions could trigger feelings of love, respect, warmth, or courage, and this was precisely the perspective that informed Lorde’s literature. Yet, it was also what she intended for poetry, the poet, and the writer to do more generally. In her “The Dream of Europe” speech, Lorde declared, “I am an African-American poet and believe in the power of poetry. Poetry, like all art, has a function: to bring us closer to who we wish to be: to help us vision a future which has not yet been: and to help us survive the lack of that future.”94


94 Draft remarks by Audre Lorde, “The Dream of Europe,” n.d. Box 17, Folder 061, CAL. The Dream of Europe (Ein Traum von Europa) was an international writers’ symposium that took place in Berlin from May 25-29, 1988. See also Dieter Esche (Secretary of the preparatory group) letter to Lorde, March 22,
individuals could tap into an alternative emotional archive, especially in their collaborative projects for social change that helped to dismantle all forms of discrimination.\(^{95}\)

In figure 1.2 below, Lorde was at a reading in Cologne, where she seized the audience’s attention in the seminar room. The black and white image captures Lorde in motion with one arm outstretched and opened to the audience and camera while she holds the microphone in her other hand. Lorde views the audience, and by extension the camera, with intensity and purpose, as she performs her poetry. Lorde appears to be comfortable with her African diasporic clothing and jewelry and performance. She continually navigated her appearance and performance, attempting to convey affective messages to the German audience.

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Lorde also privileged the centrality of women’s bonds in many of her other works and readings, explaining at a reading of *Zami* in West Berlin:

> I wanted to make a lot of connections in this book, connections between women, connections between – it has been the love of women that has kept me alive for so long, and in the really hard times in my life it has served to reexamine the ways in which this worked, which is another way in which this book came to be written. That loving between women, whether it is bitter, whether it is transient, whether it is painful, whatever, is nourishing and empowering and is an answer to the despair that we have to deal with all the time when we deal with the realities in the rest of our lives. And to the extent that we do deal with that reality out there we need each other and ourselves even more.  

She acknowledged that no matter how these female relationships progressed they were, nonetheless, empowering and beneficial experiences that helped her endure the vicissitudes of life. Embracing all kinds of relationships (platonic, romantic, or familial) helped to sustain women.


Lorde also stressed the importance of respecting differences among women. In doing so, women could advance common objectives through interracial coalitions and international projects. She clarified that, “I am interested in making coalitions with anyone who shares a common goal.” Lorde elucidated:

I work with white women and I am pleased to work with white women when we can work as equals and as peers in situations where we move toward common goals. It is the same way I welcome working with black men. We share common destinies, we share common goals. We have great differences and we need to be able to articulate those differences and work across them.  

Attending to the differences, Lorde thought, enabled women and men to bridge their differences in constructive ways. Unity, in fact, did not require diverse individuals to be identical to one another. Using difference as a positive force led to fruitful exchanges and the promotion of goals that helped to challenge discriminatory practices in society. Specifically, Lorde persuaded the white German women’s movement to “accept antiracism [sic] and work against anti-semitism [sic] as central to the women’s movement or it will die.” She reaffirmed that “not because racism and anti-semitism [sic] are outside altruistic concerns, but because they are central, central to any kind of movement.”

Lorde also emboldened individuals through her writing and ideas and strove to “open lines of communication for instance between Afro-European and Afro-American

98 “Reading at BAZ (Berliner Aktions Zentrum of people of color),” July 1984, p. 11. Band 10, FUALA. Lorde also coined the term “connected differences” to illustrate this point. Lorde also emphasized the need to recognize differences in “Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde,” Essence (December 1984), 73-74, 129-130, and 133. This conversation lasted five hours and consisted of two separate sessions in a lounge on the campus of Hampshire College and was originally the idea of Gloria Joseph. See also De Veaux, 330-32.


women, between Afro-European and Afro-American writers.” Lorde regarded political alliances to be just as important as the creation of writing communities, believing that they both required dedication and a commitment to activism. She averred:

Well, I hope there is a growing network of women of color happening on an international level, I hope there is a growing network of women of color writers. If I have anything to do about it there will be that kind of network and it will increase. I think it is absolutely necessary that we make contact with each other across national boundaries and if we recognize, here again, there are similarities and there are differences.  

At one of her readings, Lorde asked white German women in the audience to leave, and then invited all the Black women to stay and talk with her and each other. In *A Burst of Light*, Lorde was elated by her exhilarating yet exhausting work in West Berlin and the connections that Afro-German women had made. She wrote:

I am excited by these women, by their blossoming sense of identity as they're beginning to say in one way or another, ‘Let us be ourselves now as we define us. We are not a figment of your imagination or an exotic answer to your desires. We are not some button on the pocket of your longing.’ I can see these women as a growing force for international change, in concert with other Afro-Europeans, Afro-Asians, Afro-Americans.  

Lorde wanted to help Afro-German women develop useful and practical skills that would make them agents in their own destinies and campaign against all forms of oppression. Her presence in Germany guided Afro-German women thereby encouraging them to seek fellowship with her and other Black Germans. The following section addresses the

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101 “Interview with Audre Lorde by Dagmar Schultz,” pp. 5-6.


103 Lorde, 57.
relationships that Lorde cultivated with Afro-German women, who turned to writing as a form of community building.

**What’s Emotions Got to Do With It?: From *Farbe bekennen* to Personal Attachments to Lorde**

Several Afro-German women – including Ayim, Oguntoye, and Marion Kraft, Helga Emde, Jasmin Eding, Erika “Ika” Hügel, Elke Jank, Eva von Pirch, and Eleonore Wiedenroth – benefitted from Lorde’s time in Germany and incorporated her ideas into their lives and new Afro-German movement.\(^\text{104}\) Much of this influence manifests in the groundbreaking volume *Farbe bekennen* (later published as *Showing Our Colors*) edited by Ayim, Oguntoye, and Schultz.\(^\text{105}\) Two years after they conducted extensive research throughout West Germany, the Orlanda women’s press published the collection in 1986.\(^\text{106}\) Lorde proved critical in the genesis of the anthology. In a 2012 interview Oguntoye recalled, “Audre responded that, she didn’t need a new book. Not that she wouldn’t be happy to publish additional books, but that it was her political position: ‘I

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\(^{106}\) Sub Rosa became Orlanda Frauenverlag shortly before the publication of *Farbe bekennen*. In two separate and informal conversations with Schultz and Oguntoye in the spring of 2012, they both revealed that it was Oguntoye who came up with the name Orlanda.
would find it much more exciting to publish a book with Black German women,’ she said. And that is how *Farbe bekennen* emerged.”

The anthology included poetry, autobiographical texts, interviews from Afro-German women ranging in age from sixteen to seventy, and Ayim’s master’s thesis from the University of Regensburg. Afro-Germans’ new relationships with Lorde, their burgeoning diasporic outlook, and their connection with other people of color saved them from having to “deal with our backgrounds and our identity in isolation.”

Black German activist and scholar Peggy Piesche also commented that, “These Black women and lesbians emerged from their social isolation and denial, becoming literally visible and thus wrote themselves into a history whose meaning they recognized through their contact with Audre Lorde.”

In the twentieth-anniversary edition of *Farbe bekennen*, Oguntoye claimed that, “Audre Lorde

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invited us to make our existence and experiences known to the world. . .”

The contributors offered their personal accounts of growing up during the Kaiserreich, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the Post-war occupation, and East and West Germany. Even though *Farbe bekennen* was not the first work to discuss racialized themes or racism, the volume did situate Afro-Germans in the larger German historical narrative and catalyzed the Afro-German movement. On one occasion, when Afro-German women found it difficult to pursue work on the anthology, Lorde met with them. She laid down her pen and said to the intergenerational group, “I will not write anymore, until I hear and read something from the black women in Germany.” Lorde’s powerful act convinced these women that they needed to recover and record their personal and collective Afro-German narratives.

At the heart of the volume were the compelling personal narratives that professed feelings of fragmentation, confusion, isolation, and disorientation about the lack of identity and/or amity. Afro-Germans often longed to find someone with whom they

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112 See chapter three for a brief discussion of some of these works.


114 Peggy Piesche also stated that, “Audre Lorde brachte ihre Erfahrung um die Macht der Sprache ein und teilte diese mit ihren Schwarzen deutschen Schwestern. Aus diesen Begegnungen und Gesprächen ist eine kollektive Biographie Schwarzer Geschichte in Deutschland entstanden.” Piesche, “Gegen das Schweigen,” 11.

115 Jasmin Eding, Afro-German activist and co-founder of ADEFRA and ISD in Munich, revealed her feelings about the volume, claiming that “Vor 20 Jahren bekam ich zum Geburtstag von einer meiner Schwestern ein Buch von Audre Lorde geschenkt. Dies machte den Tag noch bedeutender als er schon
could confide. As Helga Emde, of African American and German descent, recalled, “I felt degraded and discriminated against. As before, I had no contact with other Blacks, mostly because I would have preferred to deny my blackness. It wasn’t enough that I belonged to a minority; I also felt lonely and isolated.” Emde repudiated her blackness, which made it difficult for her to seek companionship with other Afro-Germans. Yet, reflecting a predicament that several of the women in the anthology discussed, she also yearned for connections with other Afro-Germans. The narratives were by no means identical. Whereas Emde was the “only Black person in [her] family,” Astrid Berger, a Cameroonian and German woman, lived with her devoted Cameroonian father and Jewish German stepmother in West Berlin.

Even though her father instilled a sense of pride and offered support, it was not enough to shield her from discrimination in a variety of social settings.

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In some of their observations, Afro-German women expressed self-hatred, aggravation, and unhappiness at being black in East and West Germany, where their white German compatriots made them feel different, ugly, and unwanted.¹¹⁸ Everyday encounters with family, friends, and strangers tended to exacerbate their discomfort and distress. For some, this self-hatred and self-denial also involved a desire to be white or light skinned. May Ayim, of Ghanaian and German heritage, for instance, dreamt of whiteness that was unattainable “because of [her] parents’ unwillingness and the weak cleaning power of soap.”¹¹⁹ Abena Adomako, a dark-skinned Afro-German of Ghanaian and German descent, longed to be light-skinned. She felt envy toward light-skinned Afro-Germans and thought that they had an easier time in society.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ There were a few women in the Farbe bekennen who were raised in East Germany, including Oguntoye and Katharina Birkenwald (Raja Lubinetzki). Once the Berlin Wall fell, Lorde also travelled to East Germany (Leipzig and Dresden). For additional information about Black Germans in the East, see Gabriele Willbold, “Ostdeutsch Schwarz,” in Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung, eds. Ika Hügel, Chris Lange, May Ayim, Ilona Bubeck, Gülsen Aktas, and Dagmar Schultz (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993), 233-235 and Peggy Pesche, “Black and German? East German Adolescents Before 1989: A Retrospective View of A ‘Non-Existent Issue’ in the GDR,” AICGS Humanities Vol. 13 (2002): 37-59. In the article, Pesche, who was also raised in the East, briefly discussed the historical legacy of foreign guest workers in the GDR and their limited legal rights by exploring how racism and discrimination were perpetuated in official policies, schools, children’s comics, magazines, and books within the GDR. For an analysis of African Americans and East Germany, see also Natalia King Rasmussen’s forthcoming dissertation, “Friends of Freedom, Allies of Peace: East Germany and the African American Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1989” from Boston College.


In *Farbe bekennen*, several Afro-German women described the burden of being meant to feel non-German and confronted the presumption that blackness and Germanness were contradictory and inherently paradoxical. During Schultz’s interview with Laura Baum, Oguntoye, and Ayim, these Afro-German women commented on oscillating between a feeling of exclusion to a partial sense of belonging. White Germans and others within the African diaspora, in this case, imposed labels and constructed boundaries that denied Afro-Germans an equal place within the nation. Rather, they were considered African-American, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, or what scholar Michelle M. Wright has termed the “external African Other.”121 Despite their diverse historical, social, cultural, and regional experiences, Black Germans were still considered homogenously foreign by their compatriots. Black Germans, in other cases, expressed feeling like they did not belong to any one community. Corinna N., an Ethiopian and German woman, recounted, “When I was with Africans, now and then it bothered me being a ‘mulatto,’ something like sitting between two stools. I couldn’t ever belong to one side or the other.” Corinna also conveyed that, “You’re not taken seriously by anyone. Just as the Germans feel sorry for you being colored, the Africans do too.”122


*Farbe bekennen*, along with later Afro-German publications, also contributed to an emergent Afro-German literary tradition – discussed further in chapter three – that allowed them to “train [them]selves to respect [their] feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared.”\(^{123}\) Lorde’s influence motivated Afro-German women to accept and trust their pre-existing feelings of hope and dynamism within their prose and poetry.\(^{124}\) Through their writing, Afro-Germans embraced their perceived and ascribed otherness and re-signified their collective identity. Blending their memories and creativity in autobiographical forms, Afro-German women used their experiences as discursive and affective tools of self-definition and community building.\(^{125}\)

Following Lorde’s advice to connect across their differences, Black German women established newfound friendships that were not confined within German borders, and in doing so, they bonded with each other by sharing their mutual experiences and emotions. Kraft remarked that, “Through Audre I met not only other African German women, but also many sisters involved in the global networking of Black women.”\(^{126}\) Lorde also assisted in the establishment of the Cross-Cultural Initiative of Black Women for Minority Rights and Studies in Germany, which hosted the 5th Annual Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute in 1991—a event and organization that I

\(^{123}\) Lorde, 37.

\(^{124}\) A number of the women contributed poetry to the collection, including Oguntoye, Emde, Lubinetzki, and Ayim to name a few.

\(^{125}\) Afro-Germans still rely on writing and poetry as concrete forms for self-identification, activism, emotional relief, and community building albeit in different ways. See Olumide Popoola and Beldan Sezen, eds. *Talking Home: Heimat aus unserer eigenen Feder. Frauen of Color in Deutschland* (Amsterdam: Blue Moon Press, 1999), and both Germanists Leroy Hopkins and Fatima El-Tayeb have examined this book, and see my brief discussion of the book in chapter three.

explore in chapter five. For Afro-German women, establishing contact to other Black women throughout the world was an extension of the project engendered by Lorde, making their participation in the Institute such an enriching experience for them personally.  

Ayim, moreover, developed connections with South African activist Ellen Kuzwayo, Guadeloupean writer Maryse Conde, and Turkish-German author Zehra Çirak. She also continued to write and perform spoken word poetry internationally and throughout Germany and became involved with Literature Women (Literatur Frauen, e.V.), an international women’s literary association based in West Berlin that involved many women of color authors, as discussed further in chapter five. Emde, Kraft, and Hügel also planned and participated in writing and feminist workshops throughout West Germany and abroad. Campaigning against racism by attending international and local conferences, book fairs, and workshops helped Afro-Germans establish coalitions with other marginalized groups and construct transnational networks. The new linkages and interpersonal attachments that Afro-German women generated also reflected their desire for recognition and community. Afro-German women’s activism served in many ways as

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127 Please refer to chapter five for details about the organization, especially as an example of Afro-German transnational and translocal activism.


130 Emde, Kraft, and Hügel helped to organize a writing workshop in Bielefeld in 1988. See Haus Neuland Verein für Familienbildung, “Einladung zur ersten gemeinsamen Schreibwerkstatt Schwarzer und Weisser Frauen,” Bielefeld, June 3-5, 1988, pp. 1-4, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom. For a brief analysis of this event and images, please refer to chapter four. Emde and Kraft also attended the 1988 Feminist Book Fair in Montreal, Canada.
the culmination of Lorde’s founding ideas, and they continued to cultivate relationships and engage with women across the African diaspora.131

Forging community through their correspondences with Lorde, Afro-German women also affirmed the significance of female bonds with Lorde as well as other women of color activists and scholars. These ties helped them survive in a West German society that inaccurately imagined itself as white. It is through Black German women’s correspondence to Lorde that we witness what literary scholar Lisa McGill has referred to as a “covenant of women-bonding” when examining the network of women depicted in Lorde’s biomythography, Zami.132 Either by using a typewriter or putting ink to paper, Afro-German women wrote letters conveying their love, respect, and admiration of Lorde.133 Writing from 1986 until Lorde’s death in 1992, Afro-German correspondences illustrate how important she remained in their lives long after her public appearances and guest professorship at the Free University.134 Writing to Lorde took courage because of her prominence in feminist and Afro-diasporic circles and because Afro-German women wrote not in their native tongue of German, which Lorde could not read, but in


132 McGill, Constructing Black Selves, 150 and Lorde, Zami. Entitling Zami a biomythography enabled Lorde to define a genre of writing that fully reflected who she was and what she wanted her book to be. McGill wrote that Lorde staged “Zami’s community of women by first locating the ways in which she, her lovers, friends, foremothers, and Afrekete form a covenant of women-bonding” (150).

133 In several of the correspondences, Afro-German women expressed appreciation to Lorde for her letters, materials, or gifts. *An example of this is in a letter that Marion Kraft wrote to Lorde, October 17, 1988, p. 1. Box 3, Folder 069, CAL.

134 Lorde also wrote other Afro-German women, but their letters were unavailable at the archives in Atlanta or Berlin. As a result, these correspondences are from only seven Black German women, but their correspondence underscored the significance of affective attachments.
English. By writing in English, one of the important languages within the African diaspora, Black Germans connected to this international community. In several cases, Afro-German women such as Ayim, Oguntoye, Kraft, and Hügel had sustained correspondences and interactions with Lorde. Schultz also exchanged letters with Lorde, and she, along with her partner, Hügel, and Ayim developed particularly strong personal friendships with Lorde and her partner, Gloria I. Joseph. As a matter of fact, Schultz, Hügel, and Ayim were all present when Lorde succumbed to liver cancer in St. Croix in 1992. Figure 1.3 shows Lorde with May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Dagmar Schultz, Ika Hügel-Marshall, and other German women at a café in Berlin-Kreuzberg in

135 Although Lorde studied German in high school, she could not read or speak it fluently, so Afro-German women were also practical in writing to her in English. At her readings in Germany, translators were always present.

136 Given that women throughout the world wrote Lorde, it is unclear how frequently she responded to Afro-German letters relative to other women of color. At The Collection of Audre Lorde in Atlanta, there are countless letters from women throughout the world, including the African American artist Mildred Thompson in Paris, the South African activist Ellen Kuzwayo, Black British singer, poet, and writer Monique Ngozi Nri, and the African American scholar Nellie Y. McKay. Schultz began writing Lorde as early as 1981.

137 Joseph was a feminist academic and activist who co-founded SISSA (Sisters in Support of Sister in South Africa) in 1984, which supported women’s project throughout South Africa. Lorde, along with other African American and Afro-Caribbean women scholar-activists such as Zala Chandler, Andrée McLaughlin, Barbara Riley, and Johnnetta B. Cole, helped to establish SISSA with Joseph. De Veaux, 279-80 and Higashida, “Audre Lorde Revisited: Nationalism and Second-Wave Black Feminism,” in her Black Internationalist Feminism, esp. 139. Joseph was also affiliated with the International Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Institute in which McLaughlin was the International Coordinator. Schultz, Kraft, and Oguntoye also wrote letters to Gloria, and it is a connection that still remains, as Joseph actually travelled from St. Croix to attend Schultz’s film premiere of Audre Lorde–The Berlin Years, 1984-1992 at the Berlinale Film Festival in February 2012. Oguntoye also recognized Joseph’s role in helping the Afro-German movement. She wrote, “For me, a Black German Feminist [sic], the presence of two older Black members of the Women’s Movement was of tremendous importance. This was the case for me personally as well as for the German Women’s Movement. Both women demonstrated, in that there were two of them, that there are Black feminists around who are beautiful, strong and talented. And also that they weren’t sentenced to fail because of discrimination but could survive successfully.” Oguntoye, “The Black German and the Womens,” p. 4.

138 At the time of her death, Joseph and the filmmaker Ada Griffin were also by her side. De Veaux, 365. When Lorde returned to Berlin after 1984, she often stayed at the apartment of Schultz and Hügel. Hügel and Schultz also visited Joseph and Lorde in St. Croix. For more on these relationships, see the film Audre Lorde—The Berlin Years, 1984-1992.
April 1990. This image reveals how Lorde cultivated ties with diverse women in Germany and that these women formed an attachment to her. Moreover, the image highlights how Lorde’s sustained physical presence in Berlin impacted everyone that she met.

Figure 1.3 Audre Lorde with May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and other women in Berlin in April 1990

Afro-German women expressed their sense of attachment to Lorde through motherly and sisterly metaphors, common to the period’s Black and Euro-American feminist writings. Their nascent connections to Lorde transcended cultural, linguistic, and national boundaries. For instance, Black German Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, of Arab

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and East German descent, referred to Lorde as “my dearest and so near Audre” and wrote:

Thinking of you, of your warm smile give [sic] me the strength and the power I need to overcome my doubtfulness. So, my dear mothersisterfriend, I want to send you lot of greetings and good wishes to you – hopefully – peaceful island and I hope that you are o.k., that your work is going on and your activities are successful.\(^\text{141}\)

As a “mothersisterfriend,” Lorde drew al-Samarai in with her warmth and made the familial connection attainable. Marion Kraft, a biracial African American and German woman, claimed in a letter, “You are the ‘big sister’ I have always longed for, and beyond all possible differences we both must learn to live with and accept, this sisterhood is real.”\(^\text{142}\) In another letter, Ayim, a biracial Ghanian and German woman, stated “It was on the 9th November demonstrations where I recited 3 poems. I was wearing your warm embracing jacket Audre and I felt as one of your daughters.”\(^\text{143}\) These examples illustrate how Black German woman expressed a symbolic filial connection to Lorde that presumed a type of blood kinship. Extending beyond biology, their affiliations and attachments to Lorde offered them a sense of acceptance, and Afro-Germans created alternative forms of intimacy.\(^\text{144}\) Given Afro-Germans’ heterogeneity, moreover, Lorde’s ideas about diaspora and kinship served as a model for their movement; a model that

\(^{141}\) Nicola Lauré al-Samarai letter to Lorde, August 2, 1990. p. 1. Box 3, Folder 073, CAL. Now Al-Samarai studies at the Technical University in Berlin, where she is working on a project about Black Germans in the former East.

\(^{142}\) Marion Kraft letter to Lorde, October 17, 1988, p. 4.

\(^{143}\) May Ayim letter to Lorde, November 14, 1991, p. 1. Box 3, Folder 094, CAL. Occurring in East and West Berlin, the demonstrations on November 9, 1989 were peaceful, and helped to bring the wall down. Ayim was at one of those events, where she introduced herself as a poet for the first time and acknowledged that, “poetry becomes a more and more powerful part in my life” (1). For details about the November 9\(^\text{th}\) demonstrations, see Konrad Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds. *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1994), esp. xx.

embraced difference yet recognized commonality through experiences of marginalization and that sought bonds with communities of color with similar predicaments.

Afro-German women expressed connections to Lorde by showering her with affectionate phrases and providing her with personal sketches and poems. Using the salutation “Dearest Audre” in a letter, Ayim also sent her “love and kisses and I wish you can feel it as much as I always feel you in my tough times,” and “Audre, I embrace you and kiss you all over.”

Afro-German women openly expressed their feelings for Lorde and often ended their letters with “I send my love to you,” “In sisterhood,” “Much love,” “Love Your sister,” or “You are with us, Audre, I embrace you Love.”

For instance, Kraft concluded by writing, “Today, I’m finishing this letter, pointing out again, how glad I am to have made your acquaintance, and how important your work is to me. With love and respect, Marion.”

In their correspondences to Lorde, Afro-German women also explored alternative familial and cultural connections that informed their identities and practice of diasporic belonging. Whereas other Afro-diasporic communities have inherited common ancestry from their black parents that often revolved around histories of forced, voluntary, or collective migration, the Afro-German community developed a different legacy. This was due in part to Germany’s short-lived colonial empire, the


147 Kraft letter to Lorde, July 12, 1986. p. 3. Box 3, Folder 069, CAL.
Third Reich, the postwar occupations, and the division of the Germanies. Historian Tina Campt has argued that “memory provides the source of the defining tension of diaspora and diasporic identity: the dynamic play of originary and imaginary homes, and the complex networks of relation forged across national, spatial, and temporal boundaries.”

As a result of Afro-Germans’ diversity, they did not possess common narratives of home, belonging, or community that provided other black communities with tangible resources that they could use as a foundation. Correspondences with Lorde, therefore, afforded Afro-German women opportunities to develop new ties that shaped them and their movement. With these new emotional bonds, Afro-Germans inherited new traits that they constituted through their relationships with Lorde and one another.

Afro-German women also revealed that their previous encounters with and relationships to Lorde were heartening and supportive. In a letter, al-Samarai stated that “Dear Audre, all of us miss you and when we are together we always remember you.”

Oguntoye, of Nigerian and East German descent, expressed in a letter that, “I enjoyed the dinner with you at Dagmars [sic]. To see you again was so warm and strengthening.”

Stressing Lorde’s influence, Kraft wrote, “Your engagement in the question of Afro-German women was really very important, and personally it means a lot for me to have

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148 Scholar Michelle M. Wright also has argued that scholarship needs to reexamine the post-1945 period as a way of redefining the diaspora and moving it away from a thesis hinged on the Middle Passage or Middle Passage Epistemology (MPE). See Wright, “Middle Passage Blackness and Its Diasporic Discontents.”

149 Campt, 101.

150 Ibid., 102.


152 Oguntoye letter to Lorde, August 4, 1986, p. 4. Box 3, Folder 093, CAL.
dealt with your writings and to have made your acquaintance!” In another letter, Oguntouye reflected on the “I am Your Sister” conference held for Lorde and emphasized how she touched so many women worldwide. Oguntouye stated:

I think it was great! It was so exciting to see all the women telling about their lives and how you and your work gave them courage. Also to me you are very precious and I thank you so much for all you did for me and for the Afro-germans [sic] [and] black people in Germany and for the german womens [sic] movement.

Oguntouye expressed excitement about attending the conference, hearing the testimonies of diverse women, and interacting with women of color. Revealing how important Lorde was to her personally and collectively, Oguntouye showed gratitude to Lorde, especially for her invaluable work and assistance in both the Afro-German and German women’s movements, and in doing so, recognized Lorde’s compassion for human rights and hoped to maintain a similar zeal. Later in the letter, she delighted in spending time with Lorde in Boston and “was very prowed [sic] to help [her] and enjoyed it a lot.”

In a letter, an Afro-German woman, Hella Schültheiß remarked that:

I am very happy that you have been here – a wish of my heart was fulfilled. You know, you have taught me a lot through your books, your way of reading and your way of being there and I am very grateful to you – because it is not a matter of course, it’s a present, it is love. . . I write to you and I look at our photographs and I am very glad I’ve got acquainted

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154 The “I am Your Sister: Forging Global Connections Across Differences” conference took place in Boston from October 5-8, 1990, where over a thousand participants from twenty-two countries came to honor Lorde’s life and work. See also “I am Your Sister: Forging Global Connections Across Differences” flyer, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom and “I am Your Sister: Forging Global Connections Across Differences” letter, May 12, 1990, pp. 1-2, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom.

155 Oguntouye letter, October 18 and 22, 1990, p. 3. Box 3, Folder 093, CAL.

156 Oguntouye letter, October 18 and 22, 1990, p. 3.
with you and I wished you [sic] book something good with you from me, from our group and from Stuttgart.\textsuperscript{157}

Treasuring Lorde’s visit to Germany, Schültheiß also regarded her literature, public readings, and personality as gifts of love that made a difference in her life, and meeting Lorde was a dream fulfilled. In a letter, al-Samarai noted, “I thank you so much for your warm letter which gave me a lot of your power and good feelings,” and “always when I think of you I get this feeling – a very important feeling and I am happy that I had the opportunity to know you. Stay strong, Audre, we need you!”\textsuperscript{158} Likewise, in another letter, Ayim admitted that, “We/I(!) miss [you], but you left a lot of warmth and strength to stay here with me/with us. You gave me so much courage these last years.”\textsuperscript{159} In another letter, Kraft insisted that:

Audre, you are one of the very few persons/women in my life who have left a deep impression and brought about changes, and the power to carry on! Yes, you and me are different, too, but what we have in common is our history as Black women, women of the African diaspora, a token, a myth, a tool, a hope, and a vision and a need – to survive.\textsuperscript{160}

In a Birthday fax, Hügel, of African American and German heritage, wrote, “All my knowledge from your works [is] in me and came out of me. Audre you can be very proud. I am sad because I can not [sic] write English [sic] enough to write all my thoughts and feelings in this letter. Have a very nice birthday.”\textsuperscript{161} These utterances provide evidence that Hügel derived energy from Lorde and her work, which continued

\textsuperscript{157} Hella Schültheiß letter to Lorde, August 8, 1990, no page numbers. Box 5, Folder 115, CAL. I am unable to determine her full ancestry. She was a lesbian involved in the Black German movement and also wrote to Dagmar Schultz at Orlanda Frauenverlag.

\textsuperscript{158} Al-Samarai letter to Lorde, December 4, 1990, pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{159} Ayim letter to Lorde, November 14, 1991, p. 1. Box 3, Folder 094, CAL.

\textsuperscript{160} Kraft letter to Lorde, October 17, 1988, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{161} Ika Hügel fax to Lorde, February 18, 1992, p. 1.
to guide her literary and artistic endeavors. In a letter, Shelia Mysorekar, of Indian and German ancestry, asked, “How do you manage to channel you [sic] energy so effectively? I wish you all the best, for love & life & health & writing, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY (since I don’t know the date, the wishes come now).” These letters underscored how special and powerful Lorde was in triggering so much love and energy with so many women. Black German women’s emotional expressions to Lorde also contain acts of transfer that provided them with support.

Afro-German women also emphasized their excitement at forging connections with women from across the diaspora. In a letter, Ogunotye remarked:

It is quite a motivation to hurry up a bit, that I can meet Jean and other black women in America and Briten [sic] again. There are so many other women I want to meet. . . My feeling also tells me that this [sic] connections are urgently necessary for me to do my work good in Germany and to live my life.

Meetings with other women of color motivated Ogunotye to continue her social activism within the Afro-German, women’s, and lesbian movements in Germany and agitate for change. In a letter, Kraft highlighted the significance of black female ties, “For me and Helga [Emde] it was a great pleasure to share our ideas and emotions with so many Black women from all over the world! Helga and I have become very close friends (smile), and

162 Hügel has mentioned how Lorde influenced her in a number of interviews. See, for example, her interview in Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years, 1984-1992.

163 Shelia Mysorekas [sic] letter to Lorde, September 3 (year unknown), p. 4. Box 3, Folder 086, CAL. This letter does not have the year in it, and I will try to ascertain what year it was at a later time.

164 Ogunotye letter to Lorde, October 18 and 22, 1990, p. 3.

165 Ogunotye was active within the lesbian and women’s movements in Germany and attended the Lesbenvorgestreffen (Lesbian Pfingsten Meeting), Berliner Lesbendoche (Berlin Lesbian Week) and other events. See Ogunotye, “Mein Coming-out als Schwarze Lesbe in Deutschland,” in In Bewegung bleiben: 100 Jahre Politik, Kultur und Geschichte von Lesben, eds. Gabriele Dernert, Christiane Leidinger, and Franziska Rauchut (Berlin: Querverlag, 2007), 160-63 and Ogunotye, “The Black German Movement and the Womens [sic] Movement in West Germany,” pp. 1-10. I also discuss Ogunotye’s involvement in the lesbian movement and Berlin Lesbian Week in chapters two and five.
I think we’ve only just begun to realize how much we need each other.” Kraft appreciated “sharing” her thoughts with other women and developing friendships with them, and Kraft’s friendship with Emde, in particular, provided her with a sense of camaraderie. Mysorekar expressed a connection to not only her Black German sisters, but also her Black German brothers. She wrote:

Yes, there are Black Germans in the GDR. They are organized and very active. Not only for them, but also for us a totally new world has opened up. In spite of all this reunification talk & “Germany for Germans” – shouting, I’m hopeful & excited about the link up with our ‘brothers and sisters from the East’ – our Black brothers & sisters! Mysorekar highlighted the attachments that she began to cultivate with her Black German compatriots in the East – relationships that were particularly important after reunification. Regarding Lorde with respect, Kraft stated that, “And I want you to discover your own strength, rediscover it for yourself, because to us women around the world, women of the African diaspora, you have given so much, words cannot describe.” Kraft’s mediation between Lorde and the global diaspora, enabled her to discover a sense of belonging and kinship and to survive in a white West German society, where she felt increasingly oppressed. Interweaving emotional expressions throughout their writing, Afro-Germans demonstrated the power of bonding and developed stronger diasporic connections in the process.

Ambivalences could emerge in meetings with other women of color with different national backgrounds, as al-Samarai recalled in a letter. Confiding in Lorde about her recent “Coming home” to Palestine, al-Samarai reminisced, “Something I must tell you

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166 Kraft letter to Lorde, October 17, 1988, p. 1.


about Palestinian women. Mostly I was afraid of them. Arab women are ruthless – when they don’t like you they never let you in!” She continued to explain that, “They gave me a welcome I’ll never forget. Such a warmth and safety when I was among them I never felt before. They are like chicken hens – saving their children with hidden power. O you should look in their eyes! Black eyes, so warm, so strong.”

At first afraid of Palestinian women, al-Samarai then became overwhelmed by their kindness and warmth. These women exuded confidence, possessing an inner strength that deeply touched her. Al Samarai’s experiences with Palestinian women in fact proved to be enriching, as she embraced her emotions and no longer feared the differences. She gained support and security through her ties with this new community of women. Here, cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed assessments’ about feelings resonate, especially when she wrote, “it is not just that we feel for the collective (such as in discourses of fraternity or patriotism), but how we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically ‘takes shape’ only as an effect of such alignments.”

Black Germans’ exchanges and bonds with other women of color and each other comprised of a number of emotions and experiences that remained mutually constitutive elements for them personally and collectively.

Even though these friendships were necessary to their efforts at community building, letters from Black German women also highlighted some of the problems that emerged with forging connections to other women. In a letter, Kraft discussed the problems that arose at of one the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer

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Institutes in Zimbabwe, in which women were unable to regard their “sisters” with respect. She posed a series of questions:

What about our sisters in Azania? What about those women from Uganda, Ethiopia, Panama – who had come a long way? What was the meaning of “Cross-Cultural”? The fact that some American sisters did not attend the closing meeting saying they felt “disrespected”? And even if they were wrong, can we discard their emotions by saying “they are very young”? How do we deal with differences among ourselves?  

Kraft’s comments highlighted that this Cross-Cultural Institute, although well intentioned, was indeed fraught with tensions based upon disrespect, fear, prejudice, and indifference.

Moreover, Oguntoyé stressed:

May [Ayim] and me reading some of Farbe bekennen and a group of Jewish [sic] and non Jewish [sic] women [Lesbisch-Feministische Shabbeskreis] reporting their results and thoughts. It was a long...but good discussion about Anti-Semitism [sic] and racism. Problems of understanding and [the ability to] understand became visible [sic]. I found it difficult to come forward and not become involved (verwickelt) into this endless fighting including reproaches and selfdefences [sic].

Oguntoyé revealed how in-fighting, indifference, and the inability to understand each other in a practical way often made cooperation among women extremely difficult. Similarly, Kraft informed Lorde in another letter that, “Unfortunately, there have been some misunderstandings and quarrels at the latest Afro-German women’s meetings. And here again, I think we must learn to understand and accept differences, and that we need

171 Kraft letter to Lorde, September 21, 1989, p. 2. Box 3, Folder 069, CAL. Throughout the letter, she detailed her experiences there.

one another.” Writing about the tensions within the Afro-German community, Oguntoye stated:

I had some fights within the afro-german [sic] women’s group. The conflict with Helga [Emde] and with Marion [Kraft] exploded. But really sorry I feel for the argument I had with Domenica (one of the twins), because I like her very much. Dose [sic] that mean growing up, to stand through the fights with people one loves.174

Interestingly, Kraft and Oguntoye detailed some of the hostilities that existed within earlier meetings of ADEFRA, an Afro-German women’s organization founded in the 1980s as further discussed in chapters two and four. While ADEFRA helped women find a degree of social cohesion, its female composition did not free it from internal strife. In the group, a number of concerns emerged about homosexual and heterosexual alliances, generational differences about sexuality, and the collective goals of a variety of women.175 Ironically, skin color also proved to be a problem, even as Afro-Germans were discriminated against based on their physical differences in German society.176 Some Afro-Germans were suspicious of lighter skinned Black Germans, especially individuals who looked as if they could pass for white. On the one hand, Kraft saw these disputes in ADEFRA as an opportunity to “learn to understand and accept differences” that would allow Black German women to grow with each other. On the other hand, Oguntoye believed that, “Anyway I got out of that all that I have to look for my own


174 Oguntoye letter to Lorde, October 26, 1988, p. 2. Box 3, Folder 093, CAL. Domenica and her twin sister Christina Grokte were very active in ADEFRA and ISD, especially in the early stages. Their brother Fidelis Grokte was also active in ISD.


176 Al-Samarai, “‘Es ist noch immer ein Aufbruch, aber mit neuer Startposition,’” 349.
feelings and needs. I am afraid I forgot about that in the last two years."\(^{177}\) Despite points of disagreement, ADEFRA, along with Afro-German female ties fostered by Lorde, remained, relative to much of white West German society that considered itself exclusively white, supportive of a nascent Black German community.\(^{178}\)

Later, Oguntoye captured exactly what Lorde’s influence upon Black Germans was when she stated, “A person with love as a source of power can achieve anything. This work of resistance, namely the difficult path to be able to accept the good and bad (unpopular) sides, this is the motivation that Audre Lorde’s work offers us.”\(^{179}\) Bearing witness, Lorde encouraged Afro-Germans to learn and adapt what they could to help their communities. At a memorial celebration held for Lorde in Berlin, Kraft echoed sentiments raised by Oguntoye, underscoring that:

> Her hope was [a] global sisterhood, and that we begin to see one another at the same time we begin to see ourselves. Self-definition and perception of the other is basic to Audre Lorde’s work. Above all, we Afro-German women – and men – have benefitted from her gift of a pathway out of our socially-constituted personal and political isolation. We should do everything we can to continue down this path as she would have wished.\(^{180}\)

Both women attributed to Lorde a significant role in the development of the Afro-German movement.

### Conclusion

\(^{177}\) Oguntoye letter to Lorde, October 26, 1988, p. 2.

\(^{178}\) ADEFRA, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” “20 Years of Black Women’s Activism in Germany,” p. 3. Oguntoye, “The Black German Movement and the Womens,” p. 2.


Lorde’s oeuvre and personality served many important functions in the lives of Afro-German women, both individually and collectively. Espousing her views, Lorde transmitted new ideas and practices that informed Afro-German women’s perspectives about identity and activism. She impressed upon Afro-German women to explore their emotions and turn to writing, poetry in particular, as concrete sources for growth, self-definition, and activism. As a result of their exchanges and encounters with Lorde, Afro-Germans created literary outlets such as *Farbe bekennen*, *Afrekete*, *afro-look*, and other forms of writing to recover their histories, re-negotiate their positions, and redirect attention towards the existence of diversity in East and West Germany. Poetry and the emotions that Lorde associated with it also emerged as a tool for establishing new diasporic linkages and relationships. Their ties with other women of color provided them with a sense of belonging and allowed them to produce a new emotional archive in the process. Black German women exemplified a variety of emotions and connections – familial, affective, and diasporic – with Lorde and each other.

Literature, moreover, allowed Afro-German women to connect across their differences in the early stages of the movement. Their writing in *Farbe bekennen* and their correspondences and relationships to Lorde helped Afro-German women embody diasporic practices, reinvent their diasporic identity, and “enact their membership” to the African diaspora. Lorde’s influence also motivated Afro-German women to engender cultural and political initiatives that addressed their needs in a West German society that continued to discriminate against them. Afro-German women, in particular, felt empowered by *Farbe bekennen* and Lorde’s ideas, and they used this motivation and excitement to collectively unite and created two associations the – Initiative of Black
Germans (ISD) and Afro-German Women (ADEFRA) – that continued to broaden their sense of solidarity and also relieved them of their isolation. ISD and ADEFRA will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. As Ria Cheatom, a member of ISD and ADEFRA in Munich, claimed, “right from the beginning of the black movement in Germany one can clearly say, that without us women very little would have developed.” Cheatom’s comment not only highlighted the fact that women helped to organize the movement, but that Black German women’s mobilization was critical in the early stages of the movement. In this way, the development of the movement was distinctly gendered, with a clear feminist space within it. Ultimately, Afro-German women helped to form a new community that relied on writing, affection, companionship, and the diaspora in order to build supportive networks and sites of change in Germany.

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181 Al-Samarai, 353; (interview with Ria Cheatom). The German text: “Gerade für die Anfänge der Schwarzen Bewegung in Deutschland kann man klar sagen, dass ohne uns Frauen nur sehr wenig gelaufen wäre.”
CHAPTER TWO

‘DEUTSCH UND SCHWARZ’: ESTABLISHING A NEW AFRO-GERMAN MOVEMENT

We, the Black Germans, want to step out of this state of social invisibility because living under such conditions is hardly pleasant. We are a challenge for our society[,] which is not prepared for such a task because of its own deranged state of self-consciousness. Hence, it follows that the Black German Movement receives its strength and motivation mainly from the desire to find a self-determined identity as Afro-Germans. The individual identity is the prerequisite for living as a person in German society and also for carrying through as a group in the struggle against racism and discrimination of minorities, in other words, using our abilities meaningfully.¹

Wir nennen uns “Initiative Schwarze in Berlin” und sind Schwarze Deutsche, die sich ihrer Isolation bewußt sind und zusammenkommen wollen.²

In meinen Augen ist der Beweggrund für viele, unserer Gruppe beizutreten, ein emotionaler, nämlich das Bedürfnis, andere Schwarze Deutsche kennenzulernen... Als Gruppe können wir dem Rassismus viel besser entgegentreten und uns schützen.³


² “Wir wollen aus der Isolation heraus” (Interview with May Ayim and John Amoateng-Kantara), in Grenzenlos und unverschämt, May Ayim (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1997), 45. The English translation: “We call ourselves “Initiative of Blacks in Berlin” and are Black Germans, who are aware of our isolation and want to come together.” Originally this interview was published in 1987 in the African Writers Association’s magazine AWA-FINNABA, an African cultural and literary magazine produced from 1983 to 1988. Based in West Berlin, it was written in both English and German and consisted of eleven issues.

³ “Wir wollen aus der Isolation heraus,” 45. The English translation: “In my eyes the motivation for many [Black Germans] to join our group, is an emotional one, specifically the need to meet other Black Germans... As a group we can better confront racism and protect ourselves.”
The first quotation here is from Katharina Oguntoye’s English-language essay on the origins of the Afro-German movement and its connection to the women’s movement in West Germany. Oguntoye’s quotation described the isolation that many Afro-Germans felt living in white families and neighborhoods. These situations characterized Afro-German life in West and East Germany in the decades before the movement. Many white German family members and compatriots simultaneously rendered Afro-Germans invisible and labeled them foreign or what literary scholar Michelle M. Wright has termed “Other-from-Without.”

The movement helped Afro-Germans confront a society that inaccurately imagined itself white. The second and third quotations appeared in an interview in the African Writers Association’s journal *AWA-FINNABA* with May Ayim and John Amoateng about the Afro-German movement. Similar to Oguntoye, Ayim and Amoateng emphasized the necessity of cultivating connections to other Black Germans.

The three quotations all stressed that, collectively, Afro-Germans could confront German racism. As a matter of fact, Oguntoye, Ayim, and Amoateng helped to co-found the organization Initiative of Black Germans (*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche*) in Berlin, eventually entitled ISD-Berlin. Their efforts at mobilization, along with those of other

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4 Wright defined “Other-from-Without” as a primitive savage who existed elsewhere, never in the white European nation, and should be conquered and civilized as part of Europe’s mission. This belief undergirded European colonial discourses and philosophical thought, including Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Philosophy*. For Wright, the “Other from Within” often born and raised within the white nation’s borders, but “are nonetheless foreign—a disease, one might say, on the national body—and thus not only outsiders, but most likely malevolent outsiders who, if unfettered, will do harm to that body.” Wright saw the latter reflecting the predicament of American Blacks and traced this thought in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes of Virginia*. See Wright, *Becoming Black*, 7-8 and 31-32 and Wright, “Others-from-within from Without,” 297.

5 John Amoateng assumed his wife Jeannine’s last name and is now John Kantara. Jeaninne Kantara was also active in the movement. In fact, they met at an ISD meeting in Berlin; informal conversation with Amoateng, fall of 2011. Throughout the chapter, I will refer to him as Amoateng.

6 Many Black Germans have remarked that the movement offered a solution to their isolation and loneliness in a white German society that marked them as Other.
Afro-Germans, not only helped them to positively define and affirm their diasporic identity as they confronted white German discriminatory practices, institutions, and presumptions, but also offered them a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Through an analysis of correspondences, agendas, programs, magazines, and flyers, this chapter turns to Afro-German activists and intellectuals and the emergence of the associations: The Initiative of Black Germans (ISD) and Afro-German Women (Afro-deutsche Frauen, ADEFRA). Focusing on the structure, objectives, and activities of these groups, I argue that Afro-Germans cultivated a new sense of self that was rooted in an emerging Afro-German community that also invented alternative traditions in a majority white society.\(^7\) As Afro-Germans created their diasporic and feminist movement and campaigned against racism in West Germany and then unified Germany, they promoted the politics of subjectivity and self-definition and claimed their position as native-born German citizens.\(^8\) While several Afro-Germans were students, the movement involved an intergenerational group of individuals and prided itself on being something more than a “club of intellectuals.”\(^9\) In organizing their movement, Afro-Germans not

\(^7\) As Black German activist Shelia Mysorekar remarked, “As Black people, we have had to create ourselves; there was nobody to teach us, no place to go to.” See Mysorekar, “‘Pass the Word and Break the Silence’: The Significance of African-American and ‘Third World’ Literature for Black Germans,” in *International Dimensions of Black Women’s Writing*, vol. 1 of *Moving Beyond Boundaries*, eds. Carol Boyce Davies and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 80.

\(^8\) Within the context of this chapter as well as the larger dissertation, I only focus on the efforts of Afro-Germans in West Germany and then reunified Germany.

\(^9\) “The Initiative” letter to Dietrich Haubold, November 29, 1985, no page number, Folder May Projekt Afro-Deutsche/Zeitungsartikel über Afro-deutsche/Schwarze in den Medien, The Private Collection of May Ayim. The full German text: “Wir wollen aber nicht primär ein Club Intellektueller sein, sondern wir sind primär schwarze Deutsche, die sich zu einem Treffen zusammengefunden haben.” See also ISD, “Einige Punkte zur Vorstellung der Initiative Schwarzer Deutscher (Afro-Deutsche),” n.d., no page number, The Private Collection of May Ayim. It is interesting to note that while the movement was successful in uniting large groups of Afro-Germans, not all Afro-Germans in West Germany joined. The small numbers of Afro-Germans, coupled with the isolation they felt in small or rural towns, often made it difficult for everyone to participate.
only sought to transform their quality of life, but to forge kinships that promoted equality and acceptance within West German society.

Unlike the early West German student, countercultural, and new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Afro-Germans were less concerned with theoretical claims about class-consciousness. Instead Afro-Germans were preoccupied with fashioning and articulating an inclusive diasporic identity based on heterogeneity and turning to writing and politics as tools to connect – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally – to each other as well as other minority groups. In creating the regional branches of ISD and ADEFRA, Afro-Germans developed customs and crafted alternative definitions of Germanness that continued to evolve and reflect their budding relationships and friendships with one another as well as other individuals of the African diaspora. Afro-German activists and intellectuals in the movement, however, were also a part of the larger West German countercultural scene of the 1980s. With their organizations, Afro-Germans advanced local and national anti-racist, diasporic, and feminist activism with journals, anthologies, and activities that attended to their specific conditions in German society. In this way, the Afro-German movement differed from some of the

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West German countercultural groups that they had connections to, especially as Afro-German sought to dismantle racist practices and beliefs and demand inclusion as native-born German citizens.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of Afro-German mobilization prior to the publication of Farbe bekennen. In doing so, it shows that there were other organizations that worked to confront multiple forms of discrimination in German society. In addition to these organizations, some Afro-Germans were involved in social movements, including the lesbian and gay and feminist movements in West Germany, which enabled them to engage in diverse forms of activism. With their engagement in these groups, Afro-Germans often felt that issues of race were never fully tackled and that solidarity among white German women was limited. Yet, Afro-Germans’ experiences in these organizations informed their efforts to mobilize, and Afro-German women, in particular, addressed the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race.

Section two describes the élan, structure, aims, and activities of ISD by showing what gave rise to the Afro-German movement. From the beginning, Afro-German women were the pioneers of the movement, as they planned initial events and built a community. Regional branches of ISD emerged throughout West Germany, with some of the most active groups in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich. Through their associations and events, Afro-Germans forged ties that, in many cases, saved them from social isolation. Finally, section three analyzes the development and activities of ADEFRA. As a lesbian and women’s organization, ADEFRA encouraged a feminist and diasporic solidarity that

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11 In an informal conversation with Katharina Oguntoye, she clarified that not many Afro-German women had experiences in other movements, and there was actually a small subset of people who had this previous knowledge.
enabled its members to resist sexism, racism, and homophobia. While there were ADEFRA groups in Bremen, Berlin, Hamburg, Erfurt, and Frankfurt, the group in Munich emerged as one of the most active ADEFRA group, organizing international conferences and consciousness-raising workshops. 12 ADEFRA-Bremen with support from other ADEFRA members across Germany helped to promote feminist politics in their journal Afrekete. 13 As diasporic and feminist organizations that addressed anti-racism, identity, and solidarity, ISD and ADEFRA used their experiences with discrimination and oppression to challenge German policies and demand recognition on their terms. In the process, Afro-Germans invented alternative traditions for future generations of Afro-Germans. Since a detailed account of the Afro-German movement has not be written, this chapter offers a history of the organizations of ISD and ADEFRA with newly recovered sources while showing how Afro-Germans saw their political and cultural struggles to be tied to their personal experiences and everyday realities of marginalization in Germany. 14

Before Farbe bekennen: Some of the Origins of Black German Activism

Efforts at mobilization and resistance occurred, if in a piecemeal fashion, long before the official formation of the organizations of ISD and ADEFRA. In September

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12 Even though there were ADEFRA groups in Berlin and Hamburg. I limit my focus to a general discussion of ADEFRA based on my access to sources.

13 I offer a more sustained analysis of ADEFRA-Bremen and Afrekete in chapter four.

14 Von Dirke, “All Power to the Imagination!,” 69. Von Dirke posited that the new social movements did not see their struggles within the framework of the social, but saw it with regards to their personal experiences and concrete problems of everyday life. Several scholarly works on Afro-Germans have mentioned their organizations and literature, but neglect to provide a detailed account of these organizations and the larger movement. See Anne Adams, “The Souls of Blak Volk: Contradiction? Oxymoron?” in Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000, eds. Patricia Mazon and Reinheld Steingröver (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 209-232 and Wright, Becoming Black, 195-96.
1972, a white German woman, Rosi Wolf-Almanasreh, founded the organization, “Interest Group for Women Married to Foreigners” (IAF), which sought to combat exclusionary legislation.\textsuperscript{15} Wolf-Almanasreh married a Palestinian and started the organization after the terrorist attacks at the Olympic Games in Munich.\textsuperscript{16} One of the main offices of the IAF was in Frankfurt, but regional groups emerged throughout West Germany.

Of particular concern to the organization was the Nationality Law of the German Empire and States, which dated back to 1913 and was based on the notion of \textit{jus sanguinis}. The law stipulated that German nationality would be conferred on “legitimate and legitimised children of German fathers with an \textit{jus sanguinis a patre}.”\textsuperscript{17} This meant that the nationality of a child was based on that of the father. This in fact caused problems for German women especially in cases of divorce and child custody, where the law of the husband’s country superseded.\textsuperscript{18} Before 1953, moreover, German women lost their citizenship upon marriage to a foreigner. In 1957, an equality statute eliminated the

\textsuperscript{15} The organization’s German title is \textit{Interessengemeinschaft der mit Ausländern verheirateten Frauen} (IAF), and it is now called Association of Binaional Families and Partnerships (\textit{Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften, e.V.}). Refer to their website: \url{http://www.verband-binationaler.de/index.php?id=50} [Accessed May 1, 2013]. Julia Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan’: Migration and the Challenges of Interethnic Marriages in Postwar Germany,” \textit{Contemporary European History} 22:2 (May 2013): 222.

\textsuperscript{16} Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan,’” 222. Wolf-Almanasreh created the organization based on fear that her husband would be a victim of backlash, as Germans began deporting Arabs after the Olympics.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Jus sanguinis} was based on the principle of blood and descent, whereas \textit{jus soli} was based on the principle of soil. See Mathias Bös, “The Legal Construction of Membership: Nationality Law in Germany and the United States,” \textit{Program for the Study of Germany and Europe, Working Paper Series} No. 00.5 (Cambridge, MA: Minda de Gunzberg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, 2000), 9. For an analysis of citizenship and nationalism in Germany, refer to Rogers Brubaker, \textit{Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany} (1992; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 50-72, 75-84, 114-37, and 165-178. Refer also to Robinson, “Schwarze Deutsche Kräfte,” 2-3. In the article, she briefly discussed this law with regards to black people in Germany. It is important to note that changes were made to the nationality law during National Socialism.

\textsuperscript{18} Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan,’” 206.
automatic loss of citizenship, yet the codification of gender parity in West German law would be gradual.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, these German women’s campaign to change legislation was as much about ethnicity and race as it was about gender and power. Drawing from their personal experiences, these white German women knew that their children’s exclusion from citizenship derived from the fact that the notion of Germanness was highly gendered and racialized; in this case, the law codified Germanness as monoracial. IAF activists advocated for their children and themselves, as they wanted their children to be able to claim German nationality. As historian Julia Woesthoff claimed, “it was the rights of German women as German female citizens and German wives – specifically, their right to choose their spouses and live with their families in Germany – that were also at the heart of IAF’s concerns and efforts.”\textsuperscript{20} The women in IAF worked together, which resulted in a law in 1974 that established “full ius sanguinis a patre et a matre.”\textsuperscript{21} A reform of the Private International Law also came into effect in 1986, and this law specifically dealt with legal proceedings of different countries in the case of intermarriages.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, 205.
\item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, 223.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Böös, “The Legal Construction of Membership,” 11. In fact, literary scholar Marilyn Sephcle has remarked that on January 1, 1975 a law was passed that recognized children born of German mothers and foreign fathers as German. See Marilyn Sephcle, “Black Germans and Their Compatriots,” in \textit{The African-German Experience: Critical Essays}, eds. Carol A. Blackshire-Belay (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 17. Sephcle also saw this organization as an early example of anti-racism work. Moreover, on January 1, 2000 the German parliament ratified a new nationality law that allowed existing \textit{ius sanguinis} laws to remain in place, but also implemented \textit{ius soli} laws, especially for children whose parents had legally resided in Germany for at least eight years. By the time these children reach the age of twenty-three, they had to decide whether they wanted German nationality or risked losing their second nationality. See Böös, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan,’” 206.
\end{itemize}
The larger mandate of the IAF focused on interethnic issues that pertained to families with one foreign and one German parent.\textsuperscript{23} The IAF organized seminars, educational workshops, and social and intercultural activities, while compiling reports and statistics and offering counseling sessions for interethnic families. The IAF attempted to educate the public about intermarriage and interethnic partnerships and sought to change opinions and stereotypes. The IAF also published a journal entitled \textit{West Meets East} as well as other resources with regards to parenting interethnic children. One of the IAF’s central objectives, according to member Heidemarie Pandey, was “the integration of bicultural families in Germany,” as a growing number of children in German schools were from bicultural families.\textsuperscript{24} The number of interethnic children continued to increase, with one out of twenty children having bicultural heritage by the 1990s. One out of three to four hundred bicultural children were Black German.\textsuperscript{25}

Some Afro-Germans were also involved in a variety of political groups, including the women’s and feminist movement in West Germany. Women such as Katharina Oguntoyé, Ika Hügel-Marshall, Elke Jank, Marion Kraft, and others participated locally in marches, demonstrations, and activities related to gender equality.\textsuperscript{26} In Hügel-Marshall’s memoir, \textit{Invisible Woman}, she discussed her engagement within the women’s

\textsuperscript{23} From the postwar years until 1995, more German women married foreigners than German men. In 1995, 28,306 German men began to marry foreign women, where as only 26,554 German women married foreign men. German women tended to become involved with Turks followed by Yugoslav, Italians, and Americans while German men partners were Poles and then Thai and Russian women. \textit{Ibid.}, 205.

\textsuperscript{24} Sephcle, “Black Germans and Their Compatriots,” 17.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{26} Oguntoyé was involved in several movements in West Berlin, and she remarked in an interview, “I was indeed an ‘old activist’ and had long been in the women’s movement. But everything really began with \textit{Farbe bekennen}.” Oguntoyé, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 23. The German text: “Ich war ja eine ‘alte Aktivistin’ und ja schon länger in der Frauenbewegung unterwegs. Aber alles fing eigentlich erst richtig mit Farbe bekennen an.” Elke Jank was involved in feminist and lesbian groups in Bremen, and Marion Kraft was involved with groups in Bielefeld.
movement in Frankfurt. Adopting “the personal is political” as her mantra, Hügel-Marshall, along with her feminist friends, decided to establish a women’s shelter in Frankfurt, which became one of the first women’s shelter in Germany. Housed in a commercial building, the shelter had a library on the top floor as well as reading and recreational rooms and a bar on the ground floor. Hügel-Marshall also participated in a “Down with Paragraph 218” march from the Frankfurt Women’s Center to Holland to protest the criminalization of abortion in West Germany. The abortion campaigns marked the first stage of the women’s movement from 1972-1975. In East Germany, abortions until twelve weeks of pregnancy became legal in 1972, and West Germany also decriminalized abortion in 1976. In addition to the march, Hügel-Marshall also served as an advisor and escort, accompanying women to Holland to obtain abortions. Although her experiences in the movement were rewarding, they were also, at times, disappointing. She recalled why in her memoir:

Singly and in groups, we are fighting for equal rights and against oppression. But not against racism. None of my sisters in the women’s groups—no one in the entire women’s movement, in fact—is interested in

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30 Hügel-Marshall, 98.
hearing the story of black women’s struggles. They don’t want to see that our society is racist as well as sexist.\(^{31}\)

Moreover, as the only Black German woman in a feminist group in Frankfurt, she found it difficult to broach topics of racism because when she did her fellow feminist “sisters” quickly dismissed her. At a meeting at the Frankfurt Women’s Center, Hügel-Marshall stated that, “As a black woman, I feel that our struggle for equality against sexism and oppression has overlooked the problem of racism.” Her colleagues stared blankly at her.\(^{32}\) Later, one stated in defense of the group, “Come on, you know we’re different from other women. How could we, as feminists, have anything against blacks? If you have a specific problem to raise, okay, but try to leave skin color out of it.”\(^{33}\) Hügel-Marshall’s experiences were not unlike those of women of color in the U.S. feminist

\(^{31}\) Ibd. See also Deborah Jansen, “The Subject in Black and White: Afro-German Identity Formation in Ika Hügel-Marshall’s Autobiography Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben,” Women in German Yearbook 21 (2005): 74. In this article, Jansen also examined Hügel-Marshall’s feminist activism. A number of scholars have analyzed Hügel-Marshall’s autobiography, including Michelle M. Wright, Jennifer Michaels, Maren Knebel, and Sonya Donaldson. See Wright, “In a Nation or a Diaspora? Gender, Sexuality and Afro-German Subject Formation,” in From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany, eds. Maria I Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (Munster: LIT, 2010), 265-286; Michaels, “Multi-Ethnicity and Cultural Identity: Afro-German Women Writers’ Struggle for Identity in Postunification Germany,” in German Memory Contexts: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse Since 1990, eds. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester: Camden House, 2006), 209-228; Maren Knebel, “Developing Critical Consciousness: Representations of Race and Gender in Two Afro-German Works,” (MA Thesis: West Virginia University, 1999), chapter two; and Sonya Donaldson, “(Ir)reconcilable Differences?: The Search for Identity in Afro-German Autobiography” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2012), chapter two.

\(^{32}\) Hügel-Marshall, Invisible Woman, 98.

\(^{33}\) Ibd., 99. Some have argued that Lorde’s presence in West Berlin also helped to change the tenor of the West German women’s movement, as these feminists began to realize how fighting against racism mattered. See also Oguntoye, “Mein Coming-out als Schwarze Lesbe in Deutschland,” 161 and Katharina Gerund, “Visions of (Global) Sisterhood and Black Solidarity: Audre Lorde,” in Transatlantic Cultural Exchange: African American Women’s Art and Activism in West Germany (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), esp. 175-191. Please also refer to the film Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984-1992 in which Ilona Bubeck and Traude Bührmann speak about Lorde’s influence on white West German women.
movement of the 1970s and 1980s, where many took stands against the privileging of
gender over race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class.\textsuperscript{34}

In an interview, moreover, Katharina Oguntoye expressed similar feelings about
being one of the only black people involved in the lesbian and feminist movements in
Berlin. Oguntoye claimed that, “We were always by ourselves. I still remember Yara.
She was the first black women that I met in the sub[cultural scene]. What I mean is that I
already knew some [women] in other contexts, but just not in the political movement.”\textsuperscript{35}
Oguntoye further remarked in another article, “In the German Wom[en] scene there is
scarely[sic] a handful of Black women who are recognised as Black. We are hopelessly
in the minority so that our demand for recognition of our real personalities and our wish
to abolish the cliché picture of us and African culture was simply not fulfilled.”\textsuperscript{36}

Prior to ISD and ADEFRA, Afro-Germans made earlier attempts to organize. In
1977, an Afro-German lesbian group began. But the group “was wrecked under the eyes
of the women’s scene in Berlin in a very painful way. Out of the fifteen women of that
group only one has been ready to do active work in a Black women’s community once

\textsuperscript{34} The literature on this theme in the United States is rather extensive, for a few examples see Hull, Scott,
and Smith, eds. \textit{But Some of Us Are Brave} and Gloria Anzaldua, ed. \textit{Making Face, Making Soul. Haciendo
These feminists focused on intersectional approaches to race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. For
additional works on intersectionality, please refer to Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins:
Intersectionality Studies: Thoery, Applications, and Praxis,” in “Intersectionality: Theorizing Power,
Empowering Theory,” eds. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, special issue,
\textit{Signs} 38:4 (Summer 2013): 785-810.

\textsuperscript{35} Oguntoye, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 21-22. The German text: “Das waren ja immer wir als
Einzelne. Ich erinnere mich noch an Yara. Sie war eine der ersten Schwarzen Frauen, die ich im Sub
kennengelernt habe. Was ich meine ist, dass ich schon einige in anderen Zusammenhaengen kannte, aber
eben nicht in der politische Bewegung.”

\textsuperscript{36} Oguntoye, “The Black German and the Womens,” p. 4.
more.” In 1982, moreover, a group of Black German youths began meeting in Dusseldorf, although the group did not last long. According to Oguntoye, “The dissolving of a group [in general] is traumatic because of the fear of never being able to have a Black community again[,] which only intensifys[sic] the feeling of isolation. This kind of pain and the danger of the following embitterment was known to all Afro-Germans. To succeed in avoiding this, or at least recovering from it, is our only chance: That is our goal.” Some Afro-Germans managed to do just that with the establishment of the Initiative of Black Germans (ISD) and Afro-German women (ADEFRA).

“Wo ist deine Heimat—ich meine, deine richtige?”: Black Germans, ISD, and the Birth of the Afro-German Movement

The invitation letter for the first national meeting of Afro-Germans, held in Wiesbaden near Frankfurt in 1985, satirically asked its readers a familiar question: “Where is your native country, I mean your real homeland?” Black Germans were tired of the common belief that “to be German meant to be white” and of encounters with white German compatriots, in which they continually answered personal questions, explaining that they were in fact native-born. As result of these experiences, Afro-

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37 Ibid., 8. I presume one of the women who had the courage to pursue work again within the Black women’s community was Oguntoye.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 While the acronyms remain the same, ISD is now called Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland, and ADEFRA is now called Schwarze deutsche Frauen und Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland.


Germans sought to unite from across West Germany, socialize with one another – sharing their mutual experiences of exclusion, isolation, and frustration – and to agitate for change.

Over the same period, some of the early research meetings and interviews for *Farbe bekennen* – held by May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz – helped to inspire Afro-Germans’ to seek interpersonal contact, especially as rumors spread about the anthology. In chapter one, I argued that the volume gave Afro-Germans the courage refashion their identities, forge connections, record their histories, and establish organizations.\(^43\) Several Black German activists and scholars, moreover, have remarked that *Farbe bekennen* was a medium through which networking and connecting became possible.\(^44\) As Oguntoye maintained in the foreword of the twentieth-anniversary edition of the volume, “*Farbe bekennen* was the trigger, catalyst, and an inspiration for this generation.”\(^45\) This section analyzes the first wave of Afro-German activism from 1985 to the mid-1990s, showing how the Initiative of Black Germans (ISD) developed

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44 Piesche, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 25. Wiedenroth and Emde were contributors to *Farbe bekennen*, and learn more about their contributions in chapter three.

and addressing its major activities. Through ISD, Afro-Germans not only bonded with one another, but validated their identity and gained visibility in German society. As Afro-German activist and co-founder of ISD and ADEFRA in Munich Judy Gummich remarked:

[ Afro-Germans] have organized ourselves to collectively develop strength in our daily fight against racism, to raise our voices, and demand our rights and dignity, to change the racist stereotypical image of black people by gradually making our history and social realities visible, to push white Germans to think about their racism, especially concerning the structures and backgrounds, [and] to no longer be convinced that blackness and Germanness is a contradiction.

Eleonore Wiedenroth (later Wiedenroth-Coulibaly), Helga Emde, and Christiana Ampedu organized the first national meeting of Black Germans at the Evangelical City

46 I am aware that Black Germans were politically active during the German colonial period and afterwards. But I posit that the first stage of the new Afro-German movement occurred from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s.

Office for Young People on November 2nd, 1985 in Wiesbaden. The organizers also wanted to establish a Black German group in the Hessen and Rhineland-Palatinate areas and advertised the event in local newspapers and on radio and television stations in these regions. These Afro-German women understood that the meeting had the potential to transform their lives. In a follow-up letter to participants on November 26th, the organizers expressed their excitement at the number of Afro-Germans who travelled from long distances to take part in the event. Afro-Germans’ attendance at the meeting also revealed that, “the idea for such a meeting was not at all wrong.” Approximately one hundred Black Germans attended, ranging from forty year olds to teenagers. Yet in an interview, Wiedenroth claimed that only thirty or so were in attendance at that first meeting. Helga Emde expressed her emotions about the first national meeting in an


50 Christiana, Eleonore, Nadja, and Sunny letter to November 2nd participants, November 26, 1985, no page number, Folder May Projekt Afro-Deutsche/Zeitungsartikel über Afro-deutsche/Schwarze in den Medien. The Collection of May Ayim. The letter also mentioned attaching a list of attendees, but sadly the list was not with the letter.


article, recalling that, “It was overwhelming. About one hundred Black people from all over Germany. It was breathtaking. Black people of all shades, sizes and ages. And the most confusing moment for me was hearing the language, German, not English. And only Black people.” For many Afro-Germans, this meeting was the first time that they had contact with other Black Germans. The organizers also claimed that the conversations and exchanges that occurred motivated them. The stories that Afro-German participants revealed, moreover, affirmed that they shared a common predicament. Black Germans’ ideas and interactions at the November 2\textsuperscript{nd} meeting helped to breakdown some of their defense mechanisms, especially as they cultivated relationships with each other. Yet, listening to the narratives from fellow participants remained difficult for the Rhine-Main circle, and they needed time to recover from the meeting because the discussions brought back memories of their own pasts. Nonetheless, the meeting opened up possibilities for Black Germans, and the organizers urged participants to write, call, and/or visit to share their experiences about the meeting and offer suggestions for future projects.

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53 Emde, “I too am German—An Afro-German Perspective,” 40.
55 Christiana, Eleonore, Nadja, and Sunny follow-up letter to November 2nd participants, November 26, 1985, no page number.
56 \textit{Ibid.}
57 \textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushright}
gatherings served as the initial impetus for the larger Afro-German movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

As a matter of fact, the November 1985 meeting in Wiesbaden led to the creation of the Initiative of Black Germans.58 There is a consensus that the Initiative of Black Germans was established between 1985 and 1986. But the exact year that some of the regional groups of ISD emerged in cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, or Munich is difficult to pinpoint due in part to discrepancies in both the primary and secondary sources. According to Katharina Oguntoye, “[Eleonore Wiedenroth] was also one of the female initiators of the first Afro-German group meeting in Wiesbaden-Frankfurt a.M., that occurred in 1985 and led to the 1986 establishment of ISD in Berlin.”59 ISD-Berlin activist and Die Zeit journalist Jeannine Kantara claimed that, “A few weeks after the release of Farbe bekennen some Afro-Germans from Berlin travelled to Wiesbaden for the national meeting of the Initiative of Black Germans (ISD), which had just been founded in Hessen. Inspired by this meeting, the Initiative of Black Germans, e.V. was established in the spring of 1987.”60 Oguntoye also remarked that, “Then, in 1986 the first meeting of ISD took place and the book Farbe bekennen was published.”61 Prior to the establishment of ISD-Berlin, specifically “when the Saarland Broadcasting Service

58 Emde, 39.


aired the 1986 documentary, ‘Germans are white, Negroes cannot be Germans,’” Kantara stated, “we were approximately twenty young [Afro-Germans] in a Berlin backyard apartment who came together in order to watch the movie and discuss it. Much of these inconsistencies have to do with individual members’ memories of the initial stages of the Afro-German movement and when each person became involved in the movement. They also suggest the urgency of documenting these histories within the Afro-German community, particularly as the founders become older and continue to be further removed from the movement. Here, issues of the past, memory, and recollection – similar to scholarship on German national memory and commemoration by Rudy Koshar and Alon Confino – need to be taken into consideration when one studies Afro-Germans’ early efforts at mobilization. Afro-Germans’ recollections and acts of remembrance may in fact mirror other German efforts to navigate its past.

Beginning in 1986, ISD-Berlin sought to challenge the marginalization, racism, and isolation that Afro-Germans endured in a majority white environment. Some of members of the ISD-Berlin group were Ayim, Amoetang, Oguntoye, Abena Adomako, Danny Hafke, Jeannine Kantara, Katja Kinder, Michael “Mike” Reichel, Patricia Elcock, Nikolai Kinder, Nii Addy, Kingsley Addy, Angela Alagiyawanna, Daniel Alagiyawanna,


64 ISD-Berlin Initiative Schwarze Deutsche und Schwarze in Deutschland e.V., brochure, n.d., no page number, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom.
and Natalie Asfaha.\textsuperscript{65} In addition to Berlin, the Rhine-Main chapter of the Initiative of Black Germans was established in 1986 and included Wiedenroth, Emde, Daniella Reichert, Susan Wright, Gisela Wright, Vera Holzhauser, Peter Croll, and Magdy Abu-Gindy, to name a few.\textsuperscript{66} Moreover, Afro-German activists Eleonore Wiedenroth and Sascha Zinflou stated in an article that, “With the creation of (still at the time) the Initiative of Black Germans, ISD for short, [we] directly confronted two central illusions within the Federal Republic. The first illusion was: ‘Germany is not an immigration country,’ and the other: ‘There is no racism in Germany.’”\textsuperscript{67} By 1988, there were affiliated ISD groups in Kiel, Duisburg, Dusseldorf/Cologne, Bielefeld, Mainz, Stuttgart, Hamburg/North, and Freiburg.\textsuperscript{68} By 1989, there were ISD groups in ten West German cities, and “each group [was] independent and organized according to its needs but all

\textsuperscript{65} I am able to recognize these individuals as member of ISD based on letters, minute meetings, a few membership lists, among other sources. Since there is no standing archive of the movement, it is hard to obtain more specifics about these formative years. See, for example, ISD-Berlin, “Mitglieder (Stand: 09.03.87),” Folder Literatur eV. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim; ISD-Berlin, “I.S.D. – Mitglieder (Stand: 25.04.87),” Folder Kontakte, nationale, internationale, Afro-Scene, The Private Collection of May Ayim; and ISD-Berlin, “I.S.D. Berlin e.V. Mitglieder/Interessenten (Stand: 12.09.88),” The Private Collection of May Ayim. Before her death, Vera Heyer, a member of ISD and ADEFRA collected materials pertaining to Afro-Germans and the larger African diaspora. Recently, there have been efforts to create an archive in Berlin with Heyer’s materials that previously had been in someone’s Berlin basement for years. See “Each One Teach One Projekt” \url{http://bibliothekarisch.de/blog/2012/11/25/aufruf-zur-online-abstimmung-foerderung-der-each-one-teach-one-bibliothek-in-berlin-bis-2-12/} [Accessed May 15, 2013]. See also Tina Bach, “Schwarze Deutsche Literatur: Eine Einführung,” freitext 18 (Oktober 2011): esp. 23 and Leroy Hopkins, “Race, Nationality and Culture: The African Diaspora in Germany,” in \textit{Who is a German? Historical and Modern Perspectives of Africans in Germany}, ed. Leroy Hopkins, Harry & Helen Gray Humanities Program Series Vol. 5 (1999): 22 and n47.


groups accepted the name ISD. After the fall of the wall, ISD materialized in the former East in cities such as Dresden and Leipzig. In 1992, ISD-Berlin, ISD-Hamburg, and ISD-Rhine-Main continued to remain active, and an ISD-North Rhine-Westphalia, a Black Freiburg group, and a Ngoma Leipzig group also emerged. As more ISD groups developed, it revealed how the idea of an inclusive diasporic community resonated with others across Germany. It also emphasized Afro-Germans’ efforts to claim and validate Black German identity and consciousness throughout German society. These groups also helped Afro-Germans to negotiate their personal and collective Afro-German identities, reworking notions of Germanness to be more representative and reflect reality. The establishment of these regional branches enabled Afro-Germans to become agents and active in a number of political and cultural causes that drew attention to Afro-Germans’ history in the country. Now an examination of the inner-workings and configuration of ISD will follow below, and it will show how Afro-Germans developed a less hierarchical, yet structured and autonomous organizations throughout Germany.

During early organizational ISD meetings, the regional branches used these spaces to evaluate the group’s progress and build their cultural autonomy. At a December 1987 meeting in Berlin, regional ISD working groups reported on their activities, including social events with other Black Germans. Each regional


representative at the meeting provided a short assessment of their group and shared their difficulties and accomplishments. For example, the Frankfurt/Wiesbaden group had been around for approximately two to three years, and during that time had organized monthly meetings. Unfortunately members of ISD-Frankfurt/Wiesbaden criticized themselves for allowing organizational matters to get the better of them, especially as some of the personal exchanges had ceased to happen. In the beginning, they relied upon newspapers to advertise their events and meetings, but eventually had a few problems with the local press and decided to forego this method. The Cologne/Dusseldorf group formed in 1987, and came together because of the book Farbe bekennen. The group grew due to the response of Black Germans and the distribution of flyers and advertisements in newspapers. Monthly meetings alternated between Cologne and Dusseldorf, although problems emerged due to the distances that members had to travel. The group continued to employ advertisements to acquire new members. ISD-Cologne/Dusseldorf remained committed to cultivating close personal contacts and undertaking social activities together.

In Munich, ISD originated through a reading of Farbe bekennen and had been around for about one year when it reported in 1987. At the time, their group consisted of women, but they were actively searching for male members in the area. The members of ISD-Munich continued to establish personal connections with one another and


73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.
acknowledged their desire to express their own interests. Eventually, Afro-German men such as Thomas Della (later Tahir Della), Marc Reis, and a few others became involved. In Bielefeld, two women established a group based on the need for political work and an assessment of their personal experiences. In Berlin, the local ISD group had been around for a year and a half and developed on the basis of previous friendships, which helped them expand the membership basis. At the time, the group had five subgroups with a variety of emphases including a children’s and youth group (*Kinder & Jugendgruppe, KiJu*); a women’s group (*Frauengruppe*); a theatre group (*Theatergruppe*), a cultural group (*Kulturgruppe*), and a political group (*Politikgruppe*). Each one of these regional groups largely represented an urban, metropolitan area, where a number of universities and cultural institutions and centers were located. The development of these ISD groups in these areas also highlighted the fact that the movement gained momentum among students and young professionals. In this way, Black Germans connected to a longer legacy of German intellectual activism.

ISD’s main objectives during its early stages involved the collection of information about Afro-Germans’ personal and collective histories as well as the implementation of

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76 Della is still active in the movement today helping with a number of projects, including a 2012 campaign against profiling. Other men such as Roy Adomako, Yonas Endrias, Patrice Poutrus, Alexander Weheilye, and Austen P. Brandt were also involved in ISD, but not necessarily in the Munich group.

77 *Ibid.*, 2. One of those women was Marion Kraft.

78 In the beginning, the group in Berlin called itself the Initiative of Blacks in Berlin (*Initiative Schwarze in Berlin*). See “May and Mike letter to Helga Emde,” Berlin, March 4, 1987, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

79 *Ibid.*, 2. During the time of the working group meeting, individuals came from Duisburg, Stuttgart, and Freiburg, where there were no collaborative groups at the time.

80 Many of these German cities helped to foster intellectual communities and engender public culture in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and (early) twentieth centuries.
these findings into concrete action that included arranging contact with other Afro-
Germans, developing self-help groups, and initiating anti-racism projects on national and
international levels. In this way, ISD furthered the work of *Farbe bekennen*. In a
brochure for ISD-Rhine-Main, the group stated that:

> To meet as Black Germans/Afro-Germans, exchange ideas and engage
> with one another was a new experience for many of us. The isolation, to
> be surrounded predominantly by whites, without the support of a black
> community is common to all of us. Otherwise, we are very different,
> through our socialization, our age, our characters, our interests, our
> experiences in family life, hetero- or homosexual men or women, and in
> our connections to our black or white part of our heritage.

Here, socializing with one another by going to the movies or meeting at cafes continued
to help Afro-Germans emerge from their isolation. Yet, ISD-Rhine-Main also
acknowledged and understood their differences to be central to their burgeoning
community.

Another motivation for the organization was to encourage Afro-Germans to have a
positive self-consciousness by cultivating a black and diasporic identity. In another
brochure, ISD-Karlsruhe clarified that, “With concepts such as ‘Black German’ and
‘Afro-German’ (based on Afro-American), as an expression of our cultural background,
it cannot and should not be limited to origin or skin color alone. In fact, we want Afros
to take the conventional hard step to determine their identity for themselves instead of it

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being determined for them” – a theme echoed by ISD-Rhine-Main.\textsuperscript{83} Afro-Germans acknowledged and nurtured themselves through the collective. ISD also wanted to undertake collaborative work with Black Germans from different social classes and backgrounds and attempted to serve the needs and interests of both Afro- and Asian-German communities.\textsuperscript{84} It also envisioned future projects that would broaden and strengthen Afro-Germans public recognition, while also cultivating solidarity with other associations working against discrimination and racism and consciousness-raising activities in a white German society.\textsuperscript{85} Here, it remained important for ISD “to strengthen the self-esteem of its individual members and to assert the rights of Blacks in German society, but [ISD] also aimed to develop contacts with Black movements in other countries.”\textsuperscript{86} In another brochure, the ISD-Stuttgart group observed that, “We believe that our joint activities reinforces solidarity inwardly and outwardly and strengthens us and gives us the ability to endure everyday racism better.”\textsuperscript{87} “In addition,” ISD “wanted


to raise awareness among white Germans with respect to all minorities in this country. This means that the self-image of Germans must be scrutinized and corrected, in which [white Germans] would finally recognize that we live in a multinational society.”

The regional ISD groups functioned independently from one another, but maintained the overarching goals of working against racism, community-building, and empowerment. The organizational structure of these regional groups was diffuse, and the groups did not necessarily have a well-defined internal governing structure, although each of the groups had a finance unit (Finanzgruppe). The unit would have a minimum of two people: one person to oversee the bank account and another to check all of the financial records, with the positions preferably occupied by one Afro-German woman and one Afro-German man. These individuals had to be members of their regional ISD groups and also collected dues from their members. During special occasions, the financial units needed to send newsletters to all ISD-regional groups informing them of their regional group’s standing. ISD-Berlin had a bank account that helped to defray the cost of its magazine *afro look* and finance additional projects.

ISD also organized approximately two planning meetings per year that occurred in different cities across West and then reunified Germany. At these meetings (Koordinationstreffen, KT), representatives from regional groups and working groups would meet to coordinate activities and subsequent meetings as well as report on their

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90 ISD, “Protokoll des Finanztreffens,” no page number.
overall progress. Before the meetings, members of the finance units were asked to provide reports along with the appropriate financial documentation to the KT. In addition to clarifying and managing the budget, the regional ISD groups also discussed the inner-dynamics of their organizations. At the 1991 Koordinationstreffen in Berlin, ISD groups discussed instituting a Speaker’s Council and a KT Secretary. The Council:

would be chosen by the plenary assembly for a year. The Council had the function of a board of directors and decided on the coordination meetings and represents ISD to other institutions. The Council will consist of three members. In the Council, at least one man and one woman must be represented.91

The Speaker’s Council would also create a budget listing information about ISD group projects in September for the following year, to be approved at the coordination meeting.92 The Coordination Secretary would serve as an advisory board rather than a decision-making body and would help with the flow of information among the groups as well as the documentation of events within the Black German movement.93

During the early years of the Initiative of Black Germans, Afro-Germans not only used the regional groups as social spaces, but they also functioned as sites that attempted to shape Afro-German identity, disseminate relevant materials about projects, and engage in activism. In many ways, the regional branches of ISD also helped Afro-Germans invent new traditions that created a sense of continuity and social cohesion. Here, I engage with nationalism scholar Eric Hobsbawm who has asserted that:


93 Ibid., 1.
‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.\textsuperscript{94}

Afro-Germans’ organizations, activities, and practices became “invented traditions,” and these alternative customs helped Black Germans reimagine their community. These traditions also contrasted with other West German political groups that often relegated or ignored Black Germans’ concerns with everyday forms of racism. Afro-Germans created new rituals that maintained a symbolic function, and they engendered their alternative traditions in four distinct ways. First, as discussed further in chapter five, ISD-Berlin established Black History Month (BHM) events that focused on Afro-diasporic culture, identity, and history. ISD-Berlin worked together with a variety of people of color organizations and state institutions that promoted anti-discrimination and anti-racism initiatives.\textsuperscript{95} The first Black History Month celebration in February of 1990 lasted a week. ISD-Berlin organized multiple events at the subsequent annual BHMs.\textsuperscript{96} The Black History Months in Berlin served as a source of continuity and sociability within the movement, and other regional ISD groups helped to plan diverse seminars and workshops.\textsuperscript{97} More importantly, Black History Month allowed Afro-Germans to actively


\textsuperscript{95} I will discuss ISD-Berlin’s Black History Month celebrations in more detail in chapter five. See ISD, “Black History Month Programm 17.-25. Februar 1990,” Berlin, p. 1, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

\textsuperscript{96} Sometimes BHM events would begin at the end of January and continue until early March.

engage in translocal and transnational activism, as they continued to cultivate connections to people of color and represent the African diaspora in Germany. The BHM was as an important and empowering event that united Black Germans.

Second, ISD-Berlin established a magazine entitled Uncle Tom’s Fist (Onkel Tom’s Faust) in 1988 and used it “as the mouthpiece of the [organization]” as well as other regional ISD-groups. ISD-Berlin combined the docile figure of “Uncle Tom” with the empowering symbol of the fist – especially from the 1968 Olympics. In the first issue of the magazine, the editorial team claimed that:

The name Uncle Tom’s Fist is a metaphor with which we want to symbolize that blacks will no longer tolerate the racism and oppression of today! We have given Uncle Tom a fist to symbolize that we want to defend ourselves. We do not understand the fist, as one might think, as a sign of authority, but as a sign of an anti-racist campaign.

Yet, the title was too controversial and militant for some members of the organization.

Before further disputes emerged, editors changed the title of the magazine to afro look: a

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99 At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, two African American athletes, Tom Smith and John Carlos, having won gold and bronze medals respectively, raised their fists. The two men wore black gloves and enacted the black power salute, which was considered a symbol of resistance and defiance. For more on this protest and black athletes, refer to: Harry Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete (New York: Free Press, 1970); Amy Bass, Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002); Eric Zolov, “Showcasing the ‘Land of Tomorrow’: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics,” The Americas 61:2 (October 2004), 159-88; Douglas Hartmann, “The Politics of Race and Sport: Resistance and Domination in the 1968 African American Olympic Protest Movement,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 19:3 (1996), 548-66; and Hartmann, Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). During the 1968 Olympics, a Czech gymnast, Vera Caslavska, also performed a silent protest. I would like to thank Ramon Jackson for sharing the information about Caslavska and some of the references.

100 ISD-Berlin, “In eigener Sache,” p. 3, The Author’s Private Collection. The German text: “Der Name Onkel Tom’s Faust ist eine metaphore mit der wir symbolisieren wollen, daß Schwarze von heute Rassismus und Unterdrückung nicht mehr hinnehmen werden! Wir haben Onkel Tom eine Faust gegeben um zu symbolisieren, daß wir uns wehren wollen. Wir begreifen die Faust nicht, wie man vielleicht meinen könnte, als Zeichen der Gewalt, sondern als Zeichen der gegen Rassismus gerichteten Aktion.” The bolded text was ISD’s emphasis.
magazine of Black Germans (*afro look: eine zeitschrift von schwarzen deutschen*) in 1988.101

Originally planned as a cultural magazine, *afro look* also served as the political voice of ISD. The magazine blended German and Afro-diasporic traditions and maintained an anti-racist and internationalist perspective, offering wide-ranging materials on Afro-Germans and the African diaspora more generally.102 Appearing every three months, the journal functioned as a form of intellectual activism and social cohesion.103 Afro-Germans students used the magazine to engender their own traditions. They also promoted their interests, linking local, national, and global developments and emphasized the significance of writing to establish connections throughout the diaspora. Afro-German women such as Ricky Reiser, Katharina Ogutnoye, May Ayim, and Jeannine Kantara, along with men, including Kingsley Addy, Mike Reichel, and John Amoateng contributed poems, designs, interviews, and articles to a burgeoning Afro-German literary scene.104

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102 For works that analyze *afro look*, please refer to the following: Kantara, “Die Geschichte der *afro look*,” 160-62; Hopkins, “Speak, so I might see you!;” Anne Adams, “*afro look: magazine of blacks in germany; An Africanist Analysis,*” in *Africa, Europe and (Post)Colonialism: Racism, Migration and Diaspora in African Literatures*, eds. Susan Arndt and Marek Spitzok von Brisinski (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 2006), 257-278; and Francine Jobatey, “*Afro Look: Die Geschichte einer Zeitschrift von Schwarzen Deutschen*” (PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 2000). Jobatey, a Black German, examined the first ten years of the journal and investigated the role of black and white women in *afro look* in chapter four as well as the significance of poetry in the Afro-German community in chapter five.

103 See chapter three for a sustained discussion on Afro-Germans’ intellectual activism.

104 Amoateng served as the editor of Onkel Tom’s Faust, but then by the early 1990s, Ricky Reiser became the editor. ISD-Berlin, “Impressum,” p. 2, The Author’s Private Collection. The magazine was affiliated with ISD from 1988 to 1997. From 1997-1999, Reiser continued to publish the journal without the institutional or financial support of ISD, and Reiser published the last issue Nr. 31/32 in 1999. I was able to find almost all issues of the magazine except two.
In addition to \textit{afro look}, members of ISD-Berlin also created a journal called, \textit{Blite}, for “youth” between the ages of fourteen and twenty.\textsuperscript{105} ISD-Munich also created a regional newsletter entitled \textit{Subculture} that began in the spring of 1990.\textsuperscript{106} These cultural productions allowed Afro-Germans to convey their feelings and claim and retain recognition in society, reshaping the boundaries of German national identity and the literary tradition in the process. Afro-Germans also used the publications to cultivate their sense of a diasporic self and belonging in Germany. Black German literary, artistic, and visual contributions enabled them to be express their personality and emotions. ISD-Berlin developed a tangible resource that helped Afro-Germans survive in Germany.

Third, each regional ISD group organized local events, conferences, and workshops, which often dealt with Afro-German history, the African diaspora, racism, and discrimination in Germany and globally. In doing so, they engendered an Afro-German activist tradition that did not eschew taboo intellectual topics such as race, racism, and the rise of ethno-nationalism and xenophobia in Germany. Afro-Germans also used these activities as a form of racial advocacy.\textsuperscript{107} They reimagined their history

\textsuperscript{105} Kantara, 162. For more information on \textit{Blite}, see Oliver Seifert, “Bericht über das Jugendprojekt ,,Blite“ – eine Quartalzeitschrift von Schwarzen Jugendlichen,” in \textit{The BlackBook: Deutschlands Häutungen}, eds. AntiDiskrimierungs Büro (ADB) Köln and cyberNomads (Frankfurt am Main and London: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Komminkation, 2004), 163-66. In the 1990s, there was also a monthly magazine entitled \textit{Strangers}, in which one member of ISD-Dusseldorf was involved with the publication. See Hopkins, “Race, Nationality and Culture,” 21.


and identity in the nation by emphasizing their linkages to regions outside of Germany such as Burkina Faso and South Africa (to name a few). The ISD-Rhine-Main group planned and hosted, for instance, an event entitled “Black Consciousness, Black Politics,” that explored the politics of Thomas Sankara, the President of Burkina Faso from 1983-1987. This two-day conference included speakers and panels that explained Sankara’s policies and politics, described the history of Burkina Faso and the neighboring country of Mali, and discussed African politics more broadly. The conference ended with a debate about the “contemporary perspective of black people in a white dominated world.” With this event, the ISD-Rhine-Main group consciously engaged in diasporic activism, navigating African history and black history. In celebration of ISD-Berlin’s third anniversary, the group organized weeklong events from July 10th through 15th, 1989, during which the group also hosted a South Africa Day on July 14th. At ISD’s South Africa Day, members held a reading with South African female authors; an exhibition and video about the country; and a presentation about South Africa with a discussion session. “Especially for us Germans,” Mike Reichel, an activist of ISD-Berlin, wrote, “whether we are black or white, it is important to learn about what is happening in South Africa, as the Federal Republic is one of the main trading partners

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109 ISD-Rhine-Main, “Schwarzes Bewusstsein-Schwarze Politik” (program), Wiesbaden, November 12-14, 1993, no page number, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom. At this point, ISD was called Initiative Schwarze Deutsche und Schwarze in Deutschland.


and supporters of the Apartheid regime.” The Apartheid government represented a racist regime, where individuals of African decent were the majority, but ruled by the white minority, and Black Germans, much like other Afro-diasporic groups worldwide, were in solidarity with the South African black and colored populations.

In addition, ISD also sponsored events that focused on the cultural productions and experiences of Afro-Germans. ISD-Munich organized a reading with Black German authors, including Angela Alagiyawanna-Kadalie from Dortmund; Nisma Bux from Munich; Michael Küppers from Dusseldorf; Modupe Laja from Gießen; Sheila Mysorekar from Cologne; and Magali Schmidt from Munich. These authors gained support and visibility within the Afro-German community and also used the opportunity to cultivate relationships to other individuals.

Other activities included publicly confronting racist incidences in Germany. In the spring of 1991, for example, a white German electronic group called Time to Time, from a small town near Frankfurt, re-recorded the old German nursery rhyme “Ten Little Niggers” (Zehn kleine Negerlein). In the racist nursery rhyme, the little “niggers” die one by one, a theme that the group embellished by having the children meet an even more gruesome death at the notoriously violent and crime-ridden Zoo train station (Bahnhof

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Zoo) in Berlin. In a letter, Austen P. Brandt, ISD-Duisburg member, wrote to an attorney and analyzed each stanza of the nursery rhyme, explaining the rhyme’s broader implications for the Black German community. The song was a pop hit, reaching number one on the German bestseller list of May 1991. Members of the ISD-Duisburg group campaigned against it by initiating legal proceedings against Time to Time and its record company, Electrola in Cologne. ISD-Duisburg also wrote to local newspapers. The campaign met with some success, as Electrola removed the song from the market. Members of the ISD-Frankfurt-Main group also established an “Anti-Racism Training” (ART), which helped white Germans understand “their own deeply-embedded psychological and social racist biases.” ISD groups across Germany also reviewed encyclopedias, children’s books, and public school textbooks and pressured publishers to expunge racist language and connotations from their publications. These practices remained politically and emotionally vital to the Afro-German movement, as they continued to engender a progressive tradition.

Fourth, ISD sponsored an annual national meeting (Bundestreffen, BT) in different cities across Germany – a tradition that still exists today –, which helped them forge

115 Bahnhof Zoologischer Garten station was the central transport site in West Berlin, and it was reconstructed and reopened in 2006.
120 Emde, “I too am German—An Afro-German Perspective,” 41.
121 Emde, 41.
friendships. In fact, in 2010, ISD celebrated its twenty-fifth-anniversary of the *Bundestreffen*. These national meetings remained open to all Black Germans and other Afro-diasporic individuals, where they could attend seminar, lectures, film screenings, poetry readings, or performances. These meetings also became an important Afro-diasporic space for emerging Black German artists, who often performed and or introduced their work to the community. Although perhaps the most important institution in terms of providing Afro-Germans with a unified social space, the *Bundestreffen* have not received a detailed analysis by scholars of the Afro-German movement. The *Bundestreffen* represented an example of how the Initiative of Black Germans invented a tradition during its formative years that enabled them to bond and negotiate their identities personally and collectively. Through their activism, Afro-Germans continued to cultivate and maintain friendships to one another that helped to sustain the organization and promoted the cultural and political interests of Afro-Germans as well as to other individuals of the African diaspora in Germany.

The Initiative of Black Germans’ annual *Bundestreffen* constructed a space where Afro-Germans could learn about their history, forging solidarity and community in the process. The BT offered diverse events that were organized for ISD members as well as other Black Germans not affiliated with the organization. ISD considered the first BT to


123 For a short film on the twenty-fifth-anniversary of the BTs, see Julia Rivera, *mEin Viertel 100 - 25 Jahre Bundestreffen* (2011). Rivera is a transgender Black German, who lives in Toronto and Berlin. He currently tours with this film throughout the United States and Canada.

124 It was important to draw attention to Afro-Germans’ legacy, particularly their efforts to combat all forms of discrimination in Germany.
be the November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1985 meeting in Wiesbaden, which was organized by a few Afro-German women, as mentioned previously. The second BT also took place in Wiesbaden on December 6\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1986. At this \textit{Bundestreffen}, a few white Germans were invited who were friends or related to other Black Germans and had an interest in discussing some issues related to racism and discrimination.\footnote{Letter “Hallo Sisters und Brothers, Freaks und Froots!,” n.d., p. 2, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim.} ISD arranged for the press to arrive at the conclusion of the meeting, but one of the invited friends turned out to be journalist, Rainer Luyken. Luyken wrote an insensitive article about the meeting in \textit{Die Zeit}.\footnote{Letter “Hallo Sisters und Brothers, Freaks und Froots!,” n.d., p. 2.} His article relied upon clichés and stereotypes when describing the \textit{Bundestreffen} and its participants, and it upset the Afro-German participants who read Luyken’s article.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}. See also R. Luyken, “Schwarzsein ist nicht genug,” \textit{Die Zeit}, December 26, 1986 and Dagmar Schultz letter to \textit{Die Zeit}, January 20, 1987, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim. After this experience, I believe the organizers restricted subsequent BTs to black people only.} Not all press coverage, however, was hostile or negative. In a German newspaper, entitled \textit{Unsere Zeit} (UZ), a feature and interview appeared about ISD and their second national meeting. At the second \textit{Bundestreffen}, the article pointed out, Afro-Germans celebrated the anniversary of the movement and respective organizations and also sought to “break their ‘culture of silence’ and to stand up for their rights more.”\footnote{“Ausländerhass trifft auch Deutsche: Zweites bundesweites Treffen der ‘Initiative Schwarze Deutsche,’” \textit{Unsere Zeit (UZ)-DKP Zeitung}, December 17, 1986, no page number, Folder May Projekt Afro-Deutsche/Zeitungsartikel über Afro-deutsche/Schwarze in den Medien, The Collection of May Ayim. The German text: “Um ihre ‘Kultur des Schweigens’ zu brechen und stärker für ihre Rechte eintreten zu können.”} For ISD, “The aim of the meeting was, among other things, that the history of Black Germans should not be
considered separate, but must be seen as a part of the entirety of German history.”

During this meeting, Afro-Germans exchanged stories about their experiences and made a decision to cooperate more with one another nationally and internationally. Afro-Germans also contributed their own accounts of the *Bundestreffen* for the press. In one article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Eleonore Wiedenroth claimed that xenophobia was a part of racism and that discrimination had increased in German society. The national meeting, she continued, allowed Afro-Germans and their regional associations to strengthen their networks and “establish effective public relations.” “Black Germans, Wiedenroth added, “also want to further solidarity and cooperation with ‘other oppressed groups such as foreigners,’ because black is the main minority.”

For Afro-Germans, challenging exclusionary beliefs, practices, and legislation for all “black” minorities in Germany remained an important objective of their movement.

As they became more popular, ISD managed to arrange a set cost for the *Bundestreffen*, in an effort to encourage all social classes to attend; ISD wanted the BTs to be an open and inclusive space, where people could cement their Black German bonds and become more politically engaged. By 1987, the *Bundestreffen* became more

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129 “Ausländerhass trifft auch Deutsche,” no page number. The German text: Ziel des Kongresses war unter anderem, dass die Geschichte der schwarzen Deutschen nicht isoliert, sondern als Teil der gesamten deutschen Geschichte zu sehen ist.”


organized and often took place at hostels, ecological and wellness areas, and cultural institutions throughout Germany. Organized by ISD-Munich, the 1989 BT, held in Linden near Munich from September 8th to 10th, 1989, included panels that focused on the topics of racism and prejudices in ISD, Afro-European history, an exhibition on South Africa, a theater workshop, and a make-up workshop. They also organized work session and exchanges with regional ISD groups along with social activities such as t-shirt painting workshops, sports (volleyball, table tennis, etc.), and live music. During the 1991 BT — its sixth annual, held from October 10th thru 13th —, ISD even attended to issues concerning health and included a panel on Gestalt therapy with Black German psychologist Bärbel Kampmann. ISD BT organizers also provided seminars such as “Power and Slavery” (Macht und Sklaverei) and “Information Exchange on the topic of I.S.D.” (Info-Börse zum Thema I.S.D.); a talkshow “Black to Future,” as well as additional workshops. The workshops had an edifying and ideological function, in which Black Germans imparted practices about a variety of topics from hair care to historical figures in the United States and Africa. The events at the BT also illustrated the range and willingness of BT organizers to appeal to and advance diverse interests.

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within the community, carving out a niche for themselves. In particular, it also afforded Afro-German participants an opportunity to process their identity by revealing how heterogeneous Black German identity truly remained.

Through the BTs, ISD created a new Afro-German tradition that served as a source of stability, community, and resistance and that helped Afro-Germans survive in society. At the 1994 BT from May 11th to the 15th, ISD focused on the Maastricht Treaty signed by the European Community and German reunification as well as the implications of these had for Afro-Germans more generally. In particular, ISD “organized this [Bundestreffen] in the common interest of young people.” The five-day event included a number of panels with topics ranging in the anti-racist youth movement in Germany, France, and England, multicultural students, black men in Germany, the socialization of black girls in Germany and many others. ISD also offered panels for Afro-German adults, motivating them to be more politically engaged. The 1994 BT also focused on future generations of Afro-Germans in an effort to instill empowering traits and encourage self-confidence among their youth.

For the tenth BT in 1995 – with the motto “Past, Present and Perspectives of the Black existence in Europe” (Vergangenheit, Gegenwart & Perspektiven Schwarzer Existenz in Europa) –, ISD celebrated the Afro-German movement, but also used the

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137 Members of the European Community formalized the Maastricht Treaty or the treaty on the European Union (TEU) in 1992.


meeting to constructively and critically assess the history of the movement and prepare for the next ten years.\textsuperscript{140} During this BT, held in Berlin, ISD showed films representing ISD and ADEFRA from the last ten years as well as films about Jack Johnson, Angela Davis, Martin Luther King, and other Afro-diasporic individuals.\textsuperscript{141} While the \textit{Bundestreffen} continued to be an Afro-diasporic space that was welcoming, conflicts and scandal developed among different members of the regional branches in which accusations of fraud, hypocrisy, and infidelity emerged. In these cases, some Afro-German relationships could not survive.\textsuperscript{142} At several of the BTs competing notions of authentic blackness made some attendees feel isolated and excluded, as they presumably did not belong. Moreover, if Afro-Germans were in relationships with white Germans, their partners could not attend. Overall, the BTs offered a variety of activities that integrated political, social, intellectual, and psychological themes and helped Afro-Germans stay connected and informed about their history and the diaspora. BT also attracted attention from individuals from the United States, France, Austria, and other countries — showing the transnational appeal that the meeting had gained.\textsuperscript{143} As the next section addresses, ADEFRA, the Afro-German women’s organization, also served a similar role within the movement, specifically attending to black feminist and diasporic themes.


\textsuperscript{142} Several members of ISD often used the BTs as an opportunity to have relations with multiple women. Some of the BTs also tended to be have a number of smaller groups or cliques that not everyone could join. Moreover, the diverse personalities that converged at the BTs also led to tensions and frustrations about black authenticity, solidarity, and activism.

\textsuperscript{143} Some African descended individuals from these countries attended the BT.
Showing Courage: ADEFRA and the Origins of the Black German Women’s Movement

ADEFRA’s twentieth-anniversary brochure stated that the initial meetings with Audre Lorde and her subsequent visits catalyzed the Afro-German movement – a point briefly raised in chapter one.\textsuperscript{144} Afro-German women embodied some of Lorde’s perspectives through their cultural practices and the establishment of ADEFRA.\textsuperscript{145} ADEFRA means “the woman who shows courage” in Amharic, an Ethiopian dialect.\textsuperscript{146} For several Afro-German women, Lorde also represented the strength of Black lesbian and feminist activism. Afro-German activists – Katharina Oguntaye, Elke Jank, Eva von Pirch, Helga Emde, Ika Hügel-Marshall, Domenica and Christina Grotke, Guy (Nzingha) St. Louis, Katja Kinder, Jasmin Eding, and Marion Kraft – helped to usher in a new Black German feminist perspective within the larger Afro-German movement and one that forged ties to other women of color in Germany and beyond. In particular, ADEFRA empowered Afro-German women and offered them a sense of belonging as they cultivated new selves and negotiated their diasporic and feminist identities within the Afro-German community at large.\textsuperscript{147} This final section examines how ADEFRA

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ADEFRA, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,”/“20 Years of Black Women’s Activism in Germany,” p. 7.
\item ADEFRA became Afro-deutsche und Schwarze Frauen (Afro-German and Black women). They made the organization more inclusive to other women of color living in Germany. Al-Samarai, 347.
\item Ani, “Die Frau, die Mut zeigt,” 145 and al-Samarai, 348; (interview with Katja Kinder).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
developed and what the Afro-German women in ADEFRA sought to accomplish as they continued to demand recognition on all fronts.

Even though the Initiative of Black Germans rallied against racism in German society and encouraged Afro-German solidarity among women and men, this commitment was not without controversy. In early meetings, several ISD members often perpetuated sexism and homophobia within their organization, alienating some female members, including a number of lesbians.\textsuperscript{148} At the same time that grievances developed within ISD, there were a series of international feminist conferences in the Netherlands and informal meetings in West Germany that occurred between 1986 and 1987 that motivated Afro-German women to create their own feminist and diasporic organization. An informal meeting in Cologne was particularly important for a number of women, including Oguntoyé, Kinder, Jank, von Pirch, and a few others – who then decided to travel to Utrecht for an international women’s conference.\textsuperscript{149} There, Black German women met black female activists from London and Amsterdam, attended theater and writing workshops, and had intellectual and personal exchanges about the situation of Black women. These Afro-German women also connected with other Black Germans activists in attendance, including Jasmin Eding.\textsuperscript{150}

After Utrecht, the women returned energized and met at Eding’s apartment in Munich to determine what to call their Black German feminist group. Additional

\textsuperscript{148} Von Pirch, “Black Magic Woman,” p. 7, ZBFF&GS. Some heterosexual ADEFRA activists also made insensitive remarks about Afro-German lesbians. This sentiment remained within ADEFRA. I also do not want to suggest that these issues disappeared with the creation of ADEFRA, as instances of sexism and homophobia remained in ISD.

\textsuperscript{149} Piesche “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 19.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 19 and 20.
meetings occurred in Bremen and Berlin, which helped the women to develop plans for their group’s aims, and activities. By Christmas of 1986, Afro-German women had formed ADEFRA. The women focused much of their efforts on the interplay of feminism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and identity, which enabled them to fight against multiple forms of discrimination. They also credited *Farbe bekennen* with bringing Black German women together, and it remained important for Black German women to socialize and meet one another, especially in a majority white society. While lesbians dominated ADEFRA, “Heteras” or “Hetera-women” (*Hetera-Frauen*) also expressed enthusiasm about the activities that the organization wanted to sponsor, including national meetings, seminars, writing symposia, and international women’s conferences.

ADEFRA envisioned its main aim to be the elimination of prejudice, discrimination, racism, and sexism in Germany. This entailed exposing and changing the racist structures, stereotypes, and behaviors in everyday life, in institutions, in the media and the law. ADEFRA activists “wanted to be perceived and recognized as part of German society.” In addition, ADEFRA activists “wanted to show that the black women’s movement had its own experiences, values, and vision based on the need for its

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151 ADEFRA, *20 Years Sistah Power*, p. 7. Other influential Black lesbians were Daniela Toukarzi, as well as sisters Christina and Domenica Grotke. See also von Pirch, “Black Magic Woman,” pp. 7-8.

152 See also ADEFRA-Munich, untitled brochure, Munich, April 1993, no page number, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom.

153 Al-Samarai, 354; (interview with Ria Cheatom). The national women’s meetings did not occur as frequently as ISD’s BT. I discuss the 1990 ADEFRA meeting in chapter four.

154 ADEFRA-Munich, untitled brochure, no page number.

own survival strategies.” Like ISD, ADEFRA activists sought to challenge historical and cultural claims of German national identity as homogeneous by asserting their agency in the process. ADEFRA feminists also saw themselves as “a forum for Afro-German and black women[.] so that we can engage with our black history and culture[,] develop a collective strength for our black feminist struggle[,] develop and strengthen our black consciousness and identity in this white society [, and] deal with our differences: age, socialization, origin, way of life, lesbian, interests, profession, etc.”

The organization also provided these minority women with an opportunity to develop what one member described as a “psycho-social consciousness” (psychosozial Bewusstseinsarbeit) about their positions and identities in German society. Through this process, Afro-German women could deal with the accumulation of anger and pain from their experiences in Germany. ADEFRA aspired to develop a collective unity based on heterogeneity with women recognizing and using their diversity to forge a community that shared mutual experiences with overlapping systems of oppression. Yet, the female composition of ADEFRA did not free it from contention, as concerns emerged about sexuality and colorism (to name a few).


158 Al-Samarai, 348; (interview with Katj Kinder).

159 Von Pirk, “Black Magic Woman,” p. 7. Please refer to chapter four where I discuss some of these problems in more detail.
By 1987, Eding, Judy Gummich, Rita Cheatom, Manu Jaromin, and Gloria Mauermeyer (Bowo) established an ADEFRA office in Munich, which went on to become the most prominent group in the early 1990s. ADEFRA-Munich planned a number of activities, including “Zami,” a project in 1994, which was a cultural center for women in the city, as well as a “Back to Roots” hair workshop in 1993. As momentum grew, additional meetings occurred in Frankfurt and Wiesbaden with Eleonore Wiedenroth, Ika Hügel-Marshall, and Helga Emde. Afro-German women quickly mobilized and asserted their presence in Bielefeld as well as several northern German cities such as Hamburg and Bremen. ADEFRA-Bremen also produced several films about the lives of Afro-Germans, including the video “Afrekete: Afro-German women authors in Bremen” (Afrekete—Afro-deutsche Autorinnen in Bremen). Despite earlier confrontations, ADEFRA and ISD continued to colloborate on a number of projects. ADEFRA-Berlin and ISD-Berlin, for instance, shared a bank account, and ADEFRA-Munich and ISD-Munich also shared an account and worked closely on a number of events. Different branches of ADEFRA also helped to organize ISD’s

160 ADEFRA, 7.


162 Ibid.

163 In Afrekete’s issue (schwarzer Feminismus), Afro-German women mention the film “Afrekete-Afro-deutsche Autorinnen in Bremen” produced by Elke Jank and Eva von Pirch (24).

Bundestreffen and Black History Month. ADEFRA in cooperation with ISD even organized an exchange program with Afro-German and African American youth.165

In 1988, Jank and Eva von Pirch, from the ADEFRA-Bremen chapter, began to publish Afrekete: Magazine for Afro-German and Black Women (Afrekete: Zeitung für afro-deutsche und schwarze Frauen).166 Afrekete was a motif that some African American and Afro-Caribbean authors used in their literary works. According to critical theorist Henry Louis Gates, Afrekete became a key symbol of the diaspora, serving “as a sign of the disrupted wholeness of an African system of meaning and belief.”167 Particularly important in the context of ADEFRA, Audre Lorde invoked Afrekete in several of her works, including Sister Outsider, and signed some of her letters “in the hands of Afrekete.”168 Lorde employed Afrekete as a source of female strength, claiming that the traditional nature of women’s power in Africa could inform black women’s consciousness.169 In this case, Afro-German women’s reference to Afrekete connected them to a network of African and Afro-diasporic women. As a creative and collective outlet, the magazine Afrekete gave Afro-German women a chance to develop their literary voices, publish their work, and claim social recognition in German society. Here,


166 For more on the uses of Afrekete in literature, see Catherine E. McKinley, Afrekete: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Writing (New York: Anchor, 1995). At the time, Jank and von Pirch were dating each other.


168 Please refer to chapter one for more on this.

Lorde’s ideas about writing continued to inspire them to embrace writing and poetry as a form of expression, survival, and resistance.

The new journal would appear four times a year and would be published in Bremen by Jank and von Pirch. The women envisioned the quarterly having a black and white layout, as color publications were costly. It would be approximately thirty or more pages in length, although some of the issues ranged from forty-five to sixty pages. These Black German women wanted to include images, articles, poetry, advertisements, and book recommendations in the magazine, and to interweave the local, the national, and the international. The editors requested that all submissions, contributions, and suggestions be sent to Hagazussa, a women’s bookstore in Bremen. The cost of the magazine was 5 DM, with an additional 1,40 DM for return postage. For a year subscription, it would cost 20 DM plus 2,50 DM for return postage. Both women also established a bank account in Bremen, where individuals could transfer money to provide additional monetary assistance. Afreketete also garnered attention from scholars and individuals in the United States and Africa. Although the journal was short-lived, ADEFRA used Afreketete as a diasporic and feminist resource that provided Afro-German women with a forum to produce and publish their work. Afro-German women expressed their feelings and negotiated their Black German identity by writing themselves into German society and the African diaspora. ADEFRA-Munich also created a newsletter (Rundbrief) that disseminated information to its members about upcoming group events, activities, exhibitions, and concerts.

170 As a matter of fact, there were only six issues of the magazine. The idea for the quarterly changed as it became difficult to obtain contributions and assistance for the magazine.

171 Afreketete (…über alles, was uns angeht), p. 1.

172 A number of scholars, including Erin Crawley, obtained a subscription to the journal.
Conclusion

Forming the Black German movement in the 1980s, in the words of Katharina Oguntoye, “[took] courage (even if from desperation) and the capacity to be open and honest, at least with yourself.” Oguntoye added that, “I don’t think that it’s coincidental that this aspect of the Afro-German Movement was first carried by women, and they continue to do so in the main. But in saying this, I don’t want to diminish the commitment and development of the men in ISD in any way. On the contrary, I am very proud of them. . .”\textsuperscript{173} Oguntoye’s comments reflect the powerful act, or “Black Coming Out,” that Afro-German women and men undertook during the early stages of the movement, as the creation of the movement occurred against mainstream white German discriminatory attitudes and practices. Afro-Germans united and worked together to create the cultural and political associations of ISD and ADEFRA, forging relationships that sustained them after years of isolation. These friendships, along with conflicts, continued to take shape at the Bundesstreffen, Koordinationstreffen, Black History Month celebrations, as well as in the magazines afro look and Afrekete.

Inventing their traditions, ISD and ADEFRA’s cultural productions, initiatives, and events helped Afro-Germans negotiate their cultural autonomy, as they determined the objectives and aims of their organizations and coordinated events. For many of them, this was a newly found source that was empowering and enriching, but some tensions and clashes arose with their efforts at community building. Afro-Germans also became relentless in their efforts to achieve more visibility in society and push for social recognition as compatriots in Germany. Afro-Germans resisted their marginalization by

\textsuperscript{173} Oguntoye, “The Black German Women and the Womens,” 10.
cultivating connections and inventing Black German traditions that opened up concrete spaces for activism and solidarity. Through ADEFRA and *Afrekete*, in particular, Black German women developed a feminist and diasporic site that attended to the interplay of sexism, racism, homophobia, and sexuality. Using their personal experiences as a tool for activism, Afro-Germans campaigned on a number of issues that emphasized their racial exclusion in German society. The movement as a whole, moreover, deepened awareness about Afro-German history and identity by speaking out about the persistence of racism in society and helped to diminish some of the exoticized and condescending imagery of black people in German culture. In this way, the movement also functioned as a form of racial advocacy. The designations of “Afro-German” and “Black German” are now common in society, although still not always accepted by some white Germans. \(^{174}\) Yet, as May Ayim remarked at a talk at Carleton College in 1994, “the Black German [experience]... reflects an ongoing movement of resistance and courage of a not yet strong and visible, but constantly growing Black community.”\(^{175}\) It was a Black German community that creatively crafted alternative traditions that forced them to escape their isolation and gave them a voice and forum, but it also no longer rendered them invisible.

\(^{174}\) In 2006, *afrodeutsch* appeared for the first time in Duden, one of Germany’s prominent dictionaries.

CHAPTER THREE

LIVING AND TELLING OUR TRUTHS: AFRO-GERMANS AND THE MAKING OF A MULTICULTURAL INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

In an English draft of her introduction to Farbe bekennen, Audre Lorde wrote:

This book is a conscious choice on the part of Afro-German women writing here to allow other citizens of their country entry into an aspect of the German consciousness that most white Germans have not yet thought about. Through their words, they are refusing to challenge despair merely with blindness or silence.¹

Stressing the significance of the volume, Lorde explained how powerful Afro-German women’s writing was as a form of activism and progressive transformation. Later, in an interview in the anthology, Afro-German poet Raja Lubinetzki, who was from the East, claimed that, “writing was the only way I could express myself, because there was nobody I could talk to, because I felt nobody understood me,” adding that, “writing was a necessity for me.”² For Lubinetzki, writing provided her with a voice and became a habitual act of self-expression, self-definition, and survival, particularly as she negotiated


a socialist society that officially but inaccurately held itself to be free from Euro-
American racism.

The quotations from these two authors demonstrate that these women understood
that writing could serve as a source of comfort and empowerment. Their comments also
allude to the fact that writing in *Farbe bekennen*, as well as in other Afro-German
publications, was a discursive and political act that helped to usher in an Afro-German
identity and resulted in the creation of a new intellectual tradition that privileged,
documented, and validated their experiences. Through multiple literary productions,
Afro-Germans positioned themselves in West and East German societies that often
ignored their existence. In doing so, Afro-Germans emerged from their social isolation
and became public intellectuals and activists engaged in representing how the political,
the personal, and the public were intertwined in their daily struggles.

Writing within the dominant culture, Afro-Germans developed a multicultural
intellectual tradition that borrowed from African, African-American, and German cultural
customs and reflected the diversity of their community as well as its burgeoning feminist
and diasporic politics. Exploring Afro-Germans’ production of public discourses serves
as a corrective to the persistent view in German history that Afro-Germans were too
small in number to make any serious intellectual contributions to society. Afro-Germans,
in fact, negotiated and affirmed overlapping public cultures with their literary
interventions, making blackness and the diaspora culturally relevant within Germany.
Black German literature also provided them with an opportunity for a series of boundary
crossings. Critical theorist Carol Boyce Davies has described boundary crossing in
relation to black women authors, opining that:
Black women’s writing...should be read as a series of boundary crossings not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing. In crossing cultural, transnational, translocal, [and] diasporic perspectives, this reworking of the grounds of ‘Black Women’s Writing’ redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality.3

For Davies, black women writers helped to bring together women from across the globe who had been previously “dis-located by time and space.”4 These black authors possessed and possess “a migratory subjectivity [that] exist[s] in multiple locations.”5 Afro-Germans’ creative cultural productions also served as a form of intellectual activism—a term I borrow from sociologist Patricia Hill Collins—, that used content, ideas, and genres to challenge discriminatory practices and beliefs and gain recognition in West German society.6 With their intellectual activism, moreover, Afro-Germans made themselves a part of Germany’s already dynamic and complex postwar public culture.7


5 Ibid.

6 Patricia Hill Collins, On Intellectual Activism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), ix-xi, and xii-xiv. Collins explained that, “one form of ‘intellectual activism’ aims to speak the truth to power. This form of truth-telling harnesses the power of ideas toward the specific goal of confronting existing power relations” (xxii) and “a second strategy of ‘intellectual activism’ aims to speak the truth directly to the people. In contrast to directing energy to those in power, a focus that inadvertently bolsters the belief that elites are the only social acts who count, those who speak the truth to the people talk directly to the masses” (xiii). I see Afro-German intellectuals performing both strategies with their literature. Arjun Appadurai has posited that, “the imagination was the staging ground for action, not only escape.” I believe that literature also served as “the staging ground” for political activism, as Afro-Germans agitated for social justice through their words. Appadurai, Modernity at Large, 7.

7 The literature on writers of the post-1945 period in Germany is rather extensive, please refer to a few examples: Heinrich Böll Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum (1974); Ingeborg Bachmann Malina (1971) and Das dreißigste Jahre: Erzählungen (1961); Nelly Sachs Eli: Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels (1951); and Günter Grass Die Bechtrommel (1959), Katz und Maus (1961), and Hundejahre (1963). Grass and Bachmann were also involved with the literary association “Gruppe 47” (Group 47). Major poets such as Wolfgang Weyrauch, Karl Krolof, and Gunter Eich also published works during the postwar period. Minority authors have also found a space in German literary circles, including Aras Ören Deutschland: Ein türkisches Märchen (1978); Sten Nadolny Selim oder Die Gabe der Rede (1990); Zehra Çirak Flugfänger: Gedichte (1987); and Yoko Tawada Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts-Anata no iru tokoro dake nani mo nai (1987). For more on literature in the postwar period, please refer to Sabine von Dirke,
As German historian Michael Geyer has posited, “The public role of intellectuals consisted in articulating the social space in which a wounded society could heal and individuals could recover and regenerate a postfascist identity. Their purpose consisted in creating a tight public sphere that would prevent escape from the past and induce cathartic renewal.” Yet, in discussing and positioning their literature, this chapter also dialogues with Geyer by suggesting that Afro-German intellectuals cultivated counter sites; excavated their suppressed histories; and used autobiographical genres to promote awareness about pressing issues concerning gender, race, identity, community, and belonging. By ‘living and telling their truths,’ Black Germans transformed the ideas, meanings, and symbols surrounding German national identity.


The first section of this chapter explores how Afro-German women used *Farbe bekennen* to establish connections to other intellectual traditions. As Afro-German women engaged with their history in the anthology, they also exemplified and infused feminist and diasporic perspectives into a new Afro-German literary and political scene. With the second section, I examine the life and oeuvre of May Ayim, the most prominent intellectual in the Afro-German movement and Germany more generally, both before and after reunification. Ayim, in fact, achieved international acclaim, traveling to London, Toronto, Cape Town, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C. Her writings and activism worked in tandem to dissolve the socially, culturally, and politically constructed borders that continued to marginalize Black Germans, Turkish Germans, Asian Germans, and other minorities in Germany. As these sections demonstrate, through their imagination and creativity, Afro-Germans produced literature that represented their embodied experiences, and they recognized that their knowledge and backgrounds did not serve as an obstacle but rather informed their work in manifold ways. These examples of Afro-German intellectual activism illustrate how this relatively small and tightly knit

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10 In *European Others*, Fatima El-Tayeb also has argued that *Farbe bekennen* was a feminist and diasporic project. See El-Tayeb, 62-76. El-Tayeb regarded *Farbe bekennen* as a form of Black German women’s activism that was influenced by African American and Afro-Caribbean writings. El-Tayeb is a Black German lesbian intellectual from Hamburg, who wrote her dissertation on the constructions of race in Germany. She currently lives in California and teaches at the University of California San Diego. See also El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche* and El-Tayeb, “‘The Birth of a European Public’: Migration, Postnationality, and Race in the Uniting of Europe,” *American Quarterly* 60:3 (September 2008): 649-670. In 1997, she also co-wrote the screenplay of the film, *Everything will be fine (Alles wird gut)*, with Angelina Maccarone; Maccarone directed the film. The film explicitly dealt with black lesbian relationships in Hamburg.

community employed writing as a resource for social justice in Germany, understanding that their literature was as much diasporic and multicultural as it was German.

**Farbe Bekennen: Engendering an Afro-German Intellectual Tradition**

As chapter one mentioned, *Farbe bekennen* emerged as a feminist undertaking where Afro-German women examined and connected their local conditions to the transnational world of the African diaspora.¹² Scholars have said much about how *Farbe bekennen* was integral to the making of Afro-German identity as well as to catalyzing the movement. These scholars have also examined how Afro-Germans united to establish their identity and movement around their heterogeneous community and experiences. For some scholars, these women writers helped to create “textured identities” and spaces for themselves in the process. Analyzing Dagmar Schultz’s interview with Laura Baum, Katharina Oguntoye, and May Ayim in the volume, Germanist Tina M. Campt has conceptualized “textured identities” to refer to “diverse and fluctuating constructions of identity.” Further explaining the concept, Campt argued that:

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¹² Farbe bekennen means “acknowledging color,” and it was widely used to imply “standing by what one is/believes.” See Orlanda Frauenverlag, “Rights Information,” June 1986, p. 1, Folder Farbe bekennen, Fotos, Rezensionen, OFV. *Farbe bekennen* was later published as *Showing Our Colors*. It took over two years of communication and negotiation before the press published the book. Correspondence from Schultz, Lorde, UM-Amherst, and the translator exists in Folder Farbe Bekennen Korrespondenz 1986, OFV. See, for example, Anne Adams letter to Dagmar Schultz, September 23, 1987, pp. 1-2, Folder Farbe Bekennen Korrespondenz, OFV; Audre Lorde letter to Dagmar Schultz, November 30, 1987, Folder Farbe Bekennen Korrespondenz, OFV; Bruce Wilcox letter to Dagmar Schultz with the draft contract from the University of Massachuseutts Press, February 29, 1988, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim; and Dagmar Schultz letter to May [Ayim] and Katharina [Oguntoye], March 14, 1988, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim. Fischer Verlag, a Frankfurt press, also published the volume in 1992, placing it in its women in the society series (*Die Frau in der Gesellschaft*). The book was also published in the UK; refer to May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds. *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (London: Open Letters, 1992), The Private Collection of May Ayim. In addition, there have also been several works that discuss *Farbe bekennen*’s significance to Black German writing and the movement, see Lennox, “Postcolonial Writing in Germany,” 637; C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay, “The African Diaspora in Europe: African Germans Speak Out,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31:3 (January 2001): 264-87; Göttche, “Self-Assertion, Intervention and Achievement,” 83-135; and Hopkins, “Searching for a Father(land),” 301-309. Here, my chapter seeks to reinterpret the legacy of the anthology by also analyzing its reach in German society.
‘texture’ connotes multiplicity and plurality without fragmentation. It is not a static construction but shifts and changes contingently in relation to the various subject-positions and locations, which these women occupy in their social interactions. In addition, it allows for flexible and versatile configurations of a range of depths within a larger surface, but without the rigidity of a forced reconciliation of contradictory or conflicting identifications. Moreover, the notion of a ‘textured identity’ provides a sense of continuity within one’s sense of self/identity often lacking in the notion of ‘multiple selves’ or identities.13

In this case, Afro-German women inspired by Lorde and Farbe bekennen embraced alterity, diversity, as well as their own complex identities and experiences. Even as Afro-Germans fashioned an identity through literature, I maintain, that it was not a seamless one. Black German women mediated a multitude of identities, helping them deal with “the social underpinnings of racism” in German society.14 As Afro-Dutch cultural theorist Philomena Essed recognized in her recent forward to Black Europe and the African Diaspora, Farbe bekennen was “a courageous political act, the racial unveiling of Germany, the birth of a common identity as Afro-Germans.”15 Reminiscing about the


15 Philomena Essed, “Foreword,” in Black Europe and the African Diaspora, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), xiii. While Afro-Germans did construct a common identity, it did not mean that their identity did not evolve and was without problems.
emergence of the Afro-German movement in a 2007 interview, Ekpenyong Ani, the former president of ADEFRA and co-editor of Orlanda women’s press, asserted:

I believe that from the beginning Audre very clearly recognized, how important the impetus or challenge of writing for Black people in Germany was. It offered the possibility for us to come into existence and become visible, so that people in general understood that we existed.16

Ani emphasized the critical role that writing maintained within the community, especially as it enabled Afro-Germans to claim their rightful place as native German citizens and initiate discussions on blackness in Germany. Similarly, Peggy Piesche, a Black German scholar, affirmed that, “The meetings and conversations that Black women and lesbians had with Audre Lorde finally had not only given Black history a place within the culture of remembrance, but also a face in Germany.”17

Afro-Germans’ history was rooted in their experiences, and Fatima El-Tayeb has argued that, “Afro-Germans are representative of a black European population that for the most part did not originate in a violent mass removal and the specific group experiences it occasioned but came to Europe via direct or indirect routes as a consequence of colonialism.”18 Black German author and journalist Shelia Mysorekar also has maintained that:

in countries without a cohesive Black community, such as Germany, Switzerland, or Norway or, for that matter, any other northern European country, Black literature serves as a spiritual connection with other Black people, breaking the silence and isolation of the individual Black man or

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16 Al-Samarai, 352; (Interview with Ekpenyong Ani). The German text: “Ich glaube, dass Audre von Anfang an sehr klar erkannte, wie wichtig der Impuls oder die Herausforderung des Schreibens für Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland war. Es bot die Möglichkeit, in eine Existenz, in eine Sichtbarkeit zu kommen, so dass überhaupt jemand merkte, dass es uns gab.”


18 El-Tayeb, European Others, 50.
woman. Now that we have started to write ourselves, we do not only feed on the books that reach us, but we send out messages as well. Now it’s our turn to help [spread] the Word.19

Afro-Germans re-inserted themselves into multiple historical narratives: German, African, African-American, and diasporic. Afro-German women’s affective acts of sharing, moreover, made the anthology a critical site for self-narration, and publishing their literature doubled as an exercise in self-expression and self-assertion. In Farbe bekennen, Black German women also grappled with what Stuart Hall has termed a “doubleness of similarity and difference”— integral to diasporic identities.20 Here, Black Germans were a part of the African diaspora, but different because they were German. At the same time, even though they were mostly native-born Germans, their experiences as Black Germans othered them from their white compatriots based on their incessant confrontations with exclusion and prejudice in society. Afro-Germans also had different backgrounds from their fellow black compatriots. In promoting and

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19 Mysorekar, “‘Pass the Word and Break the Silence,’” 83. She is an active writer and journalist, who lives in Cologne.

20 See Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 227. For Hall, recognizing this doubleness was central component in diasporic identity formation. For similar ideas concerning “doubleness,” refer to Lorde, Sister Outsider; Thomas Holt, “Slavery and Freedom in the Atlantic World: Reflection on the Diasporan Framework,” in Crossing Boundaries: Comparative Histories of Black People in Diaspora, eds. Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1999), 33-44; W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903; repr., Dover Publications, 1994); and Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Hall’s conceptualization differs slightly from W. E. B. DuBois’s idea of “double consciousness.” Likewise, Aija Poikane-Daumke has maintained that, “By rethinking the meaning of Africa and its significance in their lives, Afro-Germans attempt to bring their African and German cultural heritages together in a meaningful way. This suggests that in order to fully understand their identity, Afro-Germans must explore their African origins and reach ‘a compromise’ between their African and German dimensions.” Poikane-Daumke, African Diasporas, 49-63 esp. 49. Poikane-Daumke maintained that Farbe bekennen was an effort at finding Africa, and she compared Afro-German and African American literatures; she specifically examined Ethiopianism in Afro-German texts. While I think this is a fruitful comparison, it is important to recognize that Afro-German literature can and should stand alone without African-American literary comparisons. She also argued that Afro-Germans occupied a “betweeness,” which was similar to literary scholar Anne Adams label of “in-betweeness”— caught between two cultures (Germany and Africa). I contend that Afro-Germans occupied multiple positions that extended beyond the notion of hybridity or “(in)-betweenness” that were constantly evolving.
producing their personal narratives, these women collaborated to gain public recognition as Afro-Germans and cultivated a sense of kinship in Germany. The volume also provided a basis for future Afro-German literary projects, enabling them to channel their heterogeneity in a positive direction. Afro-Germans appropriated practices and styles and invented traditions that enabled them to attend to their particular situations in German and Afro-diasporic cultures.

Scholars have yet to fully situate Farbe benennen historically by considering the intellectual multicultural tradition that Afro-Germans were a part of and furthered – a task I seek to accomplish with this chapter. Examining Farbe bekennen and May Ayim’s volume of poetry Blues in Black and white (Blues in schwarz weiß), we witness how Afro-Germans not only wrote themselves into history, but public culture more generally. Moreover, unlike Germanist Leroy Hopkins, who has argued that German critics have either ignored Afro-German literary productions or deemed them sociological or foreign, I argue that Afro-German literature had more cultural currency than previously realized, given the range of events and reviews that Farbe bekennen and Ayim’s works received in Germany and elsewhere. Through their literature, these public intellectuals created

21 There was also a publication in 1993, in which Afro-German women contributed. See Weibblick: Informationsblatt von Frauen für Frauen (Schwarze deutsche Frauen, Rassismus in der Sprache, weiße Frauen mit schwarzen Kindern), Heft 13, Jahrgang 93, Berlin, pp. 1-49. For discussions on other Black German authors, see Bach, “Schwarze Deutsche Literatur,” 19-23; and Reinhild Steingrüber, “From Farbe bekennen to Scholadenkind: Generational Change in Afro-German Autobiographies,” in Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture, eds. Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Susanne Vees-Gulani (Rochester: Camden, 2010), 287-310. Steingrüber argued that there was a shift from racial consciousness in Farbe bekennen and other works of older generations born from 1931 to 1970 to later Afro-German memoirs that downplay race and focus on the author’s individual successes and failures as personal accomplishments and set backs rather than a consequence of discrimination. On this development, see also S. Marina Jones, “‘Outsiders Within’: Afro-Germans in West Germany—Discourses, Perceptions and Experiences, 1949–1989” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, forthcoming).

22 Leroy Hopkins, “Writing Diasporic Identity: Afro-German Literature Since 1985,” in Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000, eds. Patricia Mazón and Reinhold Steingrüber (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 183-208 esp. 185. In the same article, he
spaces for their identity, movement, and activism in a dominant culture that believed they were non-existent.

According to Shelia Mysorekar, “[Black Germans] owe very much to Black literature –African – or Asian-America, Caribbean, African and Asian novels, essays, drama, poetry, everything. And it was Black women writers who taught us to assert ourselves as **Black German women**.”

For Mysorekar, “these books connected us less with our roots in Africa or Asia, but introduced us to the international community of the Black diaspora.” Black German women saw black women writers as their literary and intellectual ancestors. Offering a type of cultural transformation, these black authors helped Black German women learn to identify and combat racism in Germany; resources they were unable to receive from their white relatives.

In the 1970s and 1980s, West Germany saw a proliferation of autobiographies that shifted attention from the “self-made man” to the female subject’s documentation and articulation of personal histories. These women authors helped to destabilize static notions of the self and practiced different forms of self-representation. Literary scholar Barbara Kosta has averred that, “autobiographical writings and textualizations of the self and of personal experience in West Germany flooded the literary market and dominated wrote, “In essence, the German literary establishment and reading public did not believe that Afro-German texts had literary quality or were relevant to mainstream literary concerns. There was, after all, not racism in Germany. All of that unpleasantness had disappeared with denazification” (185). Germans tended to consign Afro-German literature to the sociological realm, where “the statements of victimization [were] rooted in the unfortunate decisions of few” (185).

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23 Mysorekar, 83. The bolded text was Mysorekar’s emphasis. She cited Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Paule Marhsall, Nizoke Shange, as well as Asian-American authors Bharati Mukherjee and Amy Tan (82). Mysorekar considered all of these authors to be black and readily consumed their works for spiritual energy.

various literary forms.” In this way, Farbe bekennen was not unlike literature produced by West German women and feminists, who engaged in “the politics of recognition” and promoted the political as personal and the personal as political. Cultural Studies scholar Sabine von Dirke has remarked that, “The women’s movement participated in [this literary] development with its consciousness-raising texts (Verständigungstexte), whose main goal was to present an authentic experience rather than a highly stylized literary product.” These movements helped to redefine the parameters of traditional German literature, creating a new writing culture in the process. Writing during the postwar period remained one of the primary modes of communication for West German public intellectuals, and these intellectuals – Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Kocka, among others – also attended to the public substance and character of ideas. Black Germans, too, turned to writing and engaged in a similar postwar West German practice. Therefore, Farbe bekennen was a part of a broad cultural development that aimed at giving the unheard Afro-German female a voice and attended to gender and racial identities and inequalities in Germany.


27 Von Dirk, “All Power to the Imagination!,” 90.

Indeed, although they did not register the same impact of *Farbe bekennen*, two other works about being black in Germany preceded the volume. There was *Poems of a Beautiful Woman* (*Gedichte einer schönen Frau*) published by Afro-German poet, Guy (Nzingha) St. Louis in 1983, who later became involved in the Afro-German movement. In 1984, Gisela Fremgen edited the volume *and when you are still Black too: Black Women From the Federal Republic* (*...und wenn du dazu noch Schwarz bist: Berichte schwarzer Frauen in der Bundesrepublik*), which introduced female narratives of immigrants, including African Americans, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and South Africans and how these women dealt with discrimination in West German society.²⁹

*Farbe bekennen* initiated what would become one of the core intellectual projects of the Afro-German movement: recovering the collective histories of Black Germans, and especially the “herstories” of Afro-German women and “writing female subjects into literary identity.”³⁰ The emphasis on history would come up repeatedly in the volume, often focusing on its role in helping Afro-Germans challenge white Germans’ commonplace belief that to be Black and German was contradictory. *Farbe bekennen* engendered a tradition of Afro-Germans’ intellectual activism continued by subsequent publications such as *Uncle Tom’s Fist* (*Onkel Tom’s Faust*), *afro look*, *Afrekete*, and *Strangers* and additional poetry volumes, including *The Power of the Night* (*Macht Der...

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Nacht) as well as books. In addition, Afro-German autobiographies have continued to appear in German society, including from individuals who were and were not involved in the early stages of the movement. In essence, Afro-Germans created various forms of intellectual activism that enabled them to postiviely reaffirm their otherness and allow differences to coexist within their community. In particular, on the cover of the volume, different generations of Afro-German women appear together as agents, rewriting their histories and empowering their community (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Cover page of Farbe bekennen in 1986

31 Several scholars have written on afro look and Onkel Tom’s Faust, please refer to: Hopkins, “Speak, so I might see you!,” 533-38; Hopkins, “Writing Diasporic Identity,” 183-208; Adams, “afro look,” 257-278; and Jobatey, “Afro Look.” Hopkins briefly mentioned Strangers, Afreke, and Macht der Nacht in his articles. The Power of the Night (Macht der Nacht) was published by the ISD-Munich group in 1991/92.

32 Peggy Piesche and Katharina Ogutoye recognized that this volume helped to introduce Afro-German citizen subjects, rather then disempowered objects. See Piesche and Ogutoye, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 27.

The Afro-German contributors also participated in a number of readings throughout Germany – including Bremen, Frankfurt, and Berlin – which gave them an opportunity to advertise and promote the volume and illustrated how the anthology maintained some cultural currency in society.\textsuperscript{34} It also enabled Afro-Germans to forge connections with their fellow black compatriots. Moreover, several West German newspapers and magazines covered the publication.\textsuperscript{35} West German television stations also aired
documentaries about Black Germans.\textsuperscript{36} As a matter of fact, an anonymous postcard was sent to the television station, the \textit{Saarländischer Rundfunk}, and the postcard stated that, \textit{Germans are white, Negroes cannot be German} (\textit{Deutsche sind weiss, Neger können keine Deutschen sein}).\textsuperscript{37}

Also integral to the authors’ interest in history was an emphasis on establishing a symbolic connection to African and Afro-diasporic traditions. Ayim and Oguntoyee reinforced this sentiment in the introduction:

In disentangling the threads of our histories within Africa and Germany and connecting them to our subjective experiences, we are becoming more sure of our identity, and are able to assert it more aggressively to the outside world. Perhaps, eventually we will not be simply overlooked by a public steeped in ignorance and prejudice.\textsuperscript{38}

Their intent was to establish an inclusive and accessible space that recognized and accentuated differences, especially as they cultivated a connection to Africa that they did not previously have, blending diasporic and German narratives in the process. By doing

\textsuperscript{36} For documentaries and films, refer to: Christel Priemer, \textit{A little black, a little or what it means to be a German Negro} (\textit{Ein bißchen schwarz ein bißchen, oder was es heißt ein deutscher Neger zu sein}, 1984); \textit{Germans are white, Negroes cannot be German!} (\textit{Deutsche sind weiß, Neger können keine Deutschen sein!}, 1986); and \textit{Black women acknowledge their colors: Life Stories from a Cold Country} (\textit{Schwarze Frauen bekennen Farbe: Lebensgeschichten aus einem kalten Land}, 1992). These films were produced by the Consortium of public-law broadcasting institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany (\textit{Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlichrechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland}, ARD), who was affiliated with West German Broadcasting (\textit{Westdeutsche Rundfunk}, WDR) and based in the Federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. \textit{Der Spiegel (Die schwarze Kasse des DGB)}, “Fernsehen Donnerstag, 29. 5,” 22/1986, p. 230 and Christel Priemer, \textit{Black women acknowledge color} (\textit{Schwarze Frauen bekennen Farbe}), ARD, June, 22, 1992, \textit{Der Spiegel} 26/1992. See also Monika Mengel, “Farbe bekennen – weiße Feministinnen und Rassismus, ein Bücherbericht,” WDR III, September 20, 1993, pp. 1-20, Folder Farbe Bekennen, Fotos, Rezensionen 1986, OFV. See also Letter Familie Wondrejz to ARD Broadcast about the program “Schwarze Frauen bekennen Farbe,” June 25, 1992, 8:15pm, Folder Farbe bekennen Korrespondence 1986, OFV and “Deutsch sein heißt nicht immer, weiß zu sein,” (article about “Schwarze Frauen bekennen Farbe” program), Folder Farbe bekennen Korrespondence 1986, OFV.

\textsuperscript{37} See Emde, “I too am German—An Afro-German Perspective,” 40.

\textsuperscript{38} Opitz and Oguntoyee, “Editors’ Introduction,” xxii and Oguntoyee and Ayim, “Vorwort der Herausgeberinnen,” 18. See also Folder Farbe Bekennen, OFV for correspondence, interviews, and drafts of poems and articles.
so, these women also used their writing to align themselves with other oppressed communities throughout the globe.

Later, in the anthology, Raja Lubinetzki underscored the significance of African and African American literary traditions in her development as a writer. Growing up in the German Democratic Republic, she began writing at the age of 14, and “once wrote something about my feelings and thoughts, and it came out in the form of a poem.”

Visiting local libraries, she familiarized herself with Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, James Baldwin, and others from the “Black is Beautiful” movement. For Lubinetzki, “through Afro-American and African literature I could at least define myself.” Poetry, in particular, became a routine and expressive form where she “just brought everything out of myself.”

Acquiring self-worth through her writing, Lubinetzki also processed some of the vicissitudes of daily life in East Germany. In the GDR, the official rhetoric declared that everyone was a comrade in the struggle against capitalism in the West. Officials also established gender equity policies in the workplace. Yet racial equality

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40 Lubinetzki, 218 and Birkenwald, 225.


was hardly a reality for those Black Germans who experienced everyday prejudice in the East. Instead, white East Germans claimed, “We don’t discriminate against you; if you talk about color, that’s your problem.”

With such experiences, writing also served as a catharsis for Lubinetzki. Continuing to reflect upon the significance of poetry in her life, she opined:

feeling and thinking where has thinking
alone awakened the drums where has feeling
alone written a sentence
will you so scarcely understood you will
learn to understand yourself in your
thinking and feeling and conduct
the thousand-mighty chorus of your dreams.

The interplay of writing, emotions, and imagination allowed Lubinetzki to better understand herself and fulfill her aspirations.

While Lubinetzki acknowledged African and African American cultures as a point of reference in her writing, Eleonore (Ellen) Wiedenroth saw only Africa as a site for empowerment. Wiedenroth’s desire to forge ties to Africa was rooted in what she later described as “the myth of international Black solidarity.”

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44 Lubinetzki, 219 and Birkenwald, 226. The German text: “Wir diskriminiren dich nicht, wenn du von Hautfarbe redest, ist das dein Problem.”


46 Even though Lubinetzki had written poetry for years, she did not publish her first volume of poetry until 2001. See Lubinetzki, Der tag ein Funke: Gedichte (Gerhard Wolf Janus Press, 2001). She also published two of her poems (“eine haut” and “allein das ists nicht”) in the volume, Vogel oder Käfig sein: Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften in der DDR 1979-1989, edited by Klaus Michael and Thomas Wohlfahrt and published in 1992. She even established a relationship with Christa Wolf, a prominent East German writer, and her husband Gerhard Wolf. Gerhard Wolf has been Lubinetzki’s publisher for years. Lubinetzki is also an artist, drawing and painting in Berlin.

47 Ellen Wiedenroth, “What makes me so different in the eyes of others?,” in Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out, eds. May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, trans. Anne Adams
different in the eyes of others?" she explained that she often sought contact and exchange with people of African descent. Drawing upon her experiences with Africans in Germany, Wiedenroth claimed that, “Blackness opened me up to a new level of community with people. I experienced openness, friendliness, [and] unquestioned acceptance. I was a ‘sister’; I belonged.”⁴⁸ Blackness, and the continent by extension, offered a refuge from a difficult and depressing life in West Germany; it enabled her to reimagine her identity. Upon advice from her African friends and colleagues, Wiedenroth decided to live in Africa, motivated by the belief that “there’s no racism there.”⁴⁹ As scholar Aija Poikane-Daumke has written, “Africa becomes a dreamland where Afro-Germans do not have to face racism or discrimination. It acquires the status of an ideal home providing shelter and protection, whereas Germany symbolizes a racist reality.”⁵⁰ Yet moving to Liberia did not provide Wiedenroth with a sense of acceptance. There, Liberian children and adults continually labeled her “white lady” or European, subjecting her to another kind of exclusion based on skin color.⁵¹ Her tough experiences


⁴⁹ Ibid. and Ibid. Wiedenroth also published this piece in a magazine. See Ellen Wiedenroth, “Was macht mich so anders in den Augen der anderen?” in Die Brücke: Rundbrief des Military Counseling Networks, Nr. 2, Juni 1989, p. 6, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

⁵⁰ Poikane-Daumke, 50.

in Liberia and other regions such as Hawaii only helped to instill in her a sense of urgency about living and surviving in Germany.\footnote{Wiedenroth wrote that despite the fact that Hawaii was very mixed (Asians, Europeans, etc.), it was still very Americanized. Refer to Poikane-Daumke, 51, in which she analyzed the same passage of Wiedenroth’s and includes an interview with her.} This resolve eventually informed her activism in the Afro-German movement in West German society, and she noted that Germany was her home country.\footnote{As noted in chapter two, Wiedenroth organized the first national meeting of Black Germans in 1985 in Wiesbaden.} Similarly, Julia Berger, of Italian and Afro-German descent, also described that, “In Africa it was bad for me.”\footnote{Julia Berger, “I do the same things as others do,” in \textit{Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out}, eds. May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, trans. Anne Adams (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 198 and Berger, “Ich mache dieselben Sachen wie die anderen,” in \textit{Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte}, eds. Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz/Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz (1986; repr., Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 2006), 204. The German text: “In Afrika war es schlimm für mich.” Berger’s mother, Astrid, also contributed to the collection; see also chapter one.} Berger’s experiences in Africa were particularly unpleasant because Africans referred to her as white. She recalled that, “when I went there I had thought that people would be darker, but I wasn’t prepared to have them shout ‘white people’ after us. They said: ‘Toubab,’ which means stranger. It was meant to be friendly and the kids would laugh and wave. I had thought they would take me for one of their own.”\footnote{Berger, “I do the same things as others do,” 198 and Berger, “Ich mache dieselben Sachen wie die anderen,” 204. The German text: “Als ich dorthin gefahren bin, dachte ich zwar, daß die Menschen dort dunkler sind, aber daß sie ‘Weiße’ hinter uns hrrufen würden, darauf war ich nicht gefaßt. Sie sagten: ‘Tuwabu,’ das heißt Fremde, und es war freundlich gemeint, die Kinder lachten und winkten. Ich hatte geglaubt, sie würden mich für eine der Ihren halten.”}

In addition to literature, theatre and performance also served as a form of expression and helped some Afro-German women survive. For Miriam Goldschmidt, of Spanish, Jewish, African, and German ancestry, theater offered her a way to work on herself and connect to broader audiences. After her studies, Goldschmidt travelled to
Paris in 1971 and worked at the International Center for Theatrical Research under the direction of Peter Brook. With Brook’s approach to theater, he sought to “create a new relationship between actors and the public, a simple relationship that could bring a person into the world of action, but also into the world of inner feelings – a relationship in which one could find ways of connecting the inner and outer world.”

Through Goldschmidt’s work with the multinational and multiethnic ensemble and international travels to Australia, the United States, and Africa, “it didn’t matter how different we were, what walk of life we came from the only thing that mattered was to execute this movement together, to sense who was too fast or too slow, to reach a unity.”

Theater gave her a space where she began to remake her identity, reconsidering her place in society. It also served as a creative form of communication that enabled her to reach and educate diverse audiences, especially children. During the 1970s, Goldschmidt even wrote a play, Emo and Sanu, and produced it in Basel. There, she was able to “communicate to a children’s audience the experience she had had with Brook.”

Her multicultural experiences continued to inform her future projects.

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58 Goldschmidt, 120 and Goldschmidt, 131. The German text: “Mit ‘Emo und Sau’ gelang es ihr, die Erfahrung, die sie bei Brook machte, auch an Kinder weiterzugeben.”
Farbe bekennen reflected a powerful urge to explain individual experiences with gender, race, and exclusion in both the private and public realms in Germany— in essence emphasizing Afro-German’s personal herstories. For instance, Astrid Berger, of German and Cameroonian descent, recalled that in school her “teacher looked at me and said out loud: ‘This is quite an interesting case!’ I was a ‘case,’ not a person— how was I supposed to deal with that?”

Berger was also often “asked questions like ‘Aren’t you glad you can stay here?,’” and it was “hard to tell such a person that I’m German and don’t belong anywhere else. By virtue of my black skin I am often in the position of explaining and defending myself, and this has been true for as long as I can remember.”

In her professional life as a nurse, she had to endure discrimination. At one point at work, “a 350-pound woman, too lazy (though not too sick) to wash herself, once told me: ‘As a Black hussy you ought to be glad they even let you work in Germany, so come on and wash me!’”

Similarly, Angelika Eisenbrandt, of African American and German heritage, also discussed insulting personal interactions. In the volume, Eisenbrandt shared how her husband exoticized and essentialized her by saying “Fix your hair in a different way. You know, like Blacks who have that really woolly hair.”

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60 Ibid., 118 and Ibid., 128. The full German text: “Öfter werden Fragen an mich gestellt wie: ‘Sind Sie nicht froh, daß Sie immer hier bleiben dürfen?’ Und es ist enorm schwierig, den Fragenden zu erklären, daß ich eine Deutsche bin und nirgends anders hingehen kann. Durch meine Haut befinde ich mich so oft in der Position der Erklärenden und der sich Verteidigenden, und das ist schon so, solange ich denken kann.”

61 Ibid., 118 and Ibid., 128. The full German text: “So hat mir beispielsweise eine 170kg schwere Frau, die zu faul (nicht etwa zu krank) war, sich alleine zu waschen, gesagt: ‘Sie als schwarze Schickse können sich doch freuen, überhaupt in Deutschland arbeiten zu dürfen, also waschen Sie mich jetzt!’”

continued to convey that, “But I thought short, straight hair was sharp. He wanted me to look African so people could say I was unusual.” At her daughter’s school, Eisenbrandt also dealt with people saying, “how unusual I look,” and people would “ask [my daughter] with surprise: ‘What is your mother? She looks so different.’ It’s pretty hard for me to walk across the playground at recess when I go to meet [my daughter] at school.”

For several Afro-Germans in the anthology, blackness had a negative connotation that made them reject this part of their identity in favor of whiteness. In the article “An ‘Occupation Baby’ in Postwar Germany,” Helga Emde discussed her childhood in postwar West Germany, where the legacy of National Socialism still shaped her everyday interactions. In addition to being the only Black person in her extended family, Emde had to confront German beliefs that blackness did not signify pulchritude, and was instead considered repulsive. Emde stated that:

Black means unworthy of existence. And that’s exactly how I felt. I always stayed in the most remote corner; I was shy and timid and felt lucky to be asked to play with the other kids—and how! I felt unworthy of


\[\text{64 Ibid., 195 and Ibid., 201. The German text: “Die fragen dann S, ganz erstaunt: ‘Was, ist deine Mutter? Die sieht aber ganz anders aus.’ Mir fällt es hanz schön schwer, zu S. in die Schule zu gehen und über den Schulhof, wenn gerade Pause ist.”}\]


\[\text{66 Ibid., 101 and Ibid., 111.}\]
existence. I couldn’t afford to be conspicuous or else I’d be noticed, not as a sassy little girl but as ‘Nigger,’ ‘Moor Head,’ Sarotti-Moor.’

At the time, “Moor Head,” “Negro Kiss,” and “Sarotti-Moor” were the names of popular German snacks and chocolates. While seemingly innocuous, these terms were frequently invoked and particularly painful for Afro-Germans. Emde tried to hide herself because of her blackness and otherness, equating her otherness with shamefulness. Yet, Emde’s racialized body also made it impossible for her to be inconspicuous. In this case, a tension existed between Emde’s desire for invisibility and her aversion to her visible difference. Even though Emde desperately wanted to disappear, she could never do so completely because of her physical appearance. She also addressed this dilemma in her poem “The Cry,” which appeared after the article. In the poem, Emde uncovered memories from her childhood in which white German children and adults excluded her because of her physical differences, and labeled her “Moor Head.” White Germans did

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68 In the 1980s, the first two terms were changed to “Chocolate Kiss” (Shokokuss) and “Foam Kiss” (Schaumkuss), and the last term was the name of a German chocolate company, Sarotti, based in Berlin. For more on advertisements, visual culture, and race, refer to: Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995); Rita Gudermann and Bernhard Wulff, Der Sarotti-Mohr: Die bewegte Geschichte einer Werbefigur (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2004); Isabel Cserno, “Race and mass consumption in consumer culture: National trademark advertising campaigns in the United States and Germany, 1890-1930” (PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland-College Park, 2008); Willeke Sandler, “Deutsche Heimat in Afrika: Colonial Revisionism and the Construction of Germanness through Photography,” Journal of Women's History 25:1 (Spring 2013): 37-61; David Ciarlo, Advertising Empire; and Silke Hackenesch “From Cocoa Slavery to Chocolate City: Chocolate as a Racial Signifier in the Constructions of Blackness” (PhD Dissertation, Free University of Berlin, 2012).

not consider her an individual, viewing her instead as a monolithic “Nigger child” who had to behave for both her gender and her race. Venting years of frustrations, her autobiographical article and poetry also became a form of therapy. Her prose and poetry propelled her to come to terms with the past and the present, and in doing so, it served as a coping mechanism. In particular, she used language to express and declare how white Germans perceived her, who she was becoming, and who she currently was.

In addition to Emde’s contributions to Farbe bekennen, Ayim’s poem “The Break” in the volume also expressed aggravation about the precarious position of blackness in West German society. She wrote:

Longing is knowing what you want to hear and waiting in vain for it to be said. Sadness is when a child thinks she’s too Black and too ugly. Horror, when Mama won’t wash the child white. Why not? But everything would be much simpler. And the other children wouldn’t shout ‘Negro’ or ‘Negro Kiss.’

Ayim yearned for more moments of compassion from her foster parents, and she desperately wanted her foster mother to scrub away her blackness. If she could only get rid of her blackness, then she could be spared from the mean school children, who often shouted disparaging racial remarks. Harboring such hatred of blackness made it impossible for some Afro-German children to have a healthy self-esteem and confidence.

70 Emde also published prose outside of Farbe bekennen, see Emde, “I too am German-An Afro-German Perspective;” “Der Tanz,” beiträge zur feministischen theorie und praxis 23 (1988): 148 as well as poetry and articles in Afrekete. Emde resided in the US for a while, but currently lives in St. Croix with Gloria Joseph.

Both Black German women felt alone and depressed about their situations in society, but writing provided them with an opportunity to discuss their experiences and become public intellectuals.

Katharina Oguntoye’s poem “Reflection” also conveyed similar sentiments about blackness, exclusion, and longing. Oguntoye stated:

alone with my desperation. looking into your eyes, my brown, and oh so german sister. where is my peace? are you my reflection? is it the loneliness, the isolation that i see? the way to you is far and unknown. i go there unsure of my steps. Do you remember, my german, and oh so white sister, the feeling of desperation when you didn’t yet know that there are other women who don’t want to be just servants? 

Oguntoye conveyed her feelings of isolation and uncertainty. She also found it difficult to be with other Afro-Germans and could not find a space to just be herself. Moreover, Oguntoye realized that she did not want a “white sister” to presume to know what she should do with her life and future. Although there appeared to be a degree of solidarity between the white German and Oguntoye, this sisterly connection did not prohibit her from expressing her frank thoughts. Not every German woman of color wanted to be a domestic worker, and white Germans should not assume that Afro-Germans would want those careers.

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73 Oguntoye also published An Afro-German Story: On the Living Situation of Africans and Afro-Germans in Germany from 1884-1950 in 1997, which was her Masters thesis at the Technical University in Berlin. She finished her thesis in 1996. See Oguntoye, Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutschen in Deutschland von 1884 bis 1950 (Berlin: Hoh Verlag Christine Hoffmann, 1997). Oguntoye along with her organization Joliba helped to publish another book on Afro-German history this year with the support of the Senatsverwaltung für Arbeit, Integration und Frauen - Die Beauftragte für Integration und Migration, see Paulette Reed-Anderson, Menschen, Orte, Themen: Zur Geschichte und Kultur der Afrikanischen Diaspora in Berlin (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Arbeit, Integration und Frauen - Die Beauftragte für Integration und Migration, 2013). This book explored Black
With writing, Emde, Ayim, Lubinetzki, Oguntoye, and others could gain a confidence and courage to deal with their life experiences. Writing also enabled these Afro-German women to channel their pain from the many years of humiliation, loss, anger, and alienation that they endured in German society. These minority German women recognized their earlier experiences of racial discrimination as a part of their identity formation, and they wrote numerous narratives as a way of exorcizing the grief. In many ways, the contributors to Farbe bekennen became multicultural public intellectuals, who informed German society of the “truth” of its history by producing literature that helped to reach of multoples audiences. Their intellectual project also helped to shape the larger Afro-German movement, where they continued to declare their presence in Germany. In this way, writing and the movement were in fact interdependent. Representing manifold narratives, Farbe bekennen paved the way for a new Afro-German multicultural intellectual tradition that continued to allow them to re-invent their identities through their intellectual activism.

May Ayim: A “Borderless and Brazen” Multicultural Intellectual

After first blackening me up
they dragged me through the mud
wanting ultimately to make me black
absolutely uncalled for
to look on the dark side.
May Ayim

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Germans’ experiences during National Socialism, further underscoring the tradition of recovering Black German experiences.

74 Taken from the title of Ayim’s posthumous volume, Borderless and Brazen (Grenzenlos und unverschämt).

Of the Afro-German writers who helped to produce and then became inspired by *Farbe bekennen*, May Ayim would emerge as the most significant figure in the movement. Before her suicide at the age of thirty-six, Ayim became a prominent intellectual and spokesperson against racism and injustice. Throughout her career, Ayim returned to and built upon her work in *Farbe bekennen*, forging friendships and engaging with German, Afro-diasporic, and other people of color intellectuals. Employing writing as an empowering and edifying tool, Ayim also turned to diverse African, German, and diasporic traditions to creatively refashion her identity and claim her role as a public intellectual. In *Blues in Black and White* (*Blues in schwarz weiß*), for example, she touched upon the themes of diaspora, identity, community, and insensitivity while incorporating Adinkra symbols throughout the volume to express and cultivate a specific connection to West Africa. Throughout the volume, Ayim consciously relied on these multivalent Adinkra symbols and proverbs and played with African American traditions, including the blues especially with the title and content of her volume. Karein Goertz, a scholar of comparative literature, has written that, “Using metaphorical language to persuade, ridicule, parody or provoke her readers, Ayim references the double-voiced Signifying practices that are central to the African-American literary tradition.”

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76 Ayim met and maintained correspondences with Ellen Kuzwayo, Maryse Conde, Yüksel Parzarkaya, I.J. Vreugd, and others.

77 These were visual symbols that represented aphorisms, and the Akan of Ghana and by the Gyaman of Cote d’Ivoire in West Africa used them. Ayim discussed this lineage in *Blues in Black and White* (*blues in schwarz weiß*). The original booklet of Adinkra symbols is *The House of World Cultures* (Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt), *Adinkra: Symbolic language of the Ashanti/Adinkra: Symbolsprache der Ashanti* (Berlin: Movimento Drück, 1993), The Private Collection of May Ayim. See also Karin Schestokat, “May Ayim: Texte und Themen,” in *Literatur und Identität: deutsch-deutsche Befindlichkeiten und die multikulturelle Gesellschaft*, ed. Ursula E. Beitter (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2000), 219-221.

78 Karein K. Goertz, “Showing Her Colors: An Afro-German Writes the Blues in Black and White,” in “The Black German Experience,” eds. Tina Campt and Michelle M. Wright, *Callaloo*, 26:2 (Spring, 2003): 307. Goertz also discussed the Adinkra symbols that Ayim employed in this article and Goertz,
Through Ayim’s literary appropriations and personal background, she helped to develop an Afro-German tradition. Before analyzing Ayim’s written and oral forms of literary expression, I will offer some details about her childhood and adult life. Even though the vicissitudes in her life were oftentimes difficult, Ayim nevertheless turned to literature and politics to advocate for social justice for marginalized communities throughout Germany.

May Ayim was born to Ursula Andler and Emmanuel Ayim, a Ghanaian medical student, on May 3, 1960 in Hamburg, Germany. Ayim’s white German mother immediately placed her in an orphanage. Emmanuel Ayim wanted to take May back to Ghana for his childless sister, but in West Germany, he had no rights to his out of wedlock daughter.79 Brigitte Sylvia Gertrud, nicknamed May, remained at the children’s home for two years until a white family from Nordrhein-Westfalen, adopted her. Ayim joined the Opitz family, who already had children. During her childhood, she felt abandoned by her birth parents – a theme expressed in her literature. Labeled as a “mixed race child” and “pure-blooded half-breed,” Ayim’s adoptive parents were very strict in the hopes that she would become a model student in spite of her lineage — an allegedly wayward German mother and Ghanaian father. With good behavior, her adoptive parents told her, she could rise above her “half-breed” status in society. Ayim’s

troubled childhood with the Opitz family “made an impression on [her], and the negative events remained clearer in her memory than the positive ones. . .”80

Throughout her childhood, Ayim described the constant beatings and punishment that she suffered at the hands of her adoptive parents, and as a result, Ayim developed a negative opinion about her identity and blackness. Her adoptive parents derided her for a number of things, including her bed-wetting, weight gain, behavior, intelligence, school performance, and skin color. Ayim’s parents also ridiculed her, informing her that she must “Always behave nice and proper. What people think of you they think of all people of color.”81 In this environment, she harbored suicidal thoughts, and she also began to internalize the racism of her parents, siblings, and peers, nurturing a belief that black was bad, filthy, and evil. Through interactions with teachers, she continued to develop negative stereotypes and presumptions about blackness. At one point, one of her teachers assigned Ayim the role of a devil in the school play. Children at school and in the neighborhood called her offensive names such as “Negro” or “Negro Kiss” among others. Ayim longed to be loved and accepted and to find her place in German society. Growing up in this environment Ayim still felt suffocated and imprisoned, especially as the Opitzs expressed racial prejudices entrenched in German society.

As she grew older, the tensions continued with her parents and culminated when she arrived home late one night. This seemingly minor transgression resulted in Ayim’s parents throwing her out.82 After this incident, she maintained superficial contact with her siblings and sporadic contact with her adoptive parents, and when she did engage in


81 Mertins, 207.

82 Ibid., 144. Her parents denied throwing her out.
conversations with her parents, they always criticized her activism. Unable to see their own mistakes as parents, Ayim believed, they later informed her that her activism within the Black German community was “a pathological need to overcome her color and Afro-German identity.”

On her own at nineteen, she completed her Abitur in Munster with qualifications to be a nurse. She also studied German and social studies at a teacher’s college in Munster. After a trip to Israel, she transferred to the University of Regensburg and changed her major to education and psychology. In the following years, she traveled to Israel, Nairobi, Kenya, and Ghana. On a trip to Kenya, she attempted to rebuild a relationship with her biological father known as Uncle E (Onkel E). Uncle E occasionally visited when Ayim lived with her adoptive family, and he was now a Professor of Medicin, working in Kenya. Although the trip did not strengthen her relationship with him, it was crucial as she reclaimed her African heritage, embracing her roots.

After her travels, Ayim began to publish, including her 1986 thesis from the University of Regensburg, which served as the foundation of Farbe Bekennen. On a return trip to Ghana in 1986, she met her father’s extended family, and they welcomed and accepted her. After her time in Ghana, she returned to university to pursue a degree

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83 Ibid., 145.

84 As of 2013, Dr. Ayim was still alive, living and practicing medicine in Narobi, Kenya and not in his native country of Ghana.


86 Ayim’s thesis title was mentioned in chapter one. Ayim moved to Berlin in 1984.

87 According to Mertins, Ayim traveled to several African countries, but felt most at home in South Africa because she did not stand out in South Africa and blended into the “crowd of color” (147).
in speech therapy (*Heilpädagogisches Therapeutikum*) and worked at a special needs school in Berlin. In 1992, she returned to school once again for a Ph.D. in education at the Free University and pursued the topic “Ethnocentrism and Racism in Therapy.”

Ayim also continued to travel throughout the world—Brazil, South Africa, Cuba, and the United States for both work and pleasure.

Despite her hectic schedule, she still remained active in ISD and ADEFRA as well as Literature Women (*Literatur Frauen e.V.*), the European Roundtable on Human Rights and Cultural Politics in a Changing Europe: The Right to Participate in Cultural Life, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO. She continued to write, speak, and perform at workshops, conferences, and television news programs. Together with Chris Lange, Ika Hügel, Ilona Bubeck, Gülsen Aktas, and Dagmar Schultz, Ayim also edited a collection entitled *Distant Relations: Racism, Anti-Semitism, Class Oppression* (*Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung*) in 1993 and *Blues in Black and White* (*Blues in schwarz weiß*) in 1995.

Throughout her life, Ayim suffered from depression and later psychosis. In January 1996, Ayim had a breakdown and was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. During her hospitalization, the doctors diagnosed her with multiple sclerosis and abruptly discontinued her medication for other ailments. Eventually discharged from the hospital,

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88 See May Ayim, “Erster Zwischenarbeit für die Dissertation zum Thema: Ethnozentrismus und Rassismus in Therapiebereichen,” June 1992, no page number, Folder Ayim Nachtgesang 1997, OFV. It is also in 1992 that she began publishing and performing with the name Ayim.


her health continued to decline, and she attempted suicide. During this time, she also helped to organize and participated in the 1996 Black History Month celebration in Berlin. She was hospitalized a second time in June due to physical and mental exhaustion, but still worked, without sufficient food and sleep, as a college lecturer, speech therapist, and student advisor at several Berlin colleges and at the Alice-Salomon-University for Applied Sciences for Social Work (Alice-Salomon-Fachhochschule für Sozialarbeit).\(^91\) Sadly, on August 9, 1996, Ayim jumped to her death from a thirteenth story high-rise building in Berlin-Kreuzberg.\(^92\) She left her unpublished poems to the Orlanda women’s publishing house, and in 1997, the press posthumously published *Borderless and Brazen* (*Grenzenlos und unverschämt*) and *Nightsong* (*Nachtgesang*).\(^93\) As usual, conflict emerged, particularly as several Black Germans disliked the idea that she left her works to a white German woman, Dagmar Schultz, and Orlanda. At May’s funeral some Afro-German activists even fought with her adoptive parents.\(^94\)

\(^91\) Goertz, 310. Ricky Reiser and Paulette Reed-Anderson remarked in separate informal conversations how her health seriously declined in the last couple of months before her death.


\(^94\) On August 29, 2011, a dedication ceremony occurred, in which Gröbenufer, named after Otto Friederich von der Gröben – a colonial official in Ghana –, was renamed May Ayim Ufer, and I attended the dedication.
As a public intellectual, Ayim, I argue, belongs to a rich German philosophical tradition that includes Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Theodor Adorno. Several of Ayim’s works were evocative of themes covered by these philosophers: dialectical history and the African Other, nationalism and racism, and the culture industry. Yet Ayim’s literature also engaged with other topics such as the larger African diaspora, gender, and kinship that related to her experiences and observations as a Black German woman. Through her often existential and autobiographical poems, articles, speeches, and spoken-word performances, I maintain, Ayim used her marginal position to draw attention to Afro-Germans’ collective and individual difficulties in German society. In particular, she challenged Hegel’s belief that the African Other lacked a history and the ability to reason, and that Africans could not attain civilization or progress, remaining outside of Europe’s borders.

In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel wrote:

> The distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the knowledge of an absolute Being, and Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.

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95 Ayim also read Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Jean Paul Sartre’s *Réflexions Sur La Question Juive*, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back*, and others. While doing research, I stumbled upon one of Ayim’s card catalogs, in which she took notes from readings and referenced books and poems. On one index card, she even critiqued Fanon by asking: “Where is the black woman?” (“Wo bleibt die schwarze Frau?”). Please refer to May Ayim, *Brown Wooden Box of Index Cards* (card catalog), The Private Collection of May Ayim.


Hegel also stated that, “What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.” Discussing Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* literary scholar Michelle M. Wright has claimed that two dialectics were in fact at work in his piece. She has argued that:

One, explicitly defined in the text, famously locates the Black outside analytical history, mired in a developmental stasis from which only Western civilization can rescue him. The other while not explicitly defined, *implicitly* posits the Black as the antithesis of the white: where the white is civilized, the Black is primitive; where the white loves freedom, the Black enjoys servitude; whereas the white loves order, the Black embraces chaos, and so on. 

Yet, Ayim’s literature immediately established her ability to reason and think philosophically, and her literature located the Afro-German subject within the German nation and European continent more broadly. Ayim also allowed for a complex understanding of culture and nation; one that revealed the heterogeneous histories of Black Germans as well as other minorities. Ayim’s command of her mother tongue – German – and the inclusion of African, African-American, and Afro-diasporic themes and metaphors enabled her to positively position Afro-Germans within a West German intellectual tradition. With her literary activism, Ayim captured the *Volkgeist*, in this case the spirit of the Black German community, demanding a critical assessment of racist discourses and practices in German society, yet comprehending and accepting the differences that existed within the nation.

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99 Wright, *Becoming Black*, 29-30. She also made a similar point in the article “Others-from-within from Without,” by stating “rhetorically Hegel in fact places the Negro as the antithesis of the (white, male) European in his dialectic of history.” Wright, 297. She examined how Ayim and Afro-German and Afro-diasporic literature in Britain and France imbibed the “African Other” and contributed their critical literary interventions to European culture.
Ayim attended to Germany’s colonial and fascist pasts and redirected attention to the persistence of racism up to the present. In her work, she illustrated how the history of German individuals of color was connected to Germany’s colonial past and showed how Afro-German history, in particular, predated the postwar period and remained a significant aspect of German history. Moreover, she critiqued the discourses advanced by a reunified German government and media – the culture industry – by arguing that it engendered a system that continued to manipulate an “openly” susceptible public. “The power of the culture industry’s ideology,” Adorno claimed, “is such that conformity has replaced consciousness. The order that springs from it is never confronted with what it claims to be or with the real interests of human beings.”\(^{100}\) In Ayim’s critique, this racist culture manufactured discourses on integration and multiculturalism that ironically served to silence German minorities, preventing much needed dialogue and transformation from taking place. Throughout her literature, these as well as other philosophical themes remained central, and she continued to practice intellectual activism.\(^{101}\)

Turning to four of Ayim’s poems, including two of her most iconic poems, and one speech below, the remainder of this section analyzes how she tackled themes of identity, belonging, and race in her literature to disrupt the standard discourse of Germanness as being monoracial and white. This analysis also shows that Ayim worked to reinterpret diverse German identities and experiences and to give suppressed minority


\(^{101}\) Ayim was nominated for the 3rd edition of the *International Who’s Who of Contemporary Achievement*, and her biography would be included in the publication set for 1995. See J. M. Evans letter to May Opitz, July 29, 1994, *The Private Collection of May Ayim*. 

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voices a pivotal space within the nation. Ayim’s lasting achievement was her ability to interweave African, African-American, and German cultures together to create alternative literary forms and diasporic meanings that served as a critical impulse for the Afro-German community and other marginalized communities throughout the globe.

Specifically in “Afro-German I” (“Afro-deutsch I”) and “Afro-German II” (“Afro-deutsch II”), Ayim validated Black German subjectivities and public and private experiences within West German society and culture. Ayim broached topics that Black Germans experienced, and these topics also figured prominently in other Afro-German writings. “Afro-German I” and “Afro-German II,” for instance, took the form of both a dialogue and monologue, in which Ayim at moments disappeared from the conversation. In the first poem, Ayim recreated a routine interaction that Afro-Germans had with some of their white German compatriots. The white German women expressed a degree of incredulosity and fascination about Ayim’s alleged paradoxical Afro-German identity, stating:

You are Afro-German?
ah, I understand: African and German.
An interesting mixture, huh!

102 Both poems were written in 1985 during the time she conducted research for Farbe bekennen and were included in Blues in schwarz weiss. She also performed “Afro-German I” in numerous countries, including South Africa. Ayim’s first volume was reviewed in several magazines and newspapers. For example, Barbara v. Korff Schmising, “Blues in schwarz-weiß,” Der ev. Buchberater, December 1995, p. 364; Schnüß, “Poesie Schwarz-Weiss: Lustvoll gereimt,” Bonner Stadtmagazin, September 1995, p. 33; and Gerlinde Holland, “Blues in schwarz-weiß,” Stadt Revue, November 1996, p. 141. See also Folder May Ayim Blues in Schwarz Weiss 1995, OFV.

103 This is a theme that was continuously explored in other Afro-German works; see chapter four.

Ayim and other Black Germans were “interesting mixtures” rather than normal German subjects. Later on in the poem, the white German women suggested that Ayim “return” to Africa and civilize her people, spreading the ideals of humanity to the “lower culture.”

I mean you’re really a smart girl.  
If you work hard in your studies,  
you can help your people in Africa: That’s what  
you were predestined for,  
they’ll sure listen to you,  
but for us—  
it’s sort of a lower culture. . . .

In these lines, the white German woman redefined and relocated Ayim’s Afro-Germanness as an African – outside German borders. Recognizing her phenotypical difference, the white German simultaneously misread and disregarded her Black German identity. By claiming that Ayim was African, the white German woman ignored Afro-German identity as well as the entire African diasporic community in Germany.  

In “Afro-German II” Ayim, moreover, continued to focus on issues of Afro-German identity by unsettling the characteristics that white Germans ascribed to blackness and individuals of African descent more generally. Ayim also attended to the lateral differences that connected diverse German minority populations such as Jewish,

with these scholars’ analyses, although Wright assumed the German interlocutor was a man rather than a woman, and Schestokat engaged with Homi Bhabha’s idea of hybridity and Molefi Asante’s ideas about cultural and social discolation. With my interpretation, I do not reference Bhabha and Asante with regards to Ayim’s literature.


106 See also Wright, 193-194 for her discussion of the poem. Ayim also tackled this similar theme in Opitz “Ein Brief aus Münster,” in Dokumentation zum ersten Frauenkongreß, 210-213, Folder May Afro- Deutsche/Zeitungsartikel über Afro-Detusch/Schwarze in den Medien, The Private Collection of May Ayim and Ayim, “Ein Brief aus Münster,” in Grenzenlos und unverschämt (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1997), 9-12.
Asian, Turkish, and the Sinti and Roma to Afro-Germans. German discriminatory practices, exclusionary discourses, structural racism had an effect on all these minority communities, and therefore also afforded opportunities for solidarity and coalition building. Ayim emphasized these connections with the following lines, spoken by her white German interlocutor:

. . .hm, I see.
You can be glad you’re not Turkish, huh?
I mean: this harassment of foreigners is just awful,
do you get some of that too, sometimes?
“. . .”

The white German woman recognized Ayim as a non-foreigner and yet then seemed to second guess whether she could really be a native German, casting her, as Michelle Wright has coined, as an “Other-from-Within and an Other-from-Without.” Moreover, Wright maintained, “In short, Afro-German identity is not the antithesis in the dialectic of (white) German subjectivity: it is simply non-existent.” Here, the Other helped to define the parameters of Europeans’ superiority, even though the Other’s existence was deemed insignificant. Furthermore, the white German woman claimed that Ayim should be lucky that she was not Turkish because Turkish Germans are and

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108 See also Karin Obermeier, “Afro-German Women: Recording Their Own History,” in “Minorities in German Culture,” ed. Azade Seyhan, Special Issue, *New German Critique* 46 (Winter 1989): 172-180, esp. 175. Please refer to chapter five for some examples of cross-ethnic and transnational mobilization.


110 Please see chapter two for a discussion of these terms.


were considered “foreigners.” Similar to Black Germans, Turkish Germans were and are not thought to be native Germans based an unspoken belief that whiteness is equated with Germanness. Alienating and offending Ayim, the German women’s observation implied that Turkish individuals endured more persecution than Afro-Germans.

Discussing xenophobic attacks in society, the white German inquired about Ayim’s experiences of racial discrimination but only provided a veneer of sincerity. The white German woman actually downplayed the role of racism in these attacks that have occurred before the fall of the wall. In doing so, the white German trivialized the experiences of racism that Ayim and other German minorities faced, replying that as a woman, she also had some problems.

Yeah, but those problems I have myself. I don’t think you can blame everything on color, and as a woman, it’s not easy anywhere.

Ignoring the fact that German society placed value on phenotypical and racial differences, the white German woman evaded the discussion of racism. Throughout German cities, memorials, museums, and dedications to the Holocaust and Jews reveal how the country has tried to negotiate and come to terms with its past. In other ways,

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113 Here I am referring to second and third generation Turkish Germans, who speak German fluently. For more on Turkish German literature, see Zafer Şenocak, *Atlas des tropischen Deutschlands* (Berlin: Babel Verlag, 1992); Şenocak, *Fremde Flugel auf eigener Schulter* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994); Irmgard Ackermann, ed. *Als Fremder in Deutschland* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982); Leslie Adelson, “Migrants’ Literature or German Literature,” *German Quarterly* 63.3-4 (1990): 382-90; and Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims*. Chin also examines some of these aspects in *The Guest Worker Question*, esp. chapters one through three.


115 Ayim, 25 and Ayim 16. Wright has claimed that in both “Afro-German I” and “Afro-German II,” “Ayim used a strategy also located Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* and Aime Cesaire’s *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*: ventriloquism. Yet she uses it to different ends, namely, to reveal the illogical spatial and temporal assumptions that emerge from those subjects who are unable to comprehend, much less speak, the material, performed truth of Diasporic identities that do not so easily align with monologic definitions of race and nation” (303).
Ayim emphasized Germans had yet to fully grapple with how pervasive racism remained in their society, especially with regards to German minorities. The white German woman assumed that her gendered identity mitigated the significance of Ayim’s own suffering. For the doubly marginalized Afro-German women, however, gender and racial identities were inextricably linked, particularly as they agitated for equality and parity in Germany. In addition, Wright has posited that, “Ayim also made a point of providing an effective counter-discourse for the Afro-German subject.” Ayim challenged negative constructions and stereotypes of blacks in society by performing cultural and social work for the Afro-German community and allowing diverse representations of Black German identity to re-emerge. These autobiographical poems helped Ayim position herself as a public intellectual, who increasingly became the voice of the movement and helped to represent and acknowledge the experiences of her Black German compatriots. Uncovering the white German compatriots’ ignorance in her poems, Ayim’s literature as well as the larger movement’s efforts at intellectual activism sought to purge German society of its racist practices and beliefs that existed on both sides of the political spectrum.

Additionally, two poems entitled “Autumn in Germany” ("deutschland im herbst") and “No more rotten gray-for a colorful republic: talk-talk-show for the blab-blah struggle” (“gegen leberwurstgrau- für eine bunte republik talk-talk-show für den bla-bla-kampf”), Ayim described the hypocrisy of German reunification and the rhetoric of

\[116\] See also Fuechtner, “Germany’s knowledge of its racist past has blinded it to its racist present.”

\[117\] Wright, “Others-From-Within from Without,” 303.
accord, inclusion, and community. For Ayim, these were illusionary concepts that continued to subject German minorities and other people of color to attacks, denying them a rightful place within the nation. In the first few lines, Ayim established the harsh reality of racism in a newly reunified Germany with the lines “it is not true/that it is not true/that’s how it was/first then now again” (“es ist nicht wahr, daß es nicht wahr ist, so war es”). The poem’s fragmented structure, moreover, helped to represent the physical and cultural ruptures continuously taking place in Germany. Undertaking a Lordesque act of “transforming the silences,” Ayim offered a frank commentary on the ubiquitous nature of racism. Rather than claim racial discrimination was a closed chapter from Germany’s fascist past, she underscored how it was a social reality in the present. Comparing the recent cultural and political landscape of reunified Germany to the Third Reich, particularly as houses and people were openly burned, beaten, and murdered, she emphasized the continuities in anti-foreign and racist violence toward minorities in Germany. Instead of assisting people of color, Ayim pointed to how Germans actually “joined in clapping or stealthily gaping” (“und mitgemacht beifall geklatscht oder heimlich gegafft”), in response to reports of violence. Particularly poignant for Ayim was the fatal neo-Nazi attack on an Angolan man, Amadeu Antonio Kiowa, in November 1990, and she wrote:

118 Ayim, “deutschland im herbst” and “gegen leberwurstgrau—für eine bunte republik talk-talk-show für den bla-bla-kampf” Blues in Schwarz weiß (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1995), 68-70 and 62-65. Ayim, “Autumn in Germany,” and “No more rotten gray—for a color republic: talk-talk-show for the blah-blah-struggle,” in Blues in Black and White: A Collection of Essays, Poetry, and Conversations, trans. Anne V. Adams (Berlin: Orlanda Verlag, 2003), 109-111 and 60-63. “Deutschland im herbst” was published in 1992 and “No more rotten gray—for a colorful republic” was published in 1990. Goertz’s analysis of these poems, see “Showing our Colors” 313 and 314, which remain similar to my own analysis.


120 Ibid., 68 and Ibid., 109.
again so soon?

a singular incident:
in November 1990
amadeu antonio from Angola
was murdered
in eberswalde
by neo-nazis
his child born shortly after by a
white german
woman
her house

shortly after
trashed^121

In addition to Kiowa’s tragic death, his child would now grow up fatherless, and
his white partner would have to raise their child alone and deal with the aftermath of
having her life and home/intimacy destroyed.\textsuperscript{122} With this literary and political act, Ayim
exposed how German history repeated itself, particularly with racial violence against
asylum seekers, minorities, and other immigrants. Later, she connected the fatal attack
on Kiowa on November 1990 to \textit{Kristallnacht} and wrote:

that’s how it is

“\textit{Kristallnacht}”:
in November 1938
first shattered
were windowpanes
then
again and again
human bones
of Jews and blacks

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 69 and Ibid., 110.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{122} Kiowa later succumbed to his wounds on December 6, 1990. For more information on Kiowa, please refer to} \url{http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/eng/about-us/who-was-amadeu-antonio/} \textsuperscript{[Accessed January 16, 2012]. In August 1992, neo-Nazis instigated mob attacks against immigrants and asylum seekers, mostly from Vietnam and the Sinti and Roma from Romania, in Rostock. Neo-Nazis threw Molotov cocktails and burned the high-rise apartment where immigrants stayed. Several events promoting tolerance and understanding took place in August 2012 to recognize the 20\textsuperscript{th}-anniversary of this violent event.}
In their contributions to *The Power of Intellectuals*, scholars Konard Jarausch and Andreas Huyseen have suggested that unification allowed neoconservatives to gain intellectual and political currency, causing a revival of nationalism — a dreaded step backwards. Ayim no doubt concurred. As extreme right-wing nationalism continued to surge in reunified Germany, Ayim posited that some Germans had not learned from their past. Although these xenophobic attacks were new incidents, they highlighted the historical continuum of racist ideals surrounding homogeneity and the privileging of whiteness (white supremacy) in Germany. As history repeated itself, the German public remained increasingly disinterested in these violent incidents, and Ayim wrote:

and the police
    came so late
    it was too late
and the newspapers were so short
    of words
    it equaled silence
and on TV no picture

123 Ayim, 68 and Ayim, 109. Cultural theorist Jennifer Michaels also examined this poem along with works from Ika Hügel-Marshall and Helga Emde. See Michaels, “Multiethnicity and Cultural Identity,” 213-14 and Michaels, “Fühlst Du Dich als Deutsche oder Afrikanerin?: May Ayim’s Search for an Afro-German identity in her Poetry and Essays,” *German Life and Letters* 59:4 (October 2006): 500-514. In the latter article, she only discussed Ayim’s works, positing that Ayim was the only Afro-German to infuse African symbols into her literature. This of course is not true when one analyzes *Afrekete* and other Black German literature.

Ayim depicted common apathy to these assaults and stressed how normalized violence and discourses of racial difference had become even in a post-1945 German society.

Through “Autumn in Germany,” Ayim highlighted the disunity that existed in unified Germany, especially with the line “in the newly united Germany that so much likes to/likes too much to call itself re-united/it happened.” While a newly reunified Germany ignored its racist past, it actually located racial difference in both the center and periphery, excluding individuals on the fringes of life from the German nation. Racist assaults became so prevalent in the autumns following unification, celebrated on October 3rd, that the fall quickly became a season that Ayim abhorred.

In “No more rotten gray—for a colorful republic: talk-talk-show for the blah-blah struggle,” Ayim covered similar ground, especially as she used her position as a minority intellectual to readdress the political hypocrisy pervasive in unified Germany. Ayim limned feelings of hopelessness throughout the poem and revealed how the media and representatives from both political spectrums treated Black Germans and other German minorities. Pressing minority concerns appeared to occupy a fleeting role in the minds’ of politicians and activists. But during elections season or special occasions, minority issues remained in demand. Here, the “dear alien citizens” (“liebe ausländische

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125 Ayim, 69 and Ayim, 110. Ayim also explored similar themes in the following poems in Blues in schwarz weiß, please see “blues in schwarz weiss” (82-83) and freiheit der kunst (76-77).

126 Ibid., 69 and Ibid., 110-111. The phrase also refers to the terrorist season of the late 1970s, in which the Red Army Fraction (RAF, Rote Armee Fraktion) heralded the “autumn (herbst) of postwar or Wunder-Germany.” This supports the idea that postwar Germany remained fraught with conflicts and disunity. See the film Deutschland im Herbst, 1978. DVD. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alf Brustellin, Alexander Kluge, Maximiliane Mainka, Edgar Reitz, Katja Rupé, Hans Peter Cloos, Volker Schlöndorff, and Bernhard Sinkel. Berlin: Kinowelt.

127 Since the poem spans over two pages, I will only analyze excerpts of it.
mitbürgerInnen”) attended protests and/or participated in a variety of shows and academic panels. These activities gave the appearance of a “colorful” and multicultural Germany, but in reality, the politicians and activists did not accomplish anything concrete for their minority constituents.

as the “dear alien citizens”  
aturally without civil rights  
as migrants  
from the countries of the world  
as experts in matters of racism  
as the ones “afflicted”

Afro-Germans’ along with minorities’ demands and debates did not evoke significant change in society. In this case, these “minority” demands became cataloged and neglected. As white German politicians continued to ignore these demands, they, in effect, censored minority voices and denied their agency. Ayim’s sarcastic tone helped to emphasize that the issues concerning migrants and other people of color in Germany would not go unrecognized due to the nature of German bureaucracy and its culture of silence surrounding race and racism. Moreover, after completing a series of shows and conferences, German activists felt quite satisfied with their sporadic and superficial commitment. These token hyphenated-Germans, who were publicly paraded about, return to their marginal existence, as the politically correct labels disappeared. Ayim penned this verse:

the “dear alien citizens”  
still without civil rights of course  
once again turn into the “spics,” “pakis” or “chink” from next door  
the black or however  
hyphenated germans

128 Ayim 62 and Ayim 60.
129 Ibid and Ibid.
change back into the “Negroes”
from really far away
once again we are those
the whitewashed of history
already over-looked yesterday
or dis-covered
described defined instructed.130

With the constant image of integration throughout Germany, it made the hypocrisy of
unification particularly unsettling.131 Integration, unity, and community were words that
remained devoid of any significance for Afro-Germans and other minorities in unified
Germany. The façade of unification convinced these German minorities that they must
rewrite their histories and reshape their destinies.

In addition to issues in Germany, Ayim also wrote poems about well- and lesser
known individuals across the diaspora, including Ana Herrero-Villamor, Martin Lurher
King, Jr., and Audre Lorde.132 Ayim wrote about the tensions that existed within
diasporic communities. She also highlighted the injustices that occurred in diverse
countries, particularly in South Africa and the former Yugoslavia. With Blues in schwarz
weiß, Ayim transcended German boundaries in an effort to cultivate connections with

130 Ibid., 63 and Ibid., 61.

131 In a 2011 interview, Vietnamese-German scholar Kien Nghi Ha also discussed the problems of the
rhetoric of integration that presumes immigrants to be the problematic group and that demonizes Muslims
and other people of color in Germany. See The European with Kien Nghi Ha, “We Live in a Premodern
July 16, 2013].

132 Ana Herrero-Villamor was a twenty-two year old Afro-Spanish and German woman active in ISD-
Berlin, and she was found dead in her apartment in 1992. She was a poet and spoken word artist. See
Politik, The Private Collection of May Ayim. For some of her poetry, refer to Ana Herrero-Villamor, “91,”
“Auf den Straßen unserer Stadt,” “bin heimatlos,” “Heaven,” “wit Berliner,” “Gold,” “Blau/Indigo,” “sie
mochte deine lippen lesen,” “Munsternde Blicke,” and “I Am A Sister,” in Euer Schweigen Schützt Euch
nicht: Audre Lorde und die Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland, ed. Peggy Piesche (Berlin: Orlanda
other marginalized and transnational communities. Ayim, moreover, published works in wide-ranging areas and topics but continued to focus on the experiences of Black Germans.

Ayim also addressed concerns about racism, community, and indifference in her performances and speeches throughout the globe. She believed that “speaking before an audience is my therapy.” One extant written speech is particularly illuminating of how Ayim brought the Afro-German movement to international audiences. In a speech entitled “Racism and Resistance in United Germany” that Ayim gave at Carleton College on May 10, 1994, she briefly detailed the history of blacks in Germany – a legacy dating back to antiquity – and provided an overview of the conditions that Afro-Germans and other minorities encountered. Offering examples of racism in twentieth-century

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133 In *Blues schwarz weiss*, refer to “ana” (47-49); “die zeit danach” (53-54); “soul sister” (56-57); “community” (99-101); “jerusalem” (87); “bitte bosnien herzegovina krieg” (92-94); and “im exil und hiv positiv” (95-97).


135 Ayim also preformed throughout Germany, including Berlin, Kassel, Bremen, Munster, Cologne, Saarbrucken, Erfurt, Cottbus, Schwabach, and other cities. See Folder, Ayim Grenzenlos und unverschämt 1997, OFV.

136 Mertins, 143.

137 Please see the German and Russian Departments at Carleton College, “May Ayim: Afro-German Writer and Poet – Christopher U. Light Lecturer (program),” May 9-11, 1994, Northfield, Minnesota, pp. 1-3, The Private Collection of May Ayim. Ayim’s lecture took place at 4:30pm. She also appeared as a guest speaker at the University of Minnesota for a conference entitled, “Xenophobia in Germany: National and Cultural Identities After Unification,” from May 11-14. See, “Xenophobia in Germany: National and Cultural Identities After Unification” (flyer), The Private Collection of May Ayim. See also Brian DeBauche, “Extreme right-wing groups make gains in German politics,” *The Minnesota Daily*, May 18, 1994, p. 7. Ayim also participated in a conference entitled “Schweigen ist schuld: Deutsch ist eine Bunte
Germany, Ayim mentioned an account about an African family in a Berlin zoo (Tierpark) in 1920. This Berlin exhibition was not unlike the racist nineteenth-century anthropological displays (Völkerschau) in Germany and elsewhere.\(^{138}\) Unfortunately, the African family died because they were not given adequate clothing during the winter.\(^{139}\) Moreover, discussions about Afro-Germans before 1945 were a rare occurrence, as the focus remained on the “roughly 3,000 racially mixed children born to German women [and] fathered by Black US soldiers.”\(^{140}\) German parliamentary debates in 1952 insisted on finding homes for these children that were outside of Germany. Yet, “little was done to focus on the lack of tolerance among the white German [sic] population. Rather the victims of racism were regarded as a problem, not the people with conscious or unconscious racist attitudes.”\(^{141}\)

Braiding personal experiences along with historical and sociological details, Ayim shared stories of growing up in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Ayim, “There has always been a great reluctance to use the term racism within the Sprache,” at the Frankfurt Book Fair on October 10, 1993. See “Schweigen ist schuld: Deutschland ist eine Bunte Sprache” (event poster and flyer), October 10, 1993, Frankfurt, The Private Collection of May Ayim.


\(^{140}\) Ayim, “Racism and Resistance in United Germany,” p. 4.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 4.
German context. The most preferred term is still ‘xenophobia’ or ‘hostility against foreigners,’ but these terms deny the fact that all foreigners are not equally subject to attack and that Black Germans are also a target for violence.″\textsuperscript{142} Later, she proffered additional accounts of the situation in Germany, especially after the demonstrations on November 9, 1989. Recalling an experience in a crowded West German subway, she overheard when a white woman sat with her Afro-German daughter on her lap and was told, “We don’t need people like you anymore, we ourselves are more than enough.” She also witnessed when a “ten year old African boy was kicked out of a train, in order to give place to a white person.”\textsuperscript{143} Black Germans and other minorities often met to determine how to protect themselves and combat the attacks, but they were not asked their opinions about unification. The climate of 1990s Germany continued to prove disappointing for Ayim, as the “German media barely gave attention to the release of Nelson Mandela,” and “[she] was enraged that n\oeone talked about the fact that on one side, people welcomed the white citizens of the former GDR whereas, on the other hand, immigration laws for migrants especially from 2/3 of the world- countries, were changed,” making it more difficult for them to enter the country.\textsuperscript{144} The indifference to racial and sexual violence and preservation of racist language and attitudes in street names showed how these forms of discrimination were reproduced on multiple levels throughout Germany.\textsuperscript{145} The silence and ignorance towards racism by some progressives and feminists was not surprising, as even German politicians tended to be more

\textsuperscript{142}\textit{Ibid.}, 8.

\textsuperscript{143}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{144}\textit{Ibid.}, 9.

\textsuperscript{145} Ayim noted the change of Talmann street to Moor street (\textit{Mohrenstraße}).
concerned about the country’s reputation than with the real victims.\textsuperscript{146} Here, it was important to draw attention to German racism at any cost – a task of a public intellectual. Yet, she ended the talk on a positive note, focusing on the instances of multiracial alliances and the anti-racism work undertaken by a variety of organizations, including ISD and ADEFRA. As a public intellectual, Ayim’s presentation at Carleton, much like her articles, poetry and performances, sought to enlighten this university audience about the serious issues facing people of color communities and their uphill battle to address how engrained German racism truly was. Yet, it also served as a lesson in survival, resistance, and preservation.

Ayim’s “counter-discursive” literature offered diverse diasporic and minority populations in Germany with a cultural and political medium to express their concerns.\textsuperscript{147} In many ways, she became the voice of the Afro-German community and movement, and in her work, Ayim, as an Afro-German multicultural public intellectual, shared her astute observations about a reunified Germany, racism, and identity and “[spoke] metaphorically of the power of resistance, community, and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{148} Karin Schestokat, moreover, has remarked that, “In Ayim’s poems, we do not find so much a failure of language as a resonance of different voices that become as audible as the over- and undertones of a musical instrument.”\textsuperscript{149} Her spoken and written literature overturned narrow and traditional notions of the nation and reread new meanings into them. As

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{147} Please refer to Wright, \textit{Becoming Black}.
\textsuperscript{148} Goertz, 316.
\textsuperscript{149} Schestokat, 223-224. The German text: “In Ayim’s Gedichten finden wir nicht so sehr dieses Versagen der Sprache als vielmehr ein Mitschwingen von verschiedenen Stimmen, die so hörbar werden wie die Ober- und Untertöne eines Musikinstruments.”
Ayim reinterpreted German culture and identity, she invited other Germans, Europeans, and Americans to explore plural spaces that did “not confine the past to national boundaries—Ghana or Germany—rather it lies in the global struggle against racism.”

In fact, it was a campaign against exclusion that diverse Afro-German activists in the movement continuously engaged in, as they attempted to change German society. Afro-Germans’ intellectual activism enabled them to forge solidarities and accomplish political actions within and beyond German soil. Ultimately, Ayim’s intellectual activism challenged German racism of the past, present, and future and pressed for concrete transform.

Finally, following in the tradition of *Farbe bekennen* and Ayim’s later writings, there have been several anthologies written by women and queers of color about their exclusion and marginalization in Germany. In 1999 Afro-German author, Olumide Popoola, and Turkish German animation artist, Beldan Sezen, edited and published *Talking Home: Home out of our own pens: Women of Color in Germany (Talking Home: Heimat aus unserer eigenen Feder: Frauen of Color in Deutschland)*, where they declared their womanhood and sexuality in the process. Talking Home also represented some of the transformations that have taken place since *Farbe bekennen* publication and how issues of racism have not been completely resolved in German society. Using diverse autobiographical forms and visual symbols, the multicultural

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150 Goertz, 316. Globalization could also be homogenizing, and I believe Ayim wanted to get at the specificities of the German case and how its African Diaspora functioned, responded, and related to other overlapping diasporas throughout the world.

anthology engendered a site for women of color writers to forge connections to one another and rework notions of home and belonging—not unlike Ayim and the Afro-German movement.

In addition to Talking Home, some Afro-Germans have written memoirs, including Ika Hügel-Marshall, Marie Nejar, Bärbel Kampmann, Abini Zöllner, and Manuela Ritz. Hügel-Marshall’s autobiography has garnered acclaim outside of Germany as it was also translated into English in 2001. These multi-generational women authors have openly discussed their lives, reflecting upon their personal journeys to self-definition and for Hügel-Marhsall and Ritz, in particular, that journey involved activism in the Afro-German movement. Interestingly, younger generations of Afro-German authors, including Victoria Robinson and Noah Sow, currently ranging from the ages of thirty to forty, have also published a number of pieces. Afro-German men,


153 Hügel-Marshall, Invisible Woman. She participated in a tour in the fall 2011, giving readings in the US.

154 Victoria Robinson has published novels and scholarly articles. See Robinson, “Schwarze Deutsche Kräfte;” Robinson, Schanzen-Slam (Berlin: Anais, 2009); Robinson, 111 Gründe Männer zu lieben: Ein Lobgesang auf das starke Geschlecht (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2009); and Robinson, 111 Gründe, eine beste Freundin zu haben: Eine Lobeshymne auf die bedingungslose Freundschaft (Berlin:
moreover, have also written a number of autobiographies in recent years. Together these Afro-Germans have created multiple forms of their intellectual activism, continuing the legacy of *Farbe bekennen* and the Afro-German movement more broadly.

**Conclusion**

*Farbe bekennen* and Ayim’s poetry and speeches facilitated the emergence of an Afro-German multicultural intellectual tradition that privileged diverse forms of expression (spoken, written, musical, and visual). Constructing an alternative space through their writing, these Black German female intellectuals and activists informed the general public about the lives of women of color and publicly demanded recognition in a German society that often ignored their existence. Here, these Afro-German women actively created a variety of intellectual spaces where they legitimized their knowledge through the production of literature. *Farbe bekennen* also enabled Afro-German women

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155 Hans Jürgen Massaquoi’s autobiography has also been popular. Sonya Donaldson also analyzed Hügel-Marshall’s and Massaquoi’s autobiographies. Donaldson, “(Ir)reconcilable Differences,” 66-120. See Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), which was first published in English. See Massaquoi, *Neger, Neger Schornsteinfeger! Meine Kindheit in Deutschland* (Bern/Munich/Wien: Fretz & Wassmuth, 2000) and Massaquoi, *Hänschen klein, ging allein... Mein Weg in die neue Welt*, trans. Ulrike Wasel und Klaus Timmermann (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 2004). There was also a television show in Germany based on the book. For other Black German men’s autobiographies, refer to Thomas Usleber, *Die Farben unter meiner Haut. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen* (Frankfurt/Main, Brandes & Apsel, 2002); Detlef Soost, *D! Heimkind - Neger - Pionier. Mein Leben* (Reinbek, Rowohlt/Verlag Wunderlich, 2005); and Charles Max Huber, *Ein Niederbayer im Senegal. Mein Leben zwischen zwei Welten* (Frankfurt/Main, Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 2005). See also Philip Khabo Köpsell, *Die Akte James Knopf* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2010).

to declare their womanhood and align with women within Germany and across the diaspora who faced similar experiences of social exclusion. In addition, Afro-German women claimed a positive and empowering connection to African, African-American, and Afro-diasporic traditions while also cultivating new bonds, refashioning identities, and processing years of discrimination. While the oppression that these Afro-German women endured placed them on the margins, they now joined together and embraced their marginality as a powerful source; they were public intellectuals agitating for political and social changes.

Afro-German women also employed writing as a temporary way of healing their scars and purging the negativity collectively. Writing served as a catharsis not a panacea, especially as women attempted to process their childhood traumas. In this way, writing became an act of self-definition as well as self-preservation. Writing also provided Afro-Germans with a means to mediate between German and Afro-diasporic cultures as well as Afro-Germans’ multiple experiences, affirming plural positions in the process. Black German women used their literature as sites for cultural and psychological work that proved necessary in their mobilization in Germany and beyond.157

Much of Ayim’s poetry, essays, speeches, and performances documented German racism and decentered simplistic and fixed notions of culture, history, and identity, recognizing that Germany was indeed multicultural and multiracial. Through her intellectual activism, she acknowledged the varieties of Germanness and reinserted minority voices within the nation, and she revealed that Afro-Germans, not unlike other German minorities, contributed to the nation. Ayim reclaimed the African Other as a

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hyphenated multicultural German intellectual, continuing to use the dominant language and culture to redefine her place in society at large. Each poem and speech enabled Ayim to question notions of Germanness and critique the colonial imagination and rhetoric entrenched in German society as well as the illusion of post-reunification national harmony. Here, the textual registers in Ayim’s literature left the audience and reader with a resounding message about participating in social justice work.

Ayim has continued to have an important role within the Black German community, especially with their establishment of the May Ayim Award or the International Black German Literary Prize in 2004. As scholar Aija Poikane-Daumke has argued, “The year 2004 marked Afro-Germans determination to represent their writings at a national and also international level.”

Michael Küppers, also known as Küppers-Adebisi, and his multimedia project Afrotalk TV Cybernomads, in cooperation with UNESCO and the House of World Cultures (Haus der Kulturen der Welt), organized the first annual Black German literary prize that honored writers, poets, and artists “who contributed to a better understanding of the the experiences of people of African descent in Germany.” In October 2004, the literary prize committee honored an Afro-German author, Olumide Popoola along with Mario Curvello and MC Sanatana. The 2004

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158 Poikane-Daumke, 9.


160 See Peggy Piesche, Michael Küppers, Ani Ekpenyong, and Angela Alagiyawanna, eds. May Ayim Award: Erster internationaler schwarzer deutscher Literaturpreis 2004 (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 2004). Marion Kraft served on the award committee and was also Popoola’s teacher in Bielefeld. Popoola, of Nigerian and German descent, wrote poems in afro look and continues to publish. See Popoola, This is not about sadness (Munster: Unrast, 2010) and Also by Mail: A Play. Popoola is currently a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at the University of East London. She tours around the world.
celebration also took place in conjunction with the exhibition “The Black Atlantic,” at the House of World Cultures with scholars Tina Campt and Paul Gilroy.\footnote{Paul Gilroy and Tina Campt, eds. \textit{Der Black Atlantic} (Berlin: The House of World Cultures, 2004).} Afro-Germans’ effort at memorializing and honoring Ayim as well as recognizing new Afro-German authors illustrated how much intellectual activism remained at the heart of the Black German community.

Ayim along with other Black German female intellectuals such as Raja Lubinetzki, Katharina Oguntoye, and Helga Emde used their affective, political, and autobiographical works (in books, newspapers, workshops, and television) to compel the mainstream public as well as other Black Germans to understand the intricacies of racism in their own country. While they appropriated different cultural styles and forms, Black Germans still engendered a literature that reflected their diverse community. Afro-Germans’ initiatives, magazines, and books constituted multiple forms of intellectual activism. In doing so, these activists relied on their unique positions as hyphenated Germans to share new possibilities for Germanness and society.
CHAPTER FOUR

“A COVENANT OF WOMEN-BONDING”: KINSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, AND FRIENDSHIP

“Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the active being.”

Audre Lorde¹

Sister
why do you pierce me with your eyes
why do you want to understand everything

Schwester
warum durchbohrst du mich mit deinen blicken
warum willst du alles verstehen
den schmerz hinter meinem lachen anfassen
die müdigkeit in meinen augen beethoven
die furchen auf meiner stirn zählen
die narben unter meiner haut betrachten
warum willst du deine kalten hände um mein zitterndes herz falten

Schwester
warum durchbohrst du mich mit deinen blicken
warum willst du alles verstehen
den schmerz hinter meinem lachen anfassen
die müdigkeit in meinen augen beethoven
die furchen auf meiner stirn zählen
die narben unter meiner haut betrachten
warum willst du deine kalten hände um mein zitterndes herz falten

Sister
why do you pierce me with your eyes
why do you want to understand everything
touch the pain behind my laughter
feel the weariness in my eyes
count the furrows on my forehead
examine the scars under my skin
why do you want to fold your cold hands around my trembling heart

In the above quotation, Afro-Caribbean lesbian and feminist Audre Lorde explained that women’s relationships with one another are mutually supportive and constitutive. Conveying insights about female bonds, Afro-German poet May Ayim described complicated dynamics between women in the poem “Sister” (Schwester). Both women addressed how a variety of female relationships offered women a foundation. For Lorde, female fellowship engendered new spaces for women to embrace their creative potential and be themselves. Lorde’s friendships with women informed her identity, work, and activism throughout her life. Ayim expressed how a sisterly connection, possibly with a fellow Afro-German, fostered a sense of belonging and attachment; yet, it also was not without tensions and ambivalence. Reflecting both empowering and challenging female experiences, these poets highlighted how interpersonal relationships among women served as a source of strength and security, but also uncertainty.

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3 Lorde detailed this point in *Zami*, the title of which comes from “a Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers;” *Zami*, 255. She also unpacked this theme in *The Black Unicorn* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978) and other poems, including “Outlines,” “Woman,” and “Love Poem,” to name a few. See Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. Lorde also mentioned the significance of women bonds in her many works and speeches. Please refer to chapter one.

As I explained in the previous chapter, Afro-German women established a literary tradition through their diverse cultural productions, including *Farbe bekennen* and May Ayim’s *Blues in Schwarz weiß*. As a result, Afro-German women developed a form of intellectual activism, asserting their presence in German public culture. In this chapter, I examine ADEFRA as a lesbian, feminist, and internationalist organization that reflected queer black diasporic politics. Afro-German lesbian, heterosexual, and bisexual...
feminists were a part of a queer diasporic community that positioned itself in the larger mainstream German and African diasporic cultures. With their organization and journal *Afrekete*, Afro-German women established a feminist and queer black diasporic project that helped them achieve recognition and combat multiple forms of oppression, including misogyny and bigotry in West Germany.

Moreover, I analyze the centrality of female bonding within the early stages of the movement through ADEFRA’s journal. Both ADEFRA and *Afrekete* evolved as important sites, where Afro-German women cultivated affective ties that reflected their desire for acceptance and recognition in Germany as well as their feminist, queer, and diasporic identities. These nascent relationships often helped Afro-German women to creatively refashion their identities and broaden their understanding of fellowship. ADEFRA and *Afrekete* opened up spaces for social cohesion that Black German women desperately sought after years of isolation in predominantly white German communities in the period following the Second World War.

The emergence of ADEFRA and *Afrekete* enabled Afro-German women to transform their ideas into action. *Afrekete* mixed various genres and writing styles, including poetry, autobiographical narratives, historical articles, afro-centric imagery, art, photographs, as well as reports on projects, workshops, and international feminist conferences. *Afrekete* also reinforced the idea that the documentation of their personal and collective “herstories” or narratives and their writing more generally mattered. *Afrekete*, in this way, confirmed what scholar Marcelle Thiebaux has argued about women’s literature, remarking that, “The only possible library for a woman is the one

invented by herself, writing herself or her own discourse into it.” In addition, Thiebaux’s quotation also echoed sentiments common in feminism at the time, and the Afro-German women of ADEFRA continued to imbibe these ideas in their journal. Finally, *Afrekeete* offered Afro-German women a social, cultural, and intellectual connection to one another as well as other women of the diaspora. Ultimately, the social bonds that Afro-German women forged with each other helped them process their experiences and challenge popular beliefs about the myth of Germanness as whiteness and about the global African diaspora.

In the first section of the chapter, I analyze how ADEFRA, as a lesbian, feminist, and internationalist organization, constituted a feminist and queer black diasporic project, helping Afro-German women achieve visibility and solidarity. With the second section of the chapter, I explore women’s relationships in ADEFRA’s *Afrekeete*. Examining the six issues of the short-lived magazine, I argue that Afro-German women consciously used their writing to recover their histories as Germans, legitimate their identities, and affirm their attachments to women. Here, Afro-German women articulated the complexities inherent in Lorde’s project of honoring “a covenant of woman-bonding,”

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10 Eva von Pirch, one of the editors of *Afrekeete*, claimed that, “There were six issues in which black women exchanged publicly for the first time in Germany.” ADEFRA brochure, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” 16. The German text: “Es entstanden sechs Nummern, in denen sich Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland erstmals öffentlich austauschten.” Apparently, the seventh issue of *Afrekeete* was to be published at the end of July 1991 and would cost 10 DM and be a hundred pages in length. See ISD, “Protokoll des ISD-Koordinationstreffen vom 1./2. Juni’ 91,” Berlin, p. 16, Folder ISD Ko-Treffen, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom. I was unable to find the missing “seventh” issue during my research, and wrote countless emails to Elke Jank and received no response. According to Maria Cheatom, Jank lives in Hamburg and von Pirch lives in Amsterdam.
especially as they depicted different familial connections, platonic friendships, and sexual relationships in *Afrekete*. Through their journal, Afro-German women addressed themes put forward by other women of color feminists concerned with diasporic perspectives about race, gender, community, and kinship.\(^\text{11}\) Therefore, ADEFRA and *Afrekete* helped to underscore the necessity of female fellowship, particularly in shaping women’s identities and politics within the Afro-German movement. Finally in the last section, I attend to some of the transnational, diasporic connections that Afro-German women cultivated through *Afrekete* as they attempted to link to other women across the African diaspora. Whereas Germanists such as Jennifer Michaels have argued that only May Ayim connected to African diaspora, *Afrekete* represented another example of how Black German women relied on and infused diverse Afro-diasporic styles, symbols, and histories.

**Creating a Feminist and Queer Black Diasporic Project**

The lesbian founders of ADEFRA, including Katja Kinder, Jasmin Eding, Katharina Oguntoye, Eva von Pirch, Elke Jank (Ja-El), and other feminists, recognized that Black German women should possess their own liberating and curative spaces in a majority white West German society that constantly othered them. Indeed, according to ADEFRA’s twentieth anniversary program, “it was important to note, that Black women, particularly lesbians were the ones who set off the Black movement in Germany.”\(^\text{12}\) The efforts of these Afro-German lesbian activists helped to organize the movement and promoted an inclusive and inviting space, where Afro-German women no longer felt

\(^{11}\) El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 62-63; Smith, ed. *Home Girls*; and other works referenced in footnote four of this chapter.

\(^{12}\) ADEFRA, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” 3.
alone and isolated. In particular, for these ADEFRA activists, “the key objectives of our work are the dismantling of racism and sexism – two ‘isms’ which are closely linked – and the recognition as a social group also within the women’s movement.”

During the initial stages of ADEFRA’s development, Afro-German women even contemplated naming the organization ADELE (Afro-German Lesbians/Afrodeutsche Lesben). Later, these Afro-German feminists settled on the name of ADEFRA. Therefore, from the onset, ADEFRA, and eventually Afrekete, constituted a feminist and queer black diasporic project that allowed various Afro-German women, including heterosexuals or Heteras, to participate and articulate their identities, blending their feminist, queer, and diasporic politics. According to the former president of ADEFRA, Ekpenyong Ani, there were always concerns about the sexual orientation of ADEFRA. Ani stated that:

The theme of sexual orientation especially whether ADEFRA was a women- or lesbian- association, remained a huge question at all times. I can only say, that the lesbians at ADEFRA were always more mobilized, because in a certain way the focus was clear: if you concentrate on women and want to work together with them, then of course, you will find a lot of lesbians.

With this project, Black German women stressed how their intertwining of diaspora, feminism, and queerness could “strengthen and encourage self-awareness, self-

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14 Al-Samarai, 353; (Interview Ekpenyong Ani). The German text: “Das Thema der sexuellen Orientierung bzw. ob ADEFRA ein Frauen- oder Lesbenverein sei, war seit jeher eine große Frage. Ich kann nur sagen, dass die Lesben bei ADEFRA immer die Aktiveren waren, denn in gewisser Weise war der Fokus ja klar: Wenn du dich auf Frauen konzentrierst und mit ihnen zusammenarbeiten willst, dann wirst du natürlich viele Lesben finden.”
determination, and self-organisation of Black women.” Here, ADEFRA enabled a heterogeneous group of Afro-German women to embrace multiple identities that reflected their perspectives and positions in society.

Yet problems arose within ADEFRA, as the contrasting and competing views of a variety of Black women complicated the stability of a collective sense of Afro-German unity and identity. In a report entitled, “Black Magic Women,” in Afrekete, Eva von Pirch described the trajectory and dynamics of initial ADEFRA meetings. At an organizational meeting in Bremen in November 1987, for instance, debates raged among Black German women. They argued over the general goals of the association; whether it was better to work on women’s issues within the Initiative of Black Germans (ISD); who would take responsibility for the association; whether there would be a splintering of ADEFRA; and which Afro-German women actually belonged to the association and which did not? Explaining these events, von Pirch claimed that during the first national Afro-German meeting in Munich in January 1988, sponsored by the ADEFRA-Munich women, some of the other ADEFRA activists contended that women had different professional and personal backgrounds from each other, shaping how the association could develop. For other ADEFRA activists, their experiences in the women’s movement, which in the case of some members ran back over fifteen years, had revealed that heterosexual women often sought different goals than lesbians. In fact, some


17 In von Pirch’s article, there are no direct references to specific women who had years of experience with the German women’s movement. She only described the situation at the meetings and Afro-German women’s concerns.
women remarked that, “A heterosexual Afro-German woman is dominated by men and patriarchal structures are reflected in her behavior and life, making it difficult to do collaborative work. . .”18 Other Afro-German women, on other hand, “thought that this whole [heterosexual/homosexual] division was crap and that the discussion was exhausting, and it did not produce results.”19 Continuing to emphasize this point in her report, von Pirch confirmed that several women stated that, “Given the different personalities of women each one must decide for themselves how they live, and this decision should not prevent us from publicly revealing our joint efforts condemning discrimination, racism, and sexism.”20 Von Pirch’s report revealed how some of the women of ADEFRA were unclear about the direction of the group and how others wanted the organization to be a queer space that attended to all forms of discrimination in West German society and acknowledged the range of backgrounds, ideas, perspectives, and lifestyles among women.21 Yet even so, Katharina Oguntoye stated in a 2012 interview that, “ADEFRA as an Afro-German women’s group had made us lesbians at times not quite as visible.”22 In the same interview, Katja Kinder, an Afro-German


19 Ibid. The German text: “Andere Frauen wiederum meinten, daß diese ganze Einteilung Mist wäre und daß die Diskussion ermüdend, da nicht zum Ergebnis führend, sei.”

20 Ibid. The German text: “Angesichts der verschiedenen Persönlichkeiten von Frauen müsse jede für sich selbst entscheiden wie sie lebt und diese Entscheidung sollte jedoch nicht unsere gemeinsamen Anstrengungen Diskriminierung, Rassismus und Sexismus offenzulegen und anzuprangern, verhindern.”

21 Fatima El-Tayeb also has maintained that ADEFRA served as a form of queer of color activism. See El-Tayeb, European Others, 70-80.

22 Piesche, “Rückblenden und Vorschauen,” 20; (interview with Katharina Oguntoye). The German text: “ADEFRA als Afro-deutsche Frauengruppe hat uns als Lesben erst mal nicht ganz so sichtbar gemacht.” The interview was included Piesche’s 2012 edited collection about the Black German women’s movement. Ani also made a similar point and stated how problems even emerged at the 1995 Bundestreffen, where
lesbian activist and co-founder of ADEFRA, continued to remark that, “Even though it was always quite open and already known. We were all out. This was an important step – to make us visible – in the community. The heterosexual women who turned towards ADEFRA sometimes even received stupid looks and comments [because it was presumed they were gay]. But, nevertheless, we have always had a strong standing in the community. This is still the case.”

In ADEFRA’s twentieth-anniversary brochure, Afro-German lesbian and feminist activist and ADEFRA co-founder Jasmin Eding expressed that her involvement with the association made it possible for her to “[find] a home, or rather we created a home for ourselves.” In this way, ADEFRA engendered a sense of community and kinship. Kinder commented in the same brochure that in the early 1980s, “Black female activists [were] non-existent in mainstream German society and it is exactly this fact that [provided] an opportunity to occupy a new space and break down the often quoted symbolic order piece by piece.” Both of these ADEFRA activists conveyed the significance of this feminist and queer black diasporic project, as a newly created site that there was a lack of respect with insensitive comments and aggressive actions. See Al-Samarai, 353; (interview with Ekpenyong Ani).


25 Ibid., 5. The German text: “Schwarze Aktivistinnen sind im Mainstream nicht existent und genau dieser Umstand eröffnet die Chance, den Raum neu zu besetzen und die viel zitierte symbolische Ordnung Stück für Stück zu zersetzen.” Kinder also discussed her involvement with the movement in “‘Es ist noch immer ein Aufbruch, aber mit neuer Startposition,’” in Re/visionen, 347-360.
enabled them along with their fellow activists to negotiate and proclaim their Afro-German identities and interests.

Revealing how ADEFRA emerged as a queer and feminist space, ADEFRA activists – Eding, Kinder, Ekpenyong Ani, Maisha M. Eggers, and Peggy Piesche – wrote an article about black lesbians and feminism that was included in In Bewegung bleiben, a volume highlighting the hundred-year legacy of lesbian activism in Germany. In the article, these activists explained that ADEFRA was a feminist and queer project as it was all-embracing and attended to issues that impacted all types of women. Their contribution sought to emphasize that ADEFRA was also a part of this lesbian tradition in Germany — a fact often overlooked in discussions and scholarship on lesbian and gay activism. In addition, these women, excluding Kinder and Eding, represented the new generation of ADEFRA activists from the early to mid-1990s, and they were particularly drawn to the organization because it did not restrict its membership or limit its reach.

Ekpenyong Ani, Maisha M. Eggers, and Peggy Piesche joined ADEFRA and the larger Afro-German movement in the early 1990s and still remain active in the movement. Their involvement also helped to infuse the movement with a new vibrancy and momentum. Ekpenyong Ani was born in Calbe/Saale in the former East in 1966 but grew up in East and West Germany, Jamaica, and Nigeria. After attending and listening to a reading by Audre Lorde in Stuttgart in the early 1990s, Ani became involved with

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26 Beginning in the late 1980s, there was also an Afro-German gay men’s group entitled, “The Hot Chocolates,” organized by Carl Camurca in his apartment in Berlin.

27 Although in many ways, ADEFRA in its current form is relatively defunct. ADEFRA-Munich closed down its office in 1998, as a few key figures moved to Berlin, including Judy Gummich and Ria Cheatom. In 2003, ADEFRA-Munich sponsored a conference entitled “SISTA-Black Women in Art and Society.” Afro-German activists such as Ekpenyong Ani and Regina Stein no longer arrange monthly meetings (Stammtische) in Berlin, and ADEFRA does not organize many events or activities, of course there are a few notable exceptions.
Maisha M. Eggers, who was born in Kenya and raised in Germany, became involved with ADEFRA after attending a 1993 workshop entitled “Black Women and Power” (*Schwarze Frauen und Macht*) near Hamburg. There, she met approximately 50 black female activists from Germany and the Netherlands. “On this day,” Eggers explained, she “ended a specific search.” Peggy Piesche, who was born in 1968 in Arnstadt/Thüringen in former East Germany, attended ADEFRA’s first international meeting of Black women in 1990 in Munich, and after that event, her world changed. “ADEFRA,” Piesche declared, “opened up a new world to me in which I can be all I am: black, lesbian, [and] inconvenient.” Piesche demonstrated how meeting other black women remained important for a collective, but also for her sense of self and individual identification.

In their article, these ADEFRA activists stated that, “ADEFRA quickly gained (in the black community) the reputation of being a refuge for Black lesbians.”

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28 *Ibid.*, 3. In fact, Lorde had a reading in Stuttgart on May 18, 1990. A short biography of Ani is included in the art exhibition and exhibition program *Homestory Deutschland: Schwarze Biografien in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (2008/09). Ani also described her activism in the movement in “‘Es ist noch immer ein Aufbruch, aber mit neuer Startposition,’” in *Revisonen*, 347-360. Ani has worked at Orlanda Frauenverlag for years and helped to publish Ayim’s posthumous works; she is no longer one of the main editors.

29 ADEFRA, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” 2. Eggers is also a professor in Diversity Studies at the Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal and has published countless works on race and whiteness in the German context.

30 *Ibid.*. The German text: “Am diesem Tag endete eine ganz bestimmte Suche.”


32 *Ibid.*, 9. The German text: “ADEFRA hat Mir eine neue Welt eröffnet, in der ich all das sein kann, was ich bin: Schwarz, lesbisch, unbequem.” Piesche has published a number of books and articles on race and ethnicity in Germany and has been working on her PhD in Travel Literature and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Paderborn.

was a queer space that elicited a number of emotions such as astonishment, open secrecy, anxiety, or pain often based on a presumed exclusion. Further explaining dynamics within the association, these activists asserted that, “Many black women due to their involvement with ADEFRA became transitory lesbians; some for the length of a project, some for the length of a relationship, some always returning, some, it can be said remained beautifully forever.” Ani, Eding, Eggers, Kinder, and Piesche detailed how the organization recognized the fluidity of women’s sexual lives and encouraged a variety of lesbian and queer identities to take shape, including transgender and bisexual. In this way, ADEFRA reflected dynamics common to queer politics more generally. As political scientist Cathy Cohen has remarked, “In queer politics sexual expression is something that always entails the possibility of change, movement, redefinition, and subversive performance—from year to year, from partner to partner, from day to day, and even from act to act.” ADEFRA, moreover, sought to challenge heteronormative practices and presumptions in West German society. Stressing empowerment in ADEFRA, Afro-German women sought to overturn these traditional norms for themselves and each other. As Afro-German women in ADEFRA cultivated relationships to one another they also organized activities and events that reflected a queer black diasporic outlook.

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35 Ibid. The German text: “Viele Schwarze Frauen wurden über ihre Einbindung, bei ADEFRA zu transitory lesbians; einige für die Dauer eines Projekts, einige für die Dauer einer Beziehung, einige immer wiederkehrend, einige, wie so schön gesagt werden kann ‘für immer’.”

36 Cohen, 23.

37 Ani, Eding, Eggers, Kinder, and Piesche, 299.
The ADEFRA-Munich group continued to promote this perspective when they organized an international meeting of Black women (Int. Treffen Schwarzer Frauen) in November 1990 at the Community Center for Women’s Employment and Life Situation or Kofra.\textsuperscript{38} The three-day symposium, entitled “Risk your life and leave your house” (“Wage dein Leben und verlasse dein Haus”), — a title derived from an African proverb — was open to black and white German as well as other women worldwide. Supporting and representing the diversity of women’s experiences and confronting discriminatory practices, the conference involved women of color networking, sharing feelings, and exchanging ideas.\textsuperscript{39} At the symposium, Black German women sponsored art exhibitions, lectures, and seminars that addressed the themes including racism, sexism, Afro-German history, and Black women’s literature. The conference organizers also offered options for shared group meals and childcare at the conference. Some of the presentations for the general female participants included “White mother, black child;” “Clowning Muses—Pantomime;” and “Differences among women: a critical look at how to deal with others.”\textsuperscript{40} The organizers also coordinated black-women-only events, where these


\textsuperscript{39} The symposium was also sponsored by Kofra and FrauenAnstiftung. It was also had the Kofra community center. Kofra (Kommunikationszentrum für Frauen zur arbeits- und lebenssituation) is an association founded in 1982—officially in 1983—in Munich. It began as a women’s self-help group that focused on assisting women with their professional and personal life situations, and it was influenced by the women’s movement and the Women’s Community Center in Munich. In 2008, the organization celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. See Kofra: Zeitschrift für Feminismus und Arbeit, “25 Jahre Kofra: Ein viertel Jahrhundert feministische Frauenprojektarbeit,” December 2008/January 2009, 27. Jahrgang: 1-32 and Kofra \url{http://www.kofra.de/layout/index.htm} [Accessed March 15, 2013]. Beginning in 1988, the FrauenAnstiftung was a funding source affiliated with the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, which funded women’s projects throughout the globe. See their website \url{http://www.gwi-boell.de/web/feminisms-feminism-heinrich-boell-foundation-4211.html} [Accessed March 15, 2013].

\textsuperscript{40} ADEFRA in Cooperation mit FrauenAnstiftung und Kofra program, “Int. Schwarzer Frauen Treffen: ‘Wage dein leben verlasse dein haus,’” November 1-4, 1990, p. 1, The Private Collection of Maria
women could work through their specific concerns and issues, with some of these workshops revolving around topics such as “Reunification and united racism,” “Lesbian politics – women’s politics,” and “the history of slavery and its contemporary meaning.”

It is against this backdrop that ADEFRA valued building alliances with other black diasporic movements and women’s groups that focused on solidarity and anti-racist activism in Germany and beyond. Their commitment to coalitions and collaborative work remained a significant point that these activists continued to raise in several ADEFRA brochures. Afro-German female activists in ADEFRA recognized that:

we as black women have a responsibility to unite and initiate change in the family, in close surroundings [and neighborhoods], regionally and globally. We have the responsibility to survive politically, culturally, and economically. As women, we cannot only think about our immediate space, but we must look after our global community. Our commitment must be 100 percent as we deal with men with whom we live, fathers, brothers, sons, in dealing with sexism and racism.

For ADEFRA activists and participants, the symposium became an opportunity for them to connect with black women, particularly from the East and other European countries, as

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Cheatom. The workshop titles in German were: “Weiße Mutter - Schwarzes Kind”; “Clownendenen Musen – Patomime”; and “Unterschieden zwischen Frauen – ein kritischer Blick auf den Umgang mit den anderen.”


well as learn more about diverse women’s situations and survival strategies. Through the conference, former East Black Germans, including Piesche, Carmen Oliver Stanley, and Ina Röder, connected and forged ties to West Black Germans, cultivating newfound friendships and relationships.\textsuperscript{44} Underscoring the appeal of the conference, Ria Cheatom, Jasmin Eding, and Mary Powell –ADEFRA-Munich activists – mentioned that:

For most of the black women (many came from the former East and other European countries), this was the first time that they took part in a meeting exclusively for women. Despite our different ways of life and also partly our different self-image (for example, the label Afro-German was met with confusion and even a lack of acceptance by our black African, Arabic, French, and Dutch . . . sisters[]) . . . the response to the meeting was very positive.\textsuperscript{45}

These activists appreciated the discussions that they initiated with many women, learning about their personal histories. Cheatom, Eding, and Powell cited a quotation from Audre Lorde’s book \textit{Lichtflut}, remarking that, “We will begin to see each other when we dare to see ourselves. We will begin to see each other, without arrogance, belittlement or rejection, but with patience and understanding, if we cannot do it; then with recognition and appreciation, if we succeed.”\textsuperscript{46} In this way, the conference served as a queer black

\textsuperscript{44} There was also a Women’s Congress (\textit{Frauenkongreß}) sponsored by the Green party in Bavaria (\textit{Die Grünen Bayern}) on July 28-29, 1990 in Augsburg that sought to bring women together from the former East German with West Germans. See, for example, “Ver-Einigung macht stark?: Frauen BRDDR Frauen Frauenkongreß (brochure),” July 28-29, 1990, Augsburg Zeughaus, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom.

\textsuperscript{45} Cheatom, Eding, Powell and (Gerhart), “Wage Dein Leben Verlasse Dein Haus!,” 22. The full German text: “Für die meisten der Schwarzen Frauen (viele kamen aus der ehemaligen DDR und dem europäischen Ausland) war dies das erste Mal, daß sie an einem Treffen ausschließlich für Frauen teilnahmen. Trotz unserer sehr unterschiedlichen Lebenformen und auch zum Teil unseres unterschiedlichen Selbstverständnisses (so erzeugte z.B. die Benennung afro-deutsch bei unseren schwarzen afrikanischen, arabischen, französischen, holländischen. . . Schwestern Verwirrung bis Unverständnis[]), war die Resonanz auf das Treffen durchweg positiv.”

diasporic project that enabled Afro-German women from the West to continue to refashion their identities and consciousness. In linking with Afro-German women from the East along with additional women from other European countries, conference participants and activists acknowledged themselves and their new friendships as a source of empowerment and community. Demonstrating strength in numbers, the conference afforded these Afro-German women activists and participants opportunities to no longer be invisible and engage in meaningful political activism.

**WomenUniting through Writing: Afro-Germans and Kinship**

With the publication of *Farbe bekennen*, Afro-German women not only set the tone of the movement by shaping the kind of knowledge that was produced about them, but also initiated a literature infused with their feminist, queer, and diasporic sensibilities. Afro-German women’s commitment reflected their desire to forge a diasporic community and incite cultural change in West German society and later in reunified Germany. Continuing to foster a sense of community, the women of the regional ADEFRA-Bremen chapter created their publication, *Afrekete*, which would facilitate their feminist and queer black diasporic project.\(^{47}\) In this way, the co-editors, Eva von Pirch and Elke Jank, used the journal, and writing more generally, as a tool for community building and to help Afro-German women from across diverse regions in West Germany develop viable diasporic networks. The editors envisioned that the magazine would be a means of communication for black women in West Germany.\(^{48}\) They also intended for the

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\(^{48}\) Von Pirch, “20 Jahre Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” 16.
magazine to reach a large audience. From Afrekete’s first issue, the editors created a convivial and welcoming tone, imploring Afro-German women to participate and shape the direction of the magazine. In fact, Jank and von Pirch issued an invitation (Einladung) to their female readership.\textsuperscript{49} Addressing their readership as Black, Afro-German Sisters in the foreword, Jank and von Pirch immediately underscored the significance of social bonds among women, considering it a critical aspect in the vitality of the magazine.\textsuperscript{50}

ADEFRA also attempted to keep Afro-German women informed on Black feminist initiatives and integrated translated works from other women of color writers and poets such as Donna Davis, Audre Lorde, and Rosa-Lubia Falk Garcia in their magazine. Several issues of Afrekete also included pantomime scenes with Elke Jank.\textsuperscript{51} In integrating these diverse cultural forms in the journal, the editors also imagined that Afrekete could function as an alternative space, where cultural symbols could be reinterpreted, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.\textsuperscript{52} Afrekete served as a discursive,

\textsuperscript{49} Elke Jank and Eva von Pirch, “Einladung,” Afrekete (… über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe. 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 1, ZBFF&GS.

\textsuperscript{50} Elke Jank and Eva von Pirch, “Vorwort,” Afrekete (… über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe. 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 2, ZBFF&GS. In subsequent issues, the editors continued to address their presumed readership as sisters. In issues five and six of Afrekete, the editors also addressed other readers with, “Dear Afro-Germans, Black Sisters and other readers” (Liebe Afrodeutsche, Schwarze Schwestern und andere Leserinnen).


\textsuperscript{52} See also cultural theorist Homi Bhabha’s articulation of a third or alternative space in The Location of Culture. He claimed that, “The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open and expanding code” (53-54). In other words, this ambivalent act of interpretation challenges notions of historical identity and culture as being purely
diasporic, queer, and feminist act that helped Afro-Germans form ties. Through the journal, Afro-German women exchanged knowledge about a variety of topics and events and aligned with other women of the diaspora in Germany and beyond. Jank and von Pirch also intended for the journal to share cultural practices and offer advice about handling the everyday and critical concerns about racism, sexism, and homophobia in West Germany. The editors, for example, proposed, “Rather, it is the diverse survival strategies – which already lead to disparate individual consequences and objectives when taken on their own terms – that should (or can) find their own space within this magazine.”

In the last two paragraphs of the foreword, the Afro-German editors continued to address their motives for Afrekete, clarifying that:

Of course such a goal is impossible to achieve with only two women. This newspaper will only be appealing to ourselves and other women, if we collectively and individually re-assess and redefine our respective place in this society continually: as women, as Afro-Germans, as Black internationalists.

With their magazine, Jank and von Pirch located Black German women both individually and collectively within West German society, acknowledging their multiple subjectivities as female, Afro-German, and Black internationalists – aspects of which were also homogeneous, and the “disruptive temporality” allowed the meanings and symbols of culture to have no fixity or uniformity. This liminal space fostered an understanding of culture that extended beyond the simplistic idea of “pure” nations. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

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embedded in the larger movement. This positioning also gave Afro-Germans an opportunity to claim a number of identities.

Jank and von Pirch requested countless responses and submissions from their fellow Black German sisters, and welcomed the efforts of a community of diasporic individuals to financially aid the magazine. They also jokingly solicited money by saying, “At AFREKETE we are missing dough, as cash and money are very rare at ADEFRA.”55 In addition to financial assistance, these Afro-German women also wanted the magazine to be culturally viable. They stated, “. . . we call on each of you to use these pages for yourselves and other women by submitting numerous contributions about whatever lies close to your heart, soul, stomach (and wherever else a woman feels desire and would like to express it); you can either send them to us or bring them to the national editorial meeting.”56 In their call to arms, they welcomed additional ideas and emphasized that the support of other Afro-German women and women of color could advance this endeavor. In appealing to their readers’ hearts, bodies, and souls, Jank and von Pirch wanted Afrekete to foster a desire for steady participation and creative (literary and artistic) expression. The significance of contributions and maintaining these links to the community remained essential for ADEFRA and Afrekete’s development as well as Afro-Germans’ growth.57 Black German women’s connections and involvement with

55 Ibid., 1. The German text: “Bei der AFREKETE fehlt es uns an Knete auch bei der ‘Firma’ ADEFRA ist Cash und Money außerst rar daher.”

56 Ibid., 2 The German text: “Deshalb rufen wir jede von Euch auf, diese Seiten für Euch selbst und andere Frauen zu nutzen, indem Ihr zahlreiche Beiträge zu dem was Euch auf Herz, Seele, Magen (und wo Frau auch immer Auf-Begehren fühlt und zum Ausdruck bringen möchte) liegt zu uns schickt bzw. zu den überregionalen Redaktionstreffen mitbringen.”

57 Ibid., 2.
"Afrekete" enabled them to achieve a sense of belonging. Therefore, the presence of strong black female ties helped Afro-Germans develop collective unity and solidarity.

In the poem, “What do I have to do with Africa?” Eva von Pirch explored the dilemma of Afro-German “otherness” in society and used the poem to represent archetypical encounters with white Germans. Throughout the autobiographical poem, von Pirch revealed a typical conversation Afro-Germans had with their white German compatriots, exposing the perpetual state of othering that they endured.

**What do I have to do with Africa?**

This is a question I ask myself and not you white sister
You usually ask me, even though we have never met before,
where do I come from and you wait for
Exotic sounding names Africa, Latin America,
the Caribbean, or also, here in the Federal Republic the beloved, USA.
Disappointment and disbelief I see in your face, when
I tell you Berlin.
(Eva)

The poem reenacted a scene, where a white German woman asked commonplace questions, that Afro-Germans were long familiar with, such as “where are you from,” “are you from Africa, or “when will you return to your country?” These seemingly innocuous questions presumed that Black Germans were not native born Germans. Instead, they were considered foreigners — born in exotic locations such as Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean. Here, the white German women’s skepticism proved that she only conceived of German national identity as white. In utilizing the impolite form

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58 Eva von Pirch, “Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun,” *Afrekete ( . . über alles, was uns angeht)*, 1. Ausgabe. 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 19, ZBFF&GS. Please see the Appendix B for this poem and others in this chapter.

of you: \textit{du} rather than the formal \textit{Sie}, von Pirch handled the white German woman in the same inappropriate manner that the woman approached her, rudely asking her personal questions within minutes of meeting.

Her poem underscored the quotidian experiences of exclusion that doubly marginalized Afro-German women. First, othering occurred when the white German woman inquired about where the Black German woman came from. In this scenario, this Afro-German woman cannot be a native German because West Germany was and is still considered a white, “non-immigration country.” Secondly, rather than establishing a possible connection with her white German sister, the woman denied her, expressing outward disappointment that the Afro-German woman came from Berlin. The white woman’s dismayed look also indicated that racial differences, in this case skin color, still mattered in a post-Holocaust West German society. The Afro-German woman’s phenotype, moreover, did not help to normalize or affirm her Germanness. Through her actions and questions, the white German reified the categories of national belonging by excluding the Afro-German from the imagined community. Therefore, contact with an

\footnote{In 1982, Chancellor Helmut Kohl claimed that Germany was a “non-immigration country.” While Kohl’s phrase revolved around the Turkish guest worker issues, this statement reflected the general belief that Germany was white nation and helped to reify discursive, political, and cultural practices of xenophobia (\textit{Ausländerfeindlichkeit}). This development also reworked biological notions of racial difference by focusing on these communities’ allegedly inherent cultural, religious, and class differences. In addition, the shift to multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s also led to a reactionary increase in racial violence, in which Black Germans, other German people of color, and asylum seekers were physically assaulted or killed. For more on the rise of the new right, “New Racism,” and anti-Semitism in Germany, refer to Chin, \textit{The Guest Worker Question}; MacMaster, \textit{Racism in Europe}; Chin, Fehrenbach, Grossmann, and Ely, eds. \textit{After the Nazi Racial State}; and Heide Fehrenbach, “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’ in Post-War Germany: How mixed race children remade the family and challenged German ideas of race,” \textit{Der Tagesspiegel}, September 14, 2008; Robinson, “Schwarze Deutsche Kräfte,” 1-10; Crawley, “Challenging Concepts of Cultural and National Homogeneity,” 22-30; Molefi Kete Asante, “African Germans and the Problems of Cultural Location,” in \textit{The African-German Experience: Critical Essays}, ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 5-9; Michelle R. Eley, “Schwarzsein, Weißsein, Deutschsein,” 197-205; and Paul Mercheril and Thomas Teo, eds. \textit{Andere Deutsche: Zur Lebenssituation von Menschen multietnischer und multikultureller Herkunft} (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994). Please refer also to the introduction and chapter five for additional discussions on this topic.}
Afro-German served as an intervention, in essence forcing the white German to become aware of the existence of Black Germans in their “fatherland.” Von Pirch illuminated additional dynamics of these everyday interactions in subsequent stanzas.

When I am in a good mood, I still clarify: “but my father comes from Haiti,” that way white sister I can prevent the next question from leaving your lips.

Usually there are 3 versions to the following questions:

“Are you an occupation baby (child mind you)?”

or

“No, I mean where do you really come from?”

or

“No, I mean where do your parents (father and mother) really come from . . ?

An inquisitive look.61

Facing a barrage of questions and appraising glances, Black Germans must often prove their national identity to their white compatriots. With each sentence, the white German still remained unconvinced, forcing the Afro-German to proffer further evidence of her lineage. Given that Afro-Germans’ discussions occurred with strangers, these kinds of invasive personal questions were emotionally grueling and painful. As Afro-German activist and writer Helga Emde has stated in an interview in Die Tageszeitung (taz), “For the (pains) of the disenfranchised, there is only a band-aid, no healing.”62 These Afro-Germans could only experience a temporary relief from their cultural predicament.

Extending the indictment, von Pirch also impugned white German leftists for their apathy and insensitivity. Von Pirch explored in the poem how these German leftists expressed concerns about the plight of people in Africa; yet ignored the presence and

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61 Von Pirch, “Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun?,” 19. See also Crawley, “Challenging Concepts of Cultural and National Homogeneity,” esp. chapter four, where she discussed this poem. My analysis remains similar to Crawley’s.

difficulties that individuals of African descent faced in West Germany. In fact, throughout *Afrekete*, Afro-German women addressed this criticism, with many expressing frustration with the hypocrisy of progressive politics in West Germany. Rather than help her Black German compatriots combat racism in society or even inquire about their experiences as black women in West Germany, the white German concentrated on stereotypical images of African women’s colorful clothing and graceful movements as they carried water buckets on their heads. Or she remembered the West German news reports of a hunger epidemic affecting African women and children, the practices of polygamy, or the custom of female genital cutting. The last two examples focused on African women’s limited rights and oppression in their poverty-stricken, patriarchal African societies. West Germans acknowledged the importance of social equality in Africa or imperialism in the Third World more generally, but never critically examined these issues within their own country. Afro-Germans continued to express disillusionment with West German liberal activism. When Emde wrote, “I shit on your liberalism. I am a human being,” this sentiment also resonated with other Afro-Germans,


65 Quinn Slobodian has suggested in *Foreign Front* that German student activists established coalitions with many Third World students who studied in West Germany. In doing so, West German student activists learned new practices from these Third World activists and participated in a variety of campaigns against global imperialism, racism, and discrimination. Yet, West German students were less introspective about similar problems in West Germany. See Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Wendy Pojmann, ed. *Migration and Activism in Europe Since 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
especially as they wanted less discriminatory treatment at home.\footnote{Emde quoted in Kültür, “So dumm sind die Deutschen,” p. 6. The German text: “Ich scheisse auf eure Liberalität. Ich bin ein Mensch.”} Even though the white German in the poem provided a sympathetic gaze toward the continent, she overlooked the reality that many German women of color (Blacks, Asians, and Turks) suffered in West German society.\footnote{Von Pirch, “Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun?,” 20.} Von Pirch chided white German women for admiring prominent social activists and musicians such as Winnie Mandela, Angela Davis, or Joan Armatrading while having a limited or superficial engagement with actual individuals of African descent in West Germany. Similarly, these white German leftists often proclaimed their roles as specialists on Africa and African women, but they never realized that a “German Africa” (deutsches Afrika) also existed in the Federal Republic.\footnote{Ibid., 20.}

In addition to the poem’s critical and depressing tone, von Pirch admitted that there was a possibility for cross-racial dialogue and bonding with her “white sister” (weiße Schwester). Forging a close affiliation with her white sister could yield powerful results, allowing both individuals to learn about their experiences as German women. If the white German woman could put aside her preoccupation and fascination with peoples on the African continent and acknowledge her Afro-German compatriots, then perhaps a meaningful relationship could develop. An interracial and cross-cultural engagement with racism and Germanness could prove a fruitful exercise in creating a multiracial and multicultural West German feminist solidarity. Afro-German women believed that white West German women had to rethink their construction and essentialization of Africa and become more invested in tackling similar injustices against Afro-Germans and people of
color living in society. It was only through their awareness and acceptance of difference that effective changes could occur.\textsuperscript{69}

In another poem entitled, “White, black – or are they just colors,” an unnamed author explored her experiences in the judgmental and harsh streets of West Germany by writing:

\begin{quote}
I walk through the streets
upright, but hunched
Proud, but insecure.
Resigned, but concerned
Ironic, but with earnest/earnestness.

I am sick of it, I am sick of
acting. Don’t you guys see -
it is destroying me.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

The author expressed aggravation about a variety of things: straddling both ends of the emotional spectrum; being something she was not; and having to defend and define herself according to people’s perceptions of her. This constant performing (\textit{Theater spielen}) on the street with individuals who she may or may not know had damaged her self-worth. Ika Hügel-Marshall, for instance, in a contribution, also explained the need to process all types of emotions. While being a part of ISD and ADEFRA had enriched her life, allowing her to connect with other Afro-Germans and people of color, it took her a long time to realize that to make oneself visible did not only need to happen in the larger German society, but also within the Afro-German community. This entailed fully accepting and respecting the pain and anger that one had suppressed throughout the years.

\textsuperscript{69} In the film \textit{Litany for Survival}, Lorde engaged in a discussion about these issues with white West German feminists at an unspecified event in West Germany.

\textsuperscript{70} “weiß, schwarz – oder sind es nur Farben?,” \textit{Afrekete (Schwarze Über-Leben-Kunst)}, 4 Ausgabe 2. Quartal 1989, Bremen, p. 8, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom and FFBIZ.
and being honest with yourself and the nascent community. Dealing with their positive and negative experiences through artistic and intellectual expression gave Afro-German women an opportunity to disclose intimate, personal narratives that many them of commonly understood. These works validated their lived experiences.

The editors and contributors also emphasized the necessity of Black bonds in helping Afro-German women survive in a white West German society. In a poem “Invisible Women,” for instance, Mary-Ann Powell recognized that there was strength in numbers, and the collective efforts and activities of Black Germans symbolized visibility and diversity. Conveying that Afro-German women were no longer alone in their marginality, as they now had one another to rely on for sustenance, comfort, and community, Powell wrote:

... 
Open your eyes
Look at your sisters
You
Are not alone!
You
Are not invisible
We are many!
We need YOU! 

The presence of strong black ties became necessary for Afro-Germans to form a collective affiliation with one another, and it also helped them as they confronted

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exclusionary West German practices together. Von Pirch also echoed similar sentiments about meeting and connecting with her Afro-German sister.

I meet a black sister, I ask her:
“Where are you from?” She answers: “I am Afro-German.”
She explains her Afro-German story/history to me.
I do not explain my story/history, because her story/history is my story/history
Even though I know we are different.\textsuperscript{74}

Even though von Pirch asked “where are you from,” this time the dynamics were different as both of them are Afro-German. She could establish a sentimental and emotional relationship with her black sister in spite of their differences. Forging a sense of kinship, they established connections to one another based on their analogous experiences of oppression in society and their conscious self-identification as Afro-German. The bond she shared with her Afro-German sister provided her with fellowship and support, offering them both a source of camaraderie. In this case, von Pirch imbued an African or Black diasporic sisterhood with powerful meaning and challenged the negative connotations and perceptions of blackness. Black Germans, for instance, were called moor (\textit{mohr}), and there were few positive representation of blackness in society, a point they continually addressed in \textit{Afrekete}.\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Afrekete} allowed Black German women to engender positive and empowering images of Afro-diasporic individuals that changed traditional German beliefs and served them psychologically, especially after years of self-denial and self-hatred about their blackness. Linking Afro-Germans individual and collective narratives, von Pirch also used the word \textit{geschichte}, which represents both story and history, to express how Afro-Germans’ personal and collective histories were

\textsuperscript{74} Von Pirch, “Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun?,” 20.

\textsuperscript{75} Kültür, “So dumm sind die Deutschen,” p. 6. See also Elke Jank, untitled poem, \textit{Afrekete ( . . über alles, was uns angeht )}, 1. Ausgabe 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 1, ZBFF&GS.
intertwined. Writing their narratives enabled Afro-Germans to recover their German and diasporic pasts and foster alternative forms of kinship. Von Pirch confirmed that individual experiences could not be decoupled from the collective, as they were mutually constitutive.

Sisterly bonds were significant in ADEFRA and Afrekete, where sisterhood was considered affectionate, intimate, and even potentially erotic and sexual — a theme that Audre Lorde also evoked in her work. According to literary theorist Sharon Marcus, “the erotic and sexual can and do intersect, but only the sexual refers to acts that involve genital arousal. Sexual desires are wishes to perform or fantasies about engaging in such acts.” Furthermore, Marcus posited that, “. . .the erotic has no necessary connection to sex acts, to describe a dynamic or relationship as erotic requires no evidence of sex.” An untitled anonymous poem written as a monologue and dialogue – not unlike Ayim’s “Afro-German I” –, demonstrated that affectionate relations could shade into the erotic, although not in this case the sexual. These relationships provided women with insight and energy, impacting their lives.

is it not beautiful that we are siblings  
is it not beautiful that we are potentially loving  
is it not beautiful that we  
is it not beautiful that we always always, . . .that  
is it not beautiful that we still have the chance  
is it not beautiful please don’t say no  
please say yes  
please say nothing more

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76 See chapter one for a sustained discussion of Lorde’s theory on the erotic.

77 Marcus, Between Women, 113.

78 Ibid., 114.

79 Jank, untitled poem, Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 10, ZBFF&GS. For another poem dealing with this issue, please also see Tanya, untitled Poem, in Afrekete (Kunst, Politik, USW), 6. Ausgabe, 2. Quartal 1990, Bremen, p. 27, ZBFF&GS.
In this way, the connection with a Black German sister enabled the author to share affection, as all circuits of love were acceptable and welcomed. The presence of healthy, loving relationships among women remained an important resource for encouragement, especially in a racist, homophobic, and patriarchal West German society. The promise of such profound and empowering ties with other Afro-German women also resulted in a newfound courage. Therefore, the erotic connection among women should always be expressed and never suppressed because it was a “replenishing and provocative source,” giving Afro-German women satisfaction, joy, and motivation. These close attachments among women served as a tender bridge that nurtured them. This fellowship also allowed Afro-German women to access and engender knowledge about their subjectivities as Black German women of the African diaspora.

Yet, tensions also emerged in the poem, as it remained unclear if the other sibling/partner reciprocated the feelings. The voice of the other Black German sister was never present. Within the monologue, the author implored her sibling/partner not to deny the connection because she saw its potential and wanted it to flourish. She did not want to lose the affective and sexual bond and experience rejection. In this case, the inability to gain acceptance from white Germans and then the lack of compassion from her own Afro-German sister would be humiliating, disappointing, and devastating. The poem

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80 Untitled poem, Afrekte ( . . über alles, was uns angeht), p. 10, ZBFF&GS.

81 Lorde, “The Use of the Erotic,” 54.
highlighted that the creation of Afro-German female networks would not necessarily be coterminous with harmony.

Interestingly enough, below the poem, appeared a dating announcement, expressing interest in a sexual fling. In the personal advertisement, a white German woman searched for an attractive, nice woman for a tender and dynamic relationship that would not be too serious. Ideally, the woman preferred someone with brown skin or of Turkish descent, who was bisexual and not already in a committed partnership. While the placement of this ad seemed peculiar, it underscored that a variety of female bonds were given a space in Afrekete. It was unclear whether the ad’s inclusion functioned as a satire about West Germany, highlighting the tendency of women of color to be objectified and fetishized by both males and females in West German society. Destabilizing the standard European colonial myth, in which the controlling male colonizer’s desires must be satisfied, the ad focused on a white woman shopping for sensual gratification. She needed to satiate her homoerotic yearning for interracial sexual pleasure. Even though these power dynamics shifted, this white woman was still not incapable of rendering German women of color a sexual and exotic commodity.

Some issues of Afrekete also emphasized the importance of socially valued bonds between women that did not revolve around lesbian erotic or sexual liaisons. Some Afro-German women made requests in Afrekete for leisure or fitness activities such as volleyball, soccer, and basketball with other Afro-Germans. Through Afrekete, the women of ADEFRA also expressed interest in sponsoring social gatherings and

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82 ADEFRA, Advertisement, Afrekete (. . über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 20, ZBFF&GS.

83 Ibid., 27. See also Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), p. 44; Afrekete (Kunst, Politik, USW), pp. 40-41; and Afrekete (Wanted!), pp. 55-57.
expanding the general scope of the community. In Dusseldorf, for example, there was a German-African circle that met every third Saturday of every month from 3-6pm, and advertisements for musical concerts with Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba — both of which took place in June 1991 in Munich.\textsuperscript{84} Throughout issues of \textit{Afrekete}, Afro-German women focused on the significant role that female bonds provided them.

To further illustrate this point, the editors employed images alongside their poems, reports, and essays to depict the centrality of women relationships within the Afro-German community. Throughout several issues of \textit{Afrekete}, Afro-German contributors created a visual archive of black women’s fellowship, highlighting local and international connections.\textsuperscript{85} In several of these photographs, Afro-German women are socializing and dialoguing with each other. In figures 4.1 through 4.3, for instance, each photo shows women engaged in activities with one another. Figures 4.1 and 4.2, in particular, represented Afro-German women reading, laughing, eating, and filming. With these seemingly jovial and happy interactions, Afro-German women appeared to enjoy spending time with one another. The editors here strove to affirm that socialization with their fellow Afro-Germans helped them deal with the years of isolation, loneliness, and seclusion that they had often experienced as children. In figure 4.3, Afro-German twin sisters Domenica and Christina Grokte posed for a picture, representing their sisterly bond. This set of photographs revealed the diversity of women bonds that \textit{Afrekete}, and by extension ADEFRA, supported and celebrated.


\textsuperscript{85} In the later issues, fewer black and white images appeared, perhaps due to limited funds.
With figures 4.4 through 4.7, Afro-German women’s platonic bonds often extended beyond Germany, as they engaged in transnational activism and cultivated ties with women of color throughout the globe. Each photograph portrayed friendships with women of color at a number of international conferences and workshops. Figures 4.4 and 4.6 highlighted Black German women’s participation in the Third International Feminist Book Fair Montreal, especially Marion Kraft’s presentation in a panel entitled “Writing, Identity, and Discrimination.” Figure 4.5 included participants at the conference such as the prominent feminists Ellen Kuzwayo and Audre Lorde, and lastly, figure 4.7 represented Afro-German women bonding and networking at the conference, offering a visual archive of feminist women of the African diaspora. These images also portray private moments and memories – possibly taken from private Afro-German collections – that they have shared with another another. Here, Afro-German also enacted a visual process of recollection and remembrance.

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86 *Afrekete (..über alles, was uns angeht)*, pp. 5, 9, and 16.
Figure 4.1 Photographs of ADEFRA women

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87 Afrekeete (., .über alles, was uns angeht), p. 5. The English translation: “Dear women, On these pages ‘curiosities,’ of all kinds, reviews on the subject of black women, racism, and sexism, as well as reader’s letters should appear in the future.”
Figure 4.2 Photographs of ADEFRA women\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 9.
Figure 4.3 Photograph of D. and Ch. Grotke\textsuperscript{89}

Figure 4.4 Photograph of ADEFRA women at the “Third International Feminist Book Fair” in Montreal\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 16. Domenica and Christina Grotke—the twins whom Oguntoye referred to in chapter one.

\textsuperscript{90} Afreke (schwarzer Feminismus), p. 6.
Figure 4.5 Photograph of Audre Lorde and Ellen Kuzwayo at the “Third International Feminist Book Fair” in Montreal\textsuperscript{91}

Figure 4.6 Photograph of Marion Kraft in the Workshop “Writing, Identity, and Discrimination”\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 8.
With their magazine, the women of ADEFRA were also determined to cultivate contacts with their white feminist German counterparts. In doing so, Afro-Germans sought to open dialogue and connect across their differences. At one event, entitled “Workshop in the Schulz,” the organizers from ADEFRA used a cross-racial workshop

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93 Ibid., 10. For additional examples, see also Afrekeete (schwarzer Feminismus), pp. 19-21, 24, and 26; Afrekeete (Wanted!), pp. 1, 2, 10, and 19; Afrekeete (und überhaupt ist alles mir nicht paßt weiß...aber fürcht Euch nicht wir sind unter Euch!), pp. 9 and 27; Afrekeete (Schwarze-überlebens-Kunst), pp. 9 and 27; and Afrekeete (Kunst, Politik, USW), p. 39.
as an opportunity to invite white German women, form coalitions, and engage in
discussions about racism and discrimination in West German society.\footnote{Ibid., 14.}
The interracial group of German women also participated in a number of exercises, where they attended
to themes of alienation, oppression, and identity.\footnote{Ibid., 15-16.} ADEFRA included information on
the proceedings in an issue of \textit{Afrekete}. During the workshop, several Afro-German
participants exchanged stories about their individual experiences with racism in their
daily interactions as well as in the larger feminist and women’s movement in West
Germany. Conflicts arose as some white German participants tended to ignore the
problem of racism by suggesting that it was not an issue in West Germany.\footnote{Ibid., 14.}

In an article “First Collective Writing Workshop of Black and White Women,”
Marion Kraft, a writer and contributor to \textit{Afrekete}, discussed how eleven Afro-German
women and seventeen white German women gathered in Bielefeld from June 3rd through
5th, 1988.\footnote{Haus Neuland Verein für Familienbildung, “Einladung zur ersten gemeinsamen Schreibwerkstatt
Cheatom.} Lorde was also present at this writing workshop. A diverse group of
women, including several members of ADEFRA, took part in small seminars and
exchanged writing techniques and strategies.\footnote{Marion Kraft, “Erste Gemeinsame Schreibwerkstatt Schwarzer und Weisser Frauen,” \textit{Afrekete: (schwarzer Feminismus)}, 2. Ausgabe 3. Quartal (1988), p. 18, ZBFF&GS. There was a photograph taken
to represent the interracial exchange (23).} The workshop enabled these women to
not only discover and learn new ideas and practices about the process of writing, but and
also cultivate relationships with the other participants. At the writing clinic, women also
conducted drills, helping to encourage them to put ink to paper. Afro- and white German women engaged in this creative process also produced mobile circuits of meaning about their identities and their sense of community. The evocative and emotional nature of some of these texts helped these women challenge the immobilizing silences and create solidarity through writing.99

Transnational Connections: Diasporic Roots and Routes

Even as the relationships among white and black Germans continued to develop, Afro-German women involved with Afrekete found it necessary to establish networks outside of West Germany’s borders. Throughout the magazine, Afro-German women made a conscious effort to maintain and sustain their female bonds with each another, but also identified with other women of color within the global African diaspora. As political scientist William Safran has argued, the concept of diaspora has helped local communities achieve cohesiveness by offering opportunities for ethnic consciousness and solidarity.100 Black Germans looked to diasporic communities across Europe and beyond appropriating practices and discourses as they refashioned their hyphenated German identities. In addition to this transnational and global perspective, Afro-Germans’ construction of an explicitly diasporic identity allowed them to express a relationship to blackness.101 As historian Evelyn Higginbotham has written in the context of African-American women, “race was a sign of perceived kinship ties between blacks in Africa

99 See chapter five for more on literary solidarities among women of color authors.

100 Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies,” 91.

101 Campt, “Reading the Black German Experience,” 290.
and throughout the diaspora.”⁹² ADEFRA’s Afrekete established a connection to several African diasporic traditions that shaped Afro-Germans’ black female consciousness and subjectivity. Here, evidence strongly contradicts the claim by literary scholar Jennifer E. Michaels that, “Afro-German women writers rarely made use of African myths and history in their texts.” Michaels has maintained that it was Lorde who forged connections to West African genealogy, especially through her references to mythical women, goddesses, queens, and warriors in her work. In doing so, Lorde carved a space for her sexual and spiritual roots. Moreover, Michaels alleged that African symbolism and metaphors “had little impact on Afro-German women writers, who were divorced from African and African American oral narrative traditions and thus lacked connections to African myths and history.”⁹³ On the contrary, with their publication Afrekete, the women of ADEFRA consciously positioned themselves within transnational diasporic communities and used those communities as a foundation for their writing and self-narration. Employing the titles Afrekete and ADEFRA, Afro-German women solidified their ties to the African continent, in this case Benin and Ethiopia.⁹⁴

In addition to the titles, Afro-German women continued to stress their links to Africa through the layout of the magazine. On the title pages of each issue, von Pirch and Jank regularly depicted the image of a female or females of African descent (Figure 4.8). The editors also represented the “A” in Afrekete on their cover pages with a map of

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⁹³ Jennifer E. Michaels, “Audre Lorde and Afro-German Women Writers,” German Studies Review 29:1 (February 2006): 35. For more on Afro-German women’s writing, please refer to chapter three.

⁹⁴ ISD also established a small library with works from authors throughout the diaspora. See Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, Die kleine Bibliothek: Literatur von schwarzen Autorinnen/Autoren in deutscher Übersetzung, n.d., The Author’s Private Collection.
the continent (Figure 4.9). Throughout Afrekete, the editors and contributors also incorporated diasporic symbolism and metaphors and afrocentric imagery. Figure 4.10, for instance, included a black person dressed in African or Afrocentric garb positioned next to two poems; one dealing with experiences in Barbados and the other with emotions and survival.105 Figures 4.12, 4.13, and 4.15 accentuated Afro-Germans’ ties to Africa, real and imagined, by presenting different African figures standing or playing the drums. Figures 4.11 and 4.14 depicted symbols and animals that remained similar to other African symbolism and cosmologies. Many of the images conveyed an imagined version of Africa, essentializing the diverse countries on the continent.106

![Figure 4.8 Cover page of Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht)107](image)


107 ADEFRA, “Cover Page,” Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe 1. Quartal 1988, Bremen, ZBFF&GS.
Figure 4.9 Cover Page of Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht)\textsuperscript{108}

Figure 4.10 Art from Afrekete\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), p. 3.
Figure 4.11 Art from Afrekete\textsuperscript{110}

Figure 4.12 Art from Afrekete\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{110} ADEFRA, “Table of Contents,” Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), Ausgabe 3. Quartal 1988, Bremen, p. 2, ZBFF&GS.

\textsuperscript{111} ADEFRA, untitled, Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), p. 12, ZBFF&GS.
Figure 4.13 Art from Afrekete\textsuperscript{112}

Figure 4.14 Art from Afrekete\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 36.
Moreover, in all the issues of the journal the editors included a series of informative articles, entitled “Goddesses, Symbols, Myths, and Magic,” that touched upon the theme of ancient powerful women in multiple spatial, cultural, temporal and historical contexts – a theme that was also common in the Euro-American feminist tradition of the 1970s and 80s. Written by Elke Jank, the series explored different religious figures and cosmologies in Africa and Europe. Afro-Germans elucidated the matriarchal tradition of female power and spirituality in African history and society and how these matriarchs were active agents in their destiny. African goddesses had

113 Ibid., 37.
114 Ibid., 37.
multivalent meanings and symbols given the diversity of countries in Africa, and Jank used this variety to debunk the myth that Africa had always been patriarchal and oppressive to women. Here, she highlighted the ways that African women wielded power and contributed to their societies, maintaining a strong presence throughout the continent. Most importantly, Jank recognized that the actions of their African foremothers in the past became crucial to their present. For several Afro-German contributors, these African “ancestors” became necessary and useful resources as they fashioned an Afro-German identity.\textsuperscript{116} In many ways, Afro-German women’s contributions in \textit{Afrekete} were similar to Lorde’s efforts throughout her poetry, prose, and public engagements to “preserve vital aspects of African culture in the Americas by embracing the women-identified politics of African women whom she used as sources of empowerment.”\textsuperscript{117}

Furthermore, ADEFRA’s editors also published pieces in which Black German women could identify with other women of the diaspora both past and distant, underscoring the force of black diasporic womanhood. Writing a genealogy of Black women in \textit{Afrekete}, Afro-German women showed how these women were essential to their “covenant of women-bonding.” In their first issue, they mourned the death of Dulcie September, an anti-apartheid activist who was killed in Paris on March 29, 1988.

\textsuperscript{116} This was not necessarily an uncommon act among Afro-diasporic individuals. While some individuals read literature, others wore Afrocentric clothing and natural hair. Angela Davis once remarked, “I needed to say ‘Black is beautiful’ as much as any of the intransigent anti-white nationalists. I needed to explore my African ancestry, to don African garb, and to wear my hair natural as much as the blindender-wearing male supremacist cultural nationalists.” See Davis, “Black Nationalism: The Sixties and the Nineties,” \textit{The Angela Y. Davis Reader}, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 319-20. Lorde also wore African designs and incorporated African histories into her poetry. I would like to thank Silke Hackenesch for drawing this source to my attention. Refer also to chapter three for these connections to the continent and its diaspora.

\textsuperscript{117} McGill, \textit{Constructing Black Selves}, 133.
September was the head of the African National Congress (ANC) Information Bureau in France and also served as the chief representative of the ANC in Switzerland and Luxembourg. She was forty-five years old and was shot with a silencer outside her office in Paris. Marion Kraft wrote a two-page poem entitled “Für Dulcie September,” offering it as a dedication.

In the poem, Kraft described September as “A female messenger of freedom in the city of freedom” and her words were “piercing and dangerous weapons for the regime in Pretoria.” She expressed her sisterly and affective bond by calling September sister and linking her to other women of the diaspora, such as Mmanthatisi, Zora Neale Hurston, and Rosa Parks. For example, Kraft evoked these women’s names in one stanza in order to position September within a tradition of strong black females.

And there I won’t lift the first stone  
Raising up thousands of dead black women  
An infinitely long train  
led by many  
Mmanthatisi  
Zora Neale Hurston  
Rosa Parks  
And the living  
Singing with the voice of Nomzamos  
In my heart  
“One People - One Cause” -  
“There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women”  
Marion Kraft

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119 Marion Kraft, “Für Dulcie September,” Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht), 1. Ausgabe 1. Quartal (1988), Bremen, pp. 3-4, ZBFF&GS.

120 Kraft, “Für Dulcie September,” p. 3. The German text: “Botschafterin der Freiheit in der Stadt der Freiheit” and “Waffen waren Worte scharf und gefährlich für das Regime in Pretoria.”

121 Ibid., 4.
Kraft emphasized the nature of diasporic roots and routes, particularly as she recognized black women as powerful historical agents. Mmanthatisi was a warrior queen of a South African tribe; Zora Neale Hurston was a pre-eminent 20th-century author of African American and folklore and literature and Rosa Parks helped to catalyze the Civil Rights Movement. In addition to these women, Kraft also referenced the song “Nomzamos.” Nomzamo was a small black township located in the Western Cape of South Africa as well as Winnie Mandela’s first name.122 Lastly, she alluded to Lorde’s poem “There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women.”123 Kraft’s poem helped to insert dead women of African descent into traditional narratives. This discursive act sought to change popular consciousness about Black women (September, Parks, Hurston, etc.) and ensure that their accomplishments would be documented and no longer obscured. Kraft, along with other ADEFRA women, continually linked themselves to women in South Africa as well as other African countries.124

Contributors to Afrekeete also mourned the death of black women who, though less prominent than Dulcie September, shared her experiences and commitment to social justice. Afrekeete’s issue black feminism (schwarzer Feminismus) contained a memorial to their fellow Afro-German sister Claudia. For them, it was unfortunate that “another Black woman could not manage survive.”125 In essence, Afro-German women placed the

122 Ibid., 4. IQ, the British progressive rock group, included the song in their 4th album with the title Nomzamo. “One people, one cause” was also a song by IQ.

123 Ibid., 4. For more on this poem, please refer to Lorde, The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde, 409.

124 For references to South Africa, please see Afrekeete (schwarzer Feminismus), pp. 4-5, ZBFF&GS; Afrekeete (Wanted!), pp. 23, 32-33, 36, 40, and 51-53, ZBFF&GS; and Afrekeete (Schwarze-Überlebens-Kunst), p. 38, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom and FFBIZ.

blame on a racist West German society. Although Claudia committed suicide, the larger society was complicit in her death. Along with a black and white picture of Claudia, they dedicated a translated version of Tracy Chapman’s song, “She’s Got Her Ticket,” to her.\(^{126}\) Chapman’s song focused on the desire of a woman to flee the hardships of a society, in which hatred was ubiquitous. Once again, Afro-German women established a kinship among themselves and Claudia, and African American singer songwriter Tracy Chapman. Here, they were all women of the diaspora with overlapping experiences of oppression.

Similarly, in a piece entitled “Black Foremothers I” Marion Kraft explored the legacy of African/Black foremothers, who paved the way for women of the diaspora.\(^{127}\) In the article, she discussed the literary contributions of Phillis Wheatley, especially her book of poetry entitled *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious, and Moral* (1773). Wheatley served as a model for Black women writers across the Atlantic. Her ability to command language and create literary spaces exemplified the significance of writing. Wheatley accomplished what Afro-German women writers set out to do in *Afrekete* and other cultural productions. Kraft claimed that, during the time, it was an adjustment for white males to see an African woman share the same intellectual capacities as whites, but often “her voice was still not audible.”\(^{128}\) She provided a synopsis of Wheatley’s life, and mentioned that Wheatley was criticized for her lack of engagement with her African background, the African race in general, and the politics of American slavery.

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\(^{126}\) Please refer to Appendix B for Tracy Chapman’s song.


Here, however, Kraft hardly meant to marginalize or undercut Wheatley’s value to Black Germans or the African diaspora more broadly. Wheatley did not address Africa or her heritage in her poems, but she did claim an African identity that was not tied to a specific region or tribe, such as Igbo, Kongo or Yoruba, constructing an identity based on a diasporic identity. Indeed, according to historian James Sidbury, Wheatley “helped to transform the term [African] so laden with connotations of primitivism and savagery into a source of pride, [which] required her to counter conventional Enlightenment portrayals of Africans’ place--or absence of a place--in the progressive universal history of humanity forged by Enlightenment thinkers.”\(^{129}\) Wheatley, along with other African descended authors, engendered a positive discourse on African identity. In this instance, Black Germans, too, used Enlightenment tools in “the Land of Poets and Philosophers” to transform notions of Germanness and employed language as tool to braid diverse cultural heritages together and create new meanings. Kraft demonstrated how Afro-Germans were also a part of this fertile diasporic history, offering them strength and encouragement. Establishing their connections to their diasporic sisters and foremothers in the quarterly publication would continue to reinforce Afro-Germans bonds to one another and underscore the significance of writing. Moreover, Kraft also realized that Wheatley served as a point of reference for other diasporic writers including Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker.\(^{130}\) Kraft’s article also had an educational purpose, familiarizing Black German women with Afro-diasporic authors.

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\(^{130}\) Kraft, pp. 41-42.
The editors of *Afrekete* appreciated and focused on all forms of Black women’s creativity, including music. Charly Kahl-Gortan’s four-page article “Women in Jazz” recognized the presence of women in jazz in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kahl-Gortan suggested that although jazz was considered largely a male field, Black women contributed to its development, as well as African American music more generally. Kahl-Gortan, for instance, established the significance of Black women’s contributions to African American culture, beginning from the first slave woman’s arrival in Jamestown in 1619. She emphasized that New Orleans was the center of the forbidden “Voodoo-Cult,” which was distinctive from West African Vodun, where the king and queen were the main figures. The rich historical and social landscape of New Orleans offered a place for syncretic cultures to develop. Jazz in the United States, she argued, afforded African American women a degree of agency and mobility that remained unavailable to African American men at the time. She also claimed that jazz in New Orleans was more matriarchal. Jazz music, the author revealed, facilitated cross-racial interaction among women, and these women connected to this rich historical tradition began by singing, playing instruments, and composing music and pioneering jazz. Kahl-Gortan also celebrated the blues by discussing artists, such as Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, Sippie Wallace, and Alberta Hunter. Black women had an active and profound involvement in the creation of music, and Kahl-Gortan traced

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132 Kahl-Gortan, “Frauen im Jazz,” p. 34.


their historical contributions until the twentieth century. The women of Afrekete situated themselves as a part of a dynamic diasporic legacy that encouraged women to think creatively and aspire to greatness.

Contributors to Afrekete continued to privilege their diasporic bonds to women throughout the world. Several Afro-German women writers in Afrekete linked themselves to slave women. In an untitled poem, one Afro-German named Sakae harkened back to the period of slavery and how that past influenced her, asserting:

My angels are black
they are female slaves on
the markets
But
I can feel their beauty:

Sakae

Embracing a variety of ties to slave women, Sakae claimed them as her ancestors and guardians, and they provided her with a sense of belonging and kinship. Despite the slave women’s degraded and helpless state on the market, Sakae still recognized their suffering and beauty. In addressing this moment in her poem, she used this historical event for self-reflection about her contemporary identity and life. Accompanying her piece were three African symbols that helped to provide a visual link to the continent as

136 Black German women in ADEFRA were influenced by other women of the transnational African descent as briefly mentioned in chapters one and three. ADEFRA women also attended the “Third International Feminist Book Fair” in Montreal from June 14-19, 1988 with women writers such as Audre Lorde, Ellen Kuzwayo, Gloria Joseph, and Sonia Sanchez. Marion Kraft, “Impressionen von der ‘Third International Feminist Book Fair’ in Montreal,” Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), pp. 5-8, ZBFF&GS. Some of these women also attended the “Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Summer Institute” in New York from July 11-30, 1988. Anjuli Gupta, “Überlegungen zum Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Summer Institute,” Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), pp. 11-13, ZBFF&GS. Several women in ADEFRA helped to organize an “International Women’s Congress in Frankfurt am Main from October 5-8, 1989. Helga Emde, “Internationaler Frauenkongress in Frankfurt/Main vom 5.-8. 10.1989,” Afrekete ( Wanted!), pp. 14-15, ZBFF&GS. For more on Afro-German women’s transnational connections, refer to chapter five.

Throughout Afrekete, Afro-German women explored the historical legacy of slavery in a number of poems and articles. The symbols of colonialism and slavery (ships, markets, and the selling of human chattel) could be related to the broader issues of dislocation, dehumanization, alienation, and racial persecution that individuals across the diaspora endured. Here, Afro-German women positioned themselves in that global history because they, too, suffered similar hardships in West Germany.

In Afrekete, Afro-German women recognized that while diasporic ties among women were meaningful, there were difficulties in maintaining these relationships. “Black-white-Monologue” or “Black-I know-Monologue” by May Ayim directly took up the idea that bonds were not always positive, and that solidarity with women did not necessarily result in a feeling of comfort or security. Channeling the trickster goddess Afrekete, Ayim’s poem was a linguistic play with her German mother tongue, especially as her use of Schwarz-weiß, for example, could represent both Black-white or Black I know.

Black white Monologue or Black I know-Monologue

you see
me behind
your pocket camera
memories from east Africa
and

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138 Sakae, untitled poem, p. 37.

139 See, for example, Afrekete (über alles, was uns angeht), p. 24; Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), pp. 14, 24, and 40; Emde, “Frankfurt gegen Rassimüs – Schwarze Deutsche – Afrekete (Kunst, Politik, USW), pp. 3-5; and Afrekete (Kunst, Politik, USW), pp. 7, 13, and 15.

140 May Opitz (Ayim), “Schwarz-weiß-Monolog,” Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus), p. 26 and Ayim, Blues in schwarz weiß, 75. Please refer to chapter three about Ayim’s writing.

141 Weiβ as an adjective and color means “white,” but weiß is also a form of the verb to know (wissen), and I know translates into ich weiß.
what you have already read
you are ready to unload it onto me

“the massai have admirable smiles and in spite of their hungry stomachs the kids are happy”

could not be unburdened the last vacation you spent it there and you want to see me dance that way the images will be more tangible

Similar to von Pirch’s “What do I have to do with Africa,” Ayim explored the idea of Africa as a construct and the hypocrisy of white Germans. After a vacation to East Africa, the white German wanted to inform Ayim about the Massai tribe. The white German’s had an imagined ideal of Africa and she deliberately imposed her views of Africanness onto Ayim -- wanting her to dance and move so that the German woman/traveller could remember her experiences abroad.

i look at you and in the distance in the past back and forth i search for a reason to call you sister
May Ayim

Despite years of friendship, Ayim’s thoughts forced her to question the relationship with this person. The friendship and sisterly bond could no longer work because of the lack of openness, empathy, and understanding between the two. In addition to Ayim’s poem,

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Helga Emde’s “Invisible” also stressed the difficulties in sustaining relationships with women.\textsuperscript{143} Emde described the tensions and silences that existed among German women and how damaging it could be. Whenever there was cowardice, fear, malice, and silence within women’s relationships, then disharmony would emerge. This became particularly unsettling for Afro-German women when a presumed white German ally made racist or discriminatory remarks. Here, the illusion of solidarity transformed into the reality of unacceptable difference and racism.

For Afro-German women writers, \textit{Afrekete} enabled them to use literature (poetry, prose, and autobiographies) as a site for cross-cultural and cross-racial dialogue and female fellowship. The close association with other German women or women of color provided Afro-Germans with strong diasporic, cultural, and intellectual networks that became a necessary foundation in the formation of their alternative German subjectivities. These relationships were inseparable from their newly fashioned identities. Writing also served as a way to psychologically discharge years of trauma, humiliation, sadness, and loss that they endured in Germany. \textit{Afrekete} allowed a collective purging to take place and helped these minority women survive. Now with writing as a collective project, they were no longer isolated. Their marginality provided them with a new sense of community and kinship. Writing along with their newly forged social and cultural bonds gave them solace. As Marion Kraft wrote, “Writing was everyday life management (and survival), self-determination, and an invasion into a closed society: scathing, direct, and linguistically uncomplicated texts in which courage, anger, vitality, and struggle are palpable. It was a new aspect in the contemporary

\textsuperscript{143} Emde, “Unsichtbar,” \textit{Afrekete (schwarzer Feminismus)}, p. 36.
Writing was a complex practice that forced Afro-German women to navigate their emotions and identities.\textsuperscript{145}

Moreover, as I mentioned in previous chapters, many of these women credited Audre Lorde with linking their diasporic movement and identity to literature. Here, the women embraced Lorde’s idea that “poetry was not a luxury.” Instead, writing “was a vital necessity of their existence.”\textsuperscript{146} As such, writing allowed Afro-German women’s voices to be heard. These Afro-German women were no longer silently waiting for recognition; in fact, they now demanded it.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, ADEFRA and later its journal *Afrekete* represented a feminist and queer black diasporic project that did not preclude ties to other “queers” or presumed outsiders. As a result, a variety of voices emerged and activities organized that focused on resistance against oppression and exclusion and promoted alternative forms of kinship and fellowship. In doing so, these Afro-German creative cultural practices and productions cultivated space for multiple women to grow as powerful agents. Attending to everyday instances of discrimination, moreover, the women of ADEFRA engaged and identified with diverse female experiences, offering one another support and comfort.


\textsuperscript{145} The literature on writing as survival and resistance is extensive, but here are a few works that I have engaged with: Zoe Wania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith, eds. *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and hooks, *Remembered Rapture*; and Alice Glarden Brand, “The Uses of Writing in Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 19:4 (Fall 1979): 53-72.

\textsuperscript{146} Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 37.
Representing diverse forms of woman-to-woman loving, ADEFRA and Afrekete became all-inclusive spaces that enabled Afro-German women to refashion their identities, participate in collective action, and cement bonds to other Afro-Germans and women of color. These “queer” activists also cooperated with one another in order to address the gendered and racial struggles that they endured. But these alliances were also subject to personality clashes and internal discrimination. Moreover, ADEFRA-Munich’s international conference, “Risk your life and leave your house” (“Wage dein Leben, verlasse dein Haus”), enabled these activists to attract participants from all over Germany, including the former East, as well as the world. In some cases, a new generation of ADEFRA activists, such as Peggy Piesche and Maisha Eggers, became involved in the Afro-German women’s movement as result.

In addition, Afrekete also resonated with Afro-German women and other women of color because it enabled them to create a new community that privileged the African diaspora. These new literary developments also facilitated the creation of new social bonds among women, which provided them with a profound sense of commitment to one another. In this instance, they unified and accepted the newly constructed space as a way of sustaining themselves and their collective objectives. While the oppression that Afro-German women endured placed them in the margins, they now joined together and demonstrated that their marginality was no longer negative or insignificant. It was a relationship that symbolized the strength that black women possessed. At the heart of Afro-German women’s bonds, kinships, and friendships were affective connections that provided them with a sense of belonging as they interacted and confided in one another. These friendships and connections empowered Afro-German women, enabling them to
locate themselves within the global African diasporic community. Black German women’s diverse efforts at social activism demonstrate how ADEFRA, as an organization, and Afrekete, as a literary magazine, became significant feminist and queer black diasporic projects. Regardless of the regional differences between ADEFRA-Munich and –Bremen (south and north), these groups continued to initiate collaborative work and crystallized common organizational goals that reverberated throughout Germany.

Moreover, Black German women recognized that their relationships and fellowship served as a tool for coalition building, creating alliances that were necessary in their transnational activism. Through their bonds and literature, Black Germans also destabilized the persistent if often unspoken belief that German national identity was exclusively white and mostly heteronormative, redirecting attention towards their history. Afro-German women created a “covenant of women-bonding” that relied on mutual dependency and amity, and as a result, these women became empowered in the process.
CHAPTER FIVE

SCHWARZE POLITIK: AFRO-GERMAN TRANSLOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

In a conversation published in the Bielefelder Stadtblatt in 1991, Afro-Germans Marion Kraft and Katharina Oguntoye, two of the organizers of the Fifth Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute in Germany, discussed a number of topics that revolved around the West German feminist movement, racism, and economic disparities. Near the end of the interview Kraft stated that:

An essential function of the summer seminar is to build an international network of black women. To be able to find support at different levels, to gain access to resources, to form centers of information, and looking beyond the [next] three weeks to give us the chance to create an institution that does not yet exist for us.¹

Yet Kraft also acknowledged the different perspectives and experiences represented in the Institute, which took place from August 2nd to 23rd, 1991 by explaining that:

Our theme is “Black people and the European Community,” but a lot of women from the so-called Third World also are participating. These women have completely different problems than we do in western European countries. We live in countries that are directly involved in the exploitation of Third World countries. Therefore to establish a network and then to formulate the common, concrete demands for the UN and

individual countries, that is the critical thing that we can do with an event like this.²

Kraft’s statements demonstrate how building transnational coalitions helped Afro-German women form a community, exchange political ideas, and coordinate anti-racist initiatives. The Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Institute was influential in establishing a distinctly German black feminist and diasporic activism in three ways. First, Black German women saw their participation in the Institute as an opportunity to build transnational networks and alliances with women throughout the African diaspora and to other women of color within and outside of Germany. The Institute allowed Afro-German women to create solidarities with a variety of women, while also acknowledging their divergent yet interconnected experiences, identities, and politics. Forging these solidarities demonstrated the willingness of Afro-Germans to unite across their differences and pursue collaborative projects that covered a range of issues dealing with heterosexism, sexism, classism, and eurocentrism. Second, the Institute enabled Afro-German women and other women of color to exchange ideas and address their social realities through feminist activism (even though Kraft also reminded readers of the interview that they were complicit in the “global paradigm of oppression” and systems of domination that continued to exploit the Third World and women more generally).³


Third, the Institute was an important step towards opening more spaces where Black women could initiate projects, share strategies, and produce specific forms of knowledge about their challenges in societies that incessantly ignored their plight.\(^4\) Afro-German women, in particular, found support at the Fifth Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute, where they gathered in a newly developed “black” space. Because of this new “black” space, Afro-German women, along with other international female participants, legitimized their personal and collective experiences of discrimination. For Afro-German women, conquering the silences required them to elucidate the reality that Germany was an “immigration country,” to invert a phrase from the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and that racism did persist after the Second World War.\(^5\) In emphasizing diversity within Germany and in connecting to others beyond the nation, the Fifth Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute reflected Afro-Germans’ goals within the movement more broadly.

In this chapter, I contend that through their engagement in associations such as ISD, ADEFRA, and Literature Women (\textit{Literatur Frauen, e.V.}), and by sponsoring and supporting events such as Black History Month, the Berlin Lesbian Week (\textit{Berliner Lesbenwoche}), and the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute, Afro-German men and women engaged in diasporic activism.\(^6\) This black and often

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\(^4\) Within this context “Black” served as a cultural and political signifier inclusive of people of color from South America, India, and Asia who engaged in diverse forms of politics. “Black” was and is also a common designation in Sweden and in Great Britain for Southeast Asians. See also Heidi Safia Mirza, ed. \textit{Black British Feminism}, 255-268 and Lena Sawyer, “Engendering ‘race,’” 87-105.

\(^5\) Please refer to chapter four for my brief discussion on Chancellor Kohl, who referred to Germany as “a non-immigration country” in 1982.

\(^6\) With Literature Women and the Berlin Lesbian week, Afro-German women also engaged in transnational feminist and lesbian activism. With diasporic activism, I argue that Afro-Germans explicitely engaged in themes and political activism related to Africa and its diaspora and sought to connect those issues to common concerns and developments in reunified Germany. With the reunification of Germany and
multicultural diasporic activism located at the heart of Germany – Berlin in particular – focused on the themes of anti-racism, coalition building, feminism, and transnational solidarity. By practicing diasporic activism, Afro-Germans committed themselves to campaigning against racial inequalities experienced by both men and women throughout reunified Germany and elsewhere in the African diaspora. Their participation in the Institute and in hosting events along with their interactions with one another and other communities of color influenced Afro-Germans’ identities, perspectives, activism, and movement. Several of these associations and events also enabled Afro-Germans to speak openly about the reality of psychical violence and extreme nationalism in Germany.  

Moreover, Afro-Germans negotiated their involvement in local, national, and international associations and projects that inspired translocal and transnational intellectual exchanges and political mobilization.  

heightened xenophobia, Afro-Germans from the former East and West joined together to discuss and confront a common element in many international cultures: racism.

7 Lorde and her partner Gloria Joseph also witnessed the sea change in Germany and wrote a letter to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl about feeling unsafe in the country, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall. See Gloria Joseph and Audre Lorde, “AuslanderInnen zum Deutschenproblem,” Die Tageszeitung, Berlin, September 10, 1992, p. 11. Their letter has been reproduced many times in German newspapers.

8 By translocal, I maintain that Berlin included the geographical site of the city as well as the network of like-minded activists and intellectuals working on common issues, and that these individuals disseminated information about their local conditions internationally to create awareness and agitate for social justice. The literature on transnationalism has been rather extensive, but within the context of this chapter, I contend that the transnational involves the interconnectedness of people and culture that transcends the nation. According to Fatima El-Tayeb, translocality was the “localized, mult centered, horizontal community in which a strong identification with cities or neighborhoods, perceived as spaces both created by and transcending national and ethnic limits, combines with a larger diasporic perspective” (xxxvii). For the diasporic or minority communities in Europe that she analyzed, the city served as a primary source of identification and enabled them to make “minoritarian interventions,” employing diverse fields of vernacular culture and public art. El-Tayeb continued to argue that, “the local, the city, or neighborhood becomes an alternative public space, in part [by] replacing national allegiances and instead creating border-crossing translocal networks.” El-Tayeb used youth hip-hop communities to address “postethnic European of color identity.” These diverse communities cultivated “translocal connections that offered an alternative sense of belonging by constructing a group identity in the progress, based on common interests and experiences rather than shared ethnic or national origin and for the first time creating a sense of European minority identity” (7). El-Tayeb, European Others. See also Appadurai, Modernity at Large. See also these scholars’ definitions of transnationalism.
continued to express their global perspectives, elucidating the experiences of individuals of African descent on the local and national levels in Germany and also internationally in countries as far away as South Africa, Tanzania, and Somalia. As Afro-Germans took the movement beyond Germany, they linked it to diasporic movements elsewhere, marking an explicitly transnational turn in the movement. By exploring the different activities and associations that Afro-Germans participated in, I will demonstrate how their diasporic politics and activism remained enmeshed in both local and global currents. In chapter four, I argued that Afreke te remained one way that Afro-German women manifested their diasporic outlook. The seminars and events examined in this chapter served as another arena for diasporic activism for Afro-German men and women.

In section one, I examine ISD-Berlin’s Black History Month celebrations from 1990 to 1996, illustrating how this annual event sustained Afro-Germans’ efforts to gain recognition within German society and the African diaspora. The Black History Month events also enabled Afro-Germans to practice diasporic activism by sponsoring numerous film screenings, presentations, workshops, and seminars that accentuated diasporic culture. With section two, I focus on several ISD and ADEFRA members’ involvement with Literature Women, an association that organized conferences and readings that supported women’s literature and research. This international organization began in West Berlin in 1988 and became an officially registered association in 1989. Connecting to other female authors, including white women and women of color, the organization allowed some Afro-German women members to develop their intellectual

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activism and public voice on a larger scale. The third section analyzes the participation of women from ADEFRA and ISD in the 9th Berlin Lesbian Week in 1993 and the 5th Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute in 1991. While these events attracted international participants, the organizers of these events also catered to local constituents, and used the city of Berlin to form kinships, sharing common interests and experiences. Afro-German women’s involvement in these activities, as organizers, participants, and spectators, enabled them to connect to women of color and build coalitions throughout the globe. With these numerous events and associations, Afro-Germans ushered in another stage within the movement marked by a more pronounced engagement with transnational social justice politics. Each of these examples illustrates how Black Germans’ translocal and transnational activism came to fruition and how the global shaped the local within their movement. Berlin, as an international metropolitan space, served as an ideal site to help diverse actors organize local projects while remaining attuned to global dynamics, movements, and discourses that confronted discrimination.  

The Establishment of ISD-Berlin’s Annual Black History Month Celebrations

Borrowing from the African American tradition, ISD began to organize their own Black History Month (BHM) celebrations that sought to enlighten the general public about the presence of individuals of African descent in Germany. One of the main

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10 It is likely that Afro-Germans and people of color communities in Germany also drew from Berlin’s rich history in radical social and political activism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

11 “Negro History Week” was a precursor to “Black History Month,” which African-American historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History proclaimed should take place in the second week of February in 1926. In 1976 as part of the United States bicentennial, the informal expansion of Black History week to a month occurred, with President Gerald Ford later endorsing the change. See Daryl Michael Scott, “The Origins of Black History Month,” Association for the Study of African American Life and History [http://www.asalh.org/blackhistorymonthorigins.html](http://www.asalh.org/blackhistorymonthorigins.html)
ideas driving Black History Month was, as the organizers in the 1991 program explained, their concern that “there were limited opportunities to learn about Black history in Germany, but prejudices against black people’s culture and history were widespread.”

Supported by the Office of Foreign Students in the Student Union at the Free University from its inception, ISD’s Black History Month encouraged the academic study of black history along with public outreach, as Eleonore Wiedenroth-Coulibaly, one of the co-founders of the ISD-Frankfurt/Wiesbaden group, and Sascha Zinflou, an anti-fascist and anti-racist activist, have noted. ISD’s efforts also built upon, and perhaps tapped into, earlier work in Berlin by the Fountainhead Dance Theatre group, which organized a Black Cultural Festival in 1986 that underscored the breadth of African diasporic culture. As with ISD and ADEFRA, the Fountainhead Dance Theatre group evinced a


13 The ISD-Frankfurt/Wiesbaden group was also known as the ISD Rhine-Main group. Refer to chapter two for details on this regional organization.

14 Wiedenroth-Coulibaly and Zinflou, “20 Jahre Schwarze Oranisierung in Deutschland,” 140.

15 The first Black Cultural Festival took place from March 3-23. The Fountainhead Dance Theatre (Fountainhead Tanz Theatre) was founded 1980 in West Berlin by African American professors Donald Muldrow Griffith and Gayle McKinney Griffith, together with three other artists. The Fountainhead Dance Theatre was a production, performance, distribution, and teaching unit that is still in existence today. The Black Cultural Festival still remains an annual event, which usually occurs in Rathaus Schöneberg. Refer to their website http://www.fountainhead-tanz-theatre.de/ [Accessed April 9, 2013]. See Fountainhead Dance Theatre, “Black Cultural Festival,” Berlin, March 3-23, 1986, pp. 1-22, Folder Kontakte, nationale,
concern with the history of race in Germany, noting in the foreword to the program for their Festival:

Berlin was the host city of the conference in 1884/85 that consolidated the pattern of colonial rule over Africa and in Germany racism reached its greatest heights as public policy – the denial of not only cultural achievements but also the basic humanity of Black people. On the other hand[,] Berlin also has examples of resistance to this colonial/imperial legacy. Berlin is now a world city of great cultural diversity including forms of Black Culture.\(^\text{16}\)

Scholars lack the sources necessary to write a comprehensive history of Black History Month in Germany, in part because there is no extant archive containing pertinent planning notes, speeches, personal correspondences, audio, or video files – a point I have argued in the previous chapters. Detailed Black History Month programs from 1990-1996 do, however, afford the opportunity to consider the organization, focus, and broad significance of these events. The emergence of ISD’s Black History Month helped to create an Afro-German tradition. The BHM also offered Afro-Germans a sense of continuity and stability within the Black German movement. Afro-Germans also believed that Black History Month celebrations were crucial especially considering that “After the reunification of divided Germany, many people were surprised by the scale of prejudice, nationalism, and even physical racial attacks. This fact makes it more necessary than ever to look back with interest and pride to black history, but also give space to black issues in the present.”\(^\text{17}\)

As a result, Black History Month gave Black...

\(^{16}\) Fountainhead Dance Theatre, “Foreword,” in “Black Cultural Festival,” pp. 4-5.

Germans as well as other Germans and people of color more generally an opportunity to learn about the history of individuals of African descent within Germany and beyond. By focusing on often overlooked and forgotten narratives, Afro-Germans helped to transform notions of Germanness for themselves and shaped their consciousness through an act of recovering history similar to that pursued in *Farbe bekennen*. Afro-Germans also invited their white compatriots to Black History Month activities and left events open to the public for a modest fee that changed from year to year. By at least some accounts, the BHMs attracted tourists to the city.

The records about the exact origins of the BHM are contradictory. According to the program for the 1990 ISD Black History Month, the ISD-Berlin members Danny Hafke, Roy Wichert, Michael “Mike” Reichel, and Patricia Elcock developed the idea for Black History Month and coordinated the first annual celebration for February 17 thru 25, 1990. Likewise, in Black History Month programs from 1991 and 1992, ISD stated that, “Black History Month was launched in February 1990 by the Initiative of Black

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18 I am not suggesting that Afro-Germans did not also help to change beliefs in German society at large, but those changes have been gradual.

19 For example, at the first BHM in 1990, the cost for concerts and activities was 6 Deutsch Mark (DM) for GDR citizens, 10DM for ISD members with ID, and 12DM for other guests. At the 1991 BHM, ISD expected participants to pay 2DM or 10DM for a season ticket. ISD, “Black History Month Programm 17.-25. Februar 1990,” p. 5; ISD, “Programm Black History Month 1991,” p. 1; and “Programm Black History Month 1991.”

Germans in Berlin,” and “it was a great success.” Eleonore Wiedenroth-Coulibaly and Sascha Zinflou have written that Black History Month celebrations in Berlin occurred from 1990 to 2001. In the foreword to the twentieth-anniversary edition of Farbe bekennen, however, Katharina Oguntouye, a co-founder and member of ISD-Berlin, claimed that Black History Month occurred every February in Berlin from 1988-1998. May Ayim, another co-founder and member of ISD-Berlin, also wrote that, “Since 1989 ISD with the cooperation of other black groups organized the ‘Black History Month’ in Berlin.” Finally, the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD)’s current webpage provides a brief timeline about Black History Month, maintaining that it occurred in Berlin in 1991 and that BHM events actually took place for the first time in Hamburg on a small scale in 1990 under the direction of African-American jazz singer and actress Cynthia Utterbach. The misremembering of the origins of Black History

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21 ISD, “Black History Month ’92,” Berlin, p. 1, The Private Collection of May Ayim. The German text: “Der Black History Month wurde im Februar 1990 von der Initiative Schwarze Deutsche in Berlin eingeführt.” See also ISD, “Programm Black History Month 1991,” p. 1. The German text: “Im letzten Jahr veranstalteten wir den Black History Month zum ersten Mal und es wurde ein voller Erfolg.” There was yet another example of inconsistency about the first BHM. For instance, in a 1996 brochure, the Black History Month Committee claimed to have been around since 1989 (1989-1996); yet remarked that the 1996 BHM was its 7th.


Month demonstrates the value of documenting and reconstructing a detailed history of the Afro-German movement. These discrepancies aside, the BHM was an important and informative event for the Black German community.

The BHM celebrations gave Afro-Germans a sense of visibility in a majority white society that had relegated its compatriots of African heritage to the margins. Locating their events in Berlin, ISD used places in this major urban, cosmopolitan space, drawing on a legacy of political and socio-cultural activism to reach a broad audience. As Michelle M. Wright has argued, “The metropolis (usually but not exclusively Berlin) serves as a refuge from the reactionary and oppressive attitudes that pervade the rural space, although the Afro-German eventually realizes that the same vicious atavistic set of beliefs pervades both locations.” In particular, places such as the Fountainhead Dance Theatre, Die Pumpe (The Pump), KulturBrauerei (Culture Brewery), Bildungs und Aktionszentrum Dritte Welt--BAZ (Third World Education and Action Center), and Werkstatt der Kulturen (Workshop of Cultures) had already obtained recognition within certain circles in the Berlin subcultural movements. Arranging diverse activities at

place in Frankfurt am Main. Through hosting a number of events, the ISD-Frankfurt group sought to honor Floppy, an active and dedicated member who killed himself in December of last year. I met Floppy, a self-proclaimed Afro-German punk, at a workshop during the 2009 Bundestreffen. See ISD-Frankfurt and Henrich Böll Stiftung Hessen, “Black History Month 2013: Thema Racial Profiling,” Frankfurt, p. 2.

26 Koshar, From Monuments to Traces.

27 Wright, Becoming Black, 224.

28 For instance, ISD-Berlin’s office was located in the BAZ. Please refer to footnote thirteen for information on the Fountainhead Dance Theatre. Die Pumpe was and is a cultural center located in Berlin-Schoeneberg. Refer to the website: http://www.jugendkulturzentrumpumpe.de/ [Accessed April 29, 2013]. KulturBrauerei was an old brewery converted into a cultural center in the 1990s in Prenzlauer Berg-Berlin, where meetings and events took place. Refer to the website: http://kulturbrauerei.de/en [Accessed April 29, 2013]. The BAZ is now a children’s center, but in the 1980s and 1990s, it was a cultural center for immigrant organizations and offered office space to variety of immigrant and migrant associations. Opening in 1993, the Werkstatt der Kulturen was an event center sponsored by the Berlin Senate in Neukölln. Refer to the website: http://www.werkstatt-der-kulturen.de/ [Accessed April 29, 2013].
these locations, among others, helped Black Germans reinsert themselves into the fabric of city, showing that the city was not homogenously white.29 In the 1998 Black History Month program, the organizers expressed analogous ideas about Berlin in the following statement, “Especially in a city of many cultures, the BHM presents an opportunity for mutual understanding. It is a reflection of the diversity of black life. . . We have created a forum for exchange and interaction, and this helps to counteract against prejudices and misunderstandings.”30 Similar events such as Black Heritage Days, African Days, and the African Festival, that emerged in other cities including Munich, Hamburg, and Würzburg not only drew attention to continual practices and stereotypes about individuals of African descent that were entrenched in German society, but also highlighted Afro-Germans’ agency.31 These urban spaces in a multicultural and multiracial city, moreover, enabled ISD activists and Black History Month organizers and participants to transcend the political borders of Germany.32

29 Black Germans looked outward (to white Germans) and inward (within the Black German and other people of color communities), especially as they sought to reach a variety of white and black participants.


32 Wright posited that the metropolis served as a counterdiscourse for Afro-German and Black British communities. Yet, I believe Berlin, given its historical legacy and cultural cache, helped Afro-Germans achieve more visibility and gain a wider reach in society. See Wright, 224-25.
Through annual Black History Months, ISD-Berlin engaged in collaborative work with a number of government entities and local associations concerned with promoting equality, combating multiple forms of discrimination in Germany, and creating awareness about Germany’s multicultural heritage and international connections. ISD also applied for grants from state and federal agencies to fund Black History Month.\(^{33}\) For the 1991 BHM, which took place from February 23\(^{rd}\) to March 10\(^{th}\), ISD partnered with ADEFRA, the African Women’s Initiative (AFI), the Project for Multicultural Feminist Educational work (NOZIZWE), Prima Klima Reisen, and the Student Union (AStA) at the Free University.\(^{34}\) As Black History Month continued to grow in popularity, so, too, did the number of sponsors that helped to organize and present at the annual celebrations. ISD continued to benefit from private businesses, cultural centers, and civic organizations and welcomed suggestions about exhibitions, performances, workshop themes, film screenings, the format and design of the BHM program, and dance party locations. ISD also hosted discussion sessions, art workshops, children’s programming, and readings throughout the weekends and weekdays.\(^{35}\)

During the 1992 BHM, held from January 31\(^{st}\) to March 7\(^{th}\), NOZIZWE representatives participated once again, but ISD also garnered support from the Student


\(^{34}\) AFI (*Afrikanische Frauen Initiative*) was founded in 1989 as a self-help organization for African women and other black women, enabling them to work together to confront right wing radicalism and exchange stories about their experiences. NOZIZWE (*Projekt für multikulturelle feministische Bildungsarbeit*), named after a South African anti-Apartheid and Black Consciousness activist, it was a migrant women’s organization that engaged with antiracist and anti-sexist issues in Berlin. Prima Klima Reisen was a travel company in Germany that organized trips throughout the world.

Unions at both the Free University and the Technical University, the Evangelical Church Development Service in Stuttgart (ABP), the Network (Netzwerk) in Berlin, the Senate Administration for Cultural Affairs, Black Media Access, the Europe-Africa-Cultural Center (EURAFRI), Harambee, *Isivivane*, the People’s Art Ensemble, and the Umoja Africa Center. Other institutions and local businesses such as the Addis Café, the Filfila Café, the Immigrant Political Forum (IPF), the Sikasso Market, and the Tanzania Community Berlin also provided support that year. These alliances also demonstrated that ISD remained attentive and open to the specific concerns of different Afro-diasporic communities in Berlin.

As ISD worked with these multiracial communities, the activists understood their struggle against racism to be connected to larger issues concerning equality and human

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36 The Evangelical Church Development Service (Ausschuß für entwicklungsbezogene Bildung und Publizistik in Stuttgart (ABP)) was a service under the Evangelical-Lutheran church that sponsored meaningful projects throughout Germany in foreign countries. The Network (Netzwerk) was a group of young social democratic (SPD) representatives from the German Federal Parliament who sponsored a number of events that emphasized freedom, equality, and solidarity in Berlin; the organization still exists. The Senate Department for Cultural Affairs (Senatsverwaltung für kulturelle Angelegenheiten) was responsible for museum, libraries, archives, memorials, and other institutions, offering financial assistance for cultural projects. Black Media Access, e.V was a non-profit media project that encouraged the promotion of black culture and communication. The Europe-Africa Cultural Center (Europa-Afrika-Kulturzentrum e.V.) was an organization that provided counseling, assistance, and other services to Africans and other black families living in Germany, and it also tried to shed light on the experiences of individuals of African descent in Germany. Harambee was a multicultural organization formed in 1982 to support and promote African artists, especially musicians. Founded in 1990, *Isivivane* was a journal publishing critical cultural and literary debates in Africa and the diaspora, offering interviews, poems, essays, interviews and reviews in English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. The People’s Art Ensemble was an association with the purpose of bringing many different art forms together that promoted established and unestablished artists. The Umoja Center, also the Umoja Africa Center, was a community center in Berlin that remained open to all Africans and other individuals of African heritage. ISD, “Black History Month ’92,” Berlin, pp. 2-4.

37 Addis and Filfila Cafes were restaurants in Berlin. The Immigrant Political Forum (Immigrantenpolitisches Forum) was launched in 1987 and worked with asylum seekers, immigrants, and black of diverse origins, confronting discrimination and racism and fighting for equality. ISD, “Black History Month ’93,” Berlin, p. 4, Folder ISD Rassismus & Politik, The Private Collection of May Ayim. The Sikasso Market (Sikasso Markt) was a grocery store in Berlin, specializing in African goods. I was unable to obtain information on the Tanzania Community Berlin.
The preoccupation with translocal currents in Berlin, such as increased violence against immigrants in the streets and strict laws against foreigners in Germany, often dovetailed with transnational currents. When the 1993 BHM occurred from January 30th to February 28th, ISD received assistance not only from the African Women’s Initiative, the Immigrant Political Forum, and the Network, but also from the Black Liberation Sound System and the Liberia Relief Organization (LHW). Here, ISD consciously aligned with immigrant associations and people of color communities to ensure that the BHM would initiate relevant and critical discussions about migrants from Tanzania and Liberia as well as from other countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. In this way, the BHMs enabled these sponsoring associations to share and produce knowledge about the impact of marginalization at home and abroad as well as the

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38 In the 1996 BHM program, ISD described their organization by stating that, “We created our self-designation not to be dependent on a particular nationality, place of birth, or passport. Our definition of black is not limited to skin color, but includes all individuals of African-Asian descent affected by racism. From the beginning, our emphasis was on the formation and stabilization of individual identity and the commitment to establishing an anti-racist and anti-discrimination society.” The German text: “Wir machen unsere Selbstbezeichnung nicht von der jeweiligen Nationalität, dem Geburtsort oder dem Pass abhängig. Unsere Definition von Schwarz beschränkt sich nicht auf die Hautfarbe, sondern schließt alle von Rassismus betroffenen Menschen afrikanischer-asiatischer Herkunft mit ein. Schwerpunktthemen unserer Arbeit waren von Anfang an die Bildung und Stabilisierung der eigenen Identität und der Einsatz für eine antirassistische und antidiskriminierende Gesellschaft.” ISD, “Black History 1996: Schwarze Visionen,” Berlin, p. 12, Folder ISD Liga, The Private Collection of May Ayim. See also ISD, “Black History Month ’94: Die Farben Afrikas,” Berlin, p. 6, The Author’s Private Collection.

39 ISD, “Black History Month ’93,” p. 1. Founded in the early 1990s, the Black Liberation Sound System was a pioneer DJ collective that focused on political consciousness and aimed at unifying the Black community. It sponsored community and youth projects and contributed to political debate about racist attacks in Germany; Eka Neumann was a member. Left Forum, http://dev.leftforum.org/participant/speaker-eka-neumann [Accessed April 8, 2013]. For more on hip hop in Germany, please refer to Inez Horton Templeton, “Germany’s Hip Hop Old School, What’s So German About It?: Cultural Identity in the Berlin Hip Hop Scene” (PhD dissertation, University of Sterling, 2005), 107-119; Sascha Verlan and Hannes Loh, 25 Jahre Hip Hop in Deutschland (Berlin: Hannibal, 2006); Hannes Loh and Murat Güngör, Fear of a Kanak Planet: Hip Hop Zwischen Weltkultur und Nazi-Rap (Berlin: Hannibal, 2002); and El-Tayeb, European Others. The Liberian Relief Organization (Liberia Hilfswerk) was an organization that offered humanitarian aid to Liberian migrants and asylum seekers in Berlin.
positive achievements of individuals of African descent while also debunking stereotypes and presumptions.\textsuperscript{40}

With the 1994 BHM celebration, taking place from January 28\textsuperscript{th} to March 4\textsuperscript{th}, the Network, the Student Union at the Free University, the Senate Department for Cultural Affairs, the Evangelical Church Development Service, the African Women’s Initiative, Harambee, the Immigrant Political Forum, and the International Arts Berlin (IAB), formerly the People’s Art Ensemble, sponsored panels and offered financial and organizational assistance.\textsuperscript{41} But that year the BHM also received support from the State Headquarters for Political Education, the \textit{Werkstatt der Kulturen}, the Senate Department for Economics and Technology, the African Women’s Theater (AFT), a Rawandan group ABATIGAYA, and the Somali Association for Peace Initiative.\textsuperscript{42} Each new sponsor gave ISD an opportunity to advance multiple causes, as in the case with the Somali and Rwandan groups, and to advertise these organizations’ campaigns and activities. These

\textsuperscript{40} ISD, “Vorwort” and “Foreword,” in “Black History 1996: Schwarze Visonen,” pp. 3-4.

\textsuperscript{41} Renamed the International Arts Berlin, the organization maintained the same mission as the People’s Arts Ensemble. ISD, “Black History Month 94,” p. 7.

\textsuperscript{42} The State Headquarters for Political Education (\textit{Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung}) offered guidance about political topics, sponsored a variety of events that fostered political education and growth, and supported programs, projects, and conferences that benefit the citizens of Berlin. The \textit{Werkstatt der Kulturen} is a cultural center that hosted a number of international events, showcasing programs and exhibitions with musicians, artists, writers, intellectuals, dancers, and film producers. Refer to their website \url{http://www.werkstatt-der-kulturen.de/de/ueber_uns/} [Accessed April 9, 2013]. The Senate Department for Economics and Technology (\textit{Senatsverwaltung für Wirtschaft und Technologie}) was responsible for the control and support of economic activities and technological development in the German capital. Today it is entitled the Senate Department for Economics, Technology, and Women’s Issues. Founded in 1991, the African Women’s Theater (\textit{Afrikanische Frauentheater}) engaged in work that sought to illuminate the experiences of everyday racism and discrimination that black women endured, using multiple African styles and tools to focus on the roles that humor, gestures, and language play. ABATIGAYA was an association of people from Rwanda that wanted to share cultural ideas, practices, and dances with individuals in Germany. The Somali Association for Peace Initiative (\textit{Somalischer Verein für Friedeninitiative}) was an organization that attempted to help Somalis gain freedom and unify especially during the Somali War. Through dance and song, the group offered historical, cultural, and political information about the situation of Somalis and supported Somali migrants. ISD, “Black History Month 94,” pp. 4-6.
annual Black History Months also helped ISD and its sponsoring organizations strengthen their membership bases. At the BHamS, members could also socialize and obtain advice about a variety of themes such as hairstyles, music, and books.

My analysis of the sponsorships at the Black History Month celebrations reveals that multiple organizations, mostly based in Berlin, engaged in cross-ethnic mobilization in an effort to draw attention to their concerns about violent xenophobic acts, anti-immigrant legislation, discriminatory attitudes in the media, and racist practices that denied citizenship to individuals of color in German society. These sponsorships also showed how local and national dynamics in Berlin were evocative of developments in Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Somalia. Joining ISD in the struggle against diverse forms of oppression, these organizations, businesses, and government entities sought to inform the German public at large that instances of discrimination and exclusion were unacceptable and would not be tolerated by everyone. In this way, allies of multiple nationalities, colors, creeds, orientations, and religions participating in the BHM engaged in social justice activism in German society.

During the 1996 BHM, held from February 3rd to March 3rd, ISD and its Black History Month Committee, which included May Ayim, Carl Camurca, Mahgoub Eltayeb, Stephania A. A. Evboikuokha, Donald M. Griffith, Anthony J. Phillips, Patrice Poutrus, Ricky Reiser, and Fatuma Isaak-Schnuppan, continued to partner with the African Women’s Theater and the Somali Association for Peace Initiative. The organizers also made sure that the BHM program’s foreword was printed in five languages, including German, English, French, Arabic, and Portuguese. Each foreign language BHM

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43 ISD, “Black History 1996,” p. 2 and “Organisatorisches zum BHM ‘96,” pp. 1-4. Previous BHM programs were published in German with a few English panel descriptions, pages, paragraphs, or words.
program foreword welcomed participants and introduced the goals and themes. That same year the Sudanese Community Berlin-Brandenburg (S.G.B.B.), the Nigerian Community Berlin, The Collegium, Fountainhead Dance Theater, the Black International Cinema, the Cultural Zephyr, and *afro look* also offered assistance. Many of these local organizations continued to campaign on global issues such as civil unrest and inequality throughout the African continent and opposition to conservative European politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen in France.

**ISD’s Black History Month Ambitions**

Black History Month activities also helped to advance ISD’s aim to recover Black European history. At both the 1990 and 1991 BHMs, for example, ISD-Berlin co-founder and member, John Amoateng presented a panel entitled “Afro-German History.” Using the ironic phrase “A negro cannot be German” (“Ein Neger kann kein Deutscher sein”) as a point of departure, he tried to overturn the common view that Afro-German history began after 1945 by demonstrating that Black Germans were present in Germany.

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45 Founded in 1994, the Sudanese Community Berlin-Brandenburg (*Sudanesische Gemeinde Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.*) was an organization that promoted and received information about Sudanese culture, while also engaging in multicultural discussions with Germans and other nationalities. Nigerian women living in Germany launched the Nigerian Community Berlin (*Nigerianische Gemeinde Berlin*) in 1990 to: establish contact and relationships with Nigerians and other African associations in Berlin; describe the history and culture of Nigeria; and serve the general Nigerian community in Berlin. The Collegium was founded in 1995 and sought to “improve the communication between Black/Afro American expatriates for the increased psychological, spiritual, social artistic, and economic well-being of said group” (10). The Black International Cinema was founded by the Fountainhead Dance Theater in 1986 and organized annual festivals that screen movies from throughout the Africa diaspora as well as other films with intercultural backgrounds and perspectives. The Fountainhead Dance theatre also established the Cultural Zephyr in 1990 as a non-profit organization that helped to oversee some of the cultural and artistic programs and projects of Fountainhead. See ISD, “Black History 1996,” p. 7, 9, and 10.
from the eighteenth century to the present. discussing these narratives, amoateng’s seminar also detailed black germans’ lives under national socialism and underscored that germany was (and had always been) a multicultural society. at his 1990 presentation, amoateng offered details about anton wilhem amo, an african philosopher, who studied and taught in eighteenth-century halle and jena, germany. finally, amoateng attempted to help afro-germans achieve a better self-image and understand their identity in society. likewise, katharina oguntoye’s seminar at the 1993 bhm focused on the history of africans in germany and black germans from 1884 to 1960, which she later expanded and published as an afro-german story: on the living situation of africans and afro-germans in germany from 1884-1950.

continuing to situate afro-germans in the larger historical narrative at the 1991 bhm, elke jank from the adefra-bremen chapter presented a seminar, “the denied

46 john amoateng, “afro-deutsche geschichte,” in “black history month 17.-25. februar 1990 programm,” p. 1 and amoateng, “afro-deutsche geschichte,” in “programm black history month 1991,” p. 3. the 1990 workshop was held at 4 pm on sunday, february 18th, and the 1991 workshop occurred at 8 pm on sunday, february 24th. amoateng took the phrase from the anonymous postcard sent to ard about the film “germans are white, negroes cannot be german.” please refer to chapter three for more information about this.

47 amoateng, “afro-deutsche geschichte,” in “black history month 17.-25. februar 1990 programm,” p. 1. for more on anton wilhelm amo, refer to opitz, “precolonial images of africa, colonialism, and fascism,” in showing our colors, 3-4; marilyn sephocele, “anton wilhem amo,” journal of black studies 23:2 (december 1992): 182-87; and peter martin, “der schwarze philosoph,” in schwarze teufel, edle mohren, martin (hamburg: junius, 1993). see also may ayim, folder may afro-deutsche/zeitungsartikel über afro-deutsche/schwarze in den medien, the private collection of may ayim. much of amo’s philosophical works have been lost, and other german enlightenment figures have often ignored him. in 2008, amoateng along with black german film maker mo asumang visited amo’s grave in modern-day ghana.

48 this was a point that he also raised in 1991. see amoateng, “afro-deutsche geschichte,” in “programm black history month 1991,” p. 3.

49 katharina oguntoye, “im windschatten der deutschen geschichte – zur geschichte von afrikanerinnen und afro-deutschen in deutschland seit 1884,” in “black history month ‘93,” p. 14. oguntoye, eine afro-deutsche geschichte. she finished her master’s thesis at the technical university in berlin in 1995/96 on this same topic. oguntoye’s seminar was held from 5-7 pm on tuesday, february 23rd. oguntoye also gave a similar presentation at the 1997 bhm. see oguntoye, “die geschichte der afrikaner und afro-deutschen in deutschland von 1884 bis 1950,” “black history month ‘97: wir gehen weiter,” isd, berlin, p. 30, the private collection of maria cheatom.
Contribution of Black People to the History of Europe,” in which she challenged popular stereotypes of people of African descent as primitives. She revealed that several individuals of African descent were prominent Europeans, such as Toulouse Lautrec, while others were members of European ruling houses and aristocratic families.\(^{50}\) At the 1992 BHM, Thomas Pforth, from ISD-Duisburg, gave a seminar and discussed the legacy of racism as a system of oppression against blacks. For Pforth, it required time and effort on the part of whites to deal with racism and other systems of oppression because many of them had profited from it. His presentation served as an edifying source for his (assumedly mostly black) audience, as he claimed that, “Black[s] must leave behind the defensive, their psychological destabilization, isolation, powerlessness in order to influence [and] make decisions. The goal can only be intercultural cooperation.”\(^{51}\) Encouraging the theme of alliances, ISD also integrated a panel with Dagmar Schultz detailing the anti-racist work that white Germans engaged in as well as other panels featuring white German anti-racists.\(^{52}\) After Pforth’s seminar at the 1992 BHM, Austin Brandt, another member from ISD-Duisburg and an Afro-German pastor, presented a lecture entitled, “Black Christianity.”\(^{53}\) Brandt claimed even though many blacks saw the

\(^{50}\) Elke Jank, “Der verleugnete Beitrag schwarzer Menschen zur Geschichte Europas” in “Black History Month 1991,” p. 8. Jank’s presentation took place on Friday, March 1 at 6 pm. Lautrec was the descendant from the Counts of Toulouse and Lautrec and the Viscounts of Montfa.


\(^{53}\) Austen P. Brandt, “Schwarzes Christentum,” in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 17. Brandt’s seminar occurred on the same date as Pforth’s, but from 5:30-7:30. Brandt also held church services at some of the BHM’s. See also Harambee, “Religion and Black History: Christianity and Islam,” in Black History Month 94, ” p. 17.
church in Germany as a form of white power (*als eine Form weiβer Macht*), “Black Christianity” has served as a form of resistance and survival for individuals in Africa, North America, and England, and it could offer more possibilities for blacks in Germany. Moreover, at the 1992 BHM, Tina Campt, an African-American scholar studying in Berlin, and Pascal Grosse, an Afro-German scholar from the East, offered a presentation entitled, “Aspects of Afro-German History” that provided a “critical review of the background and concept of race as a scientific category, 1900-1960.” In addition to this panel, Campt, Grosse, and Black German scholar Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria each presented different aspects of Afro-German history in the twentieth-century during a seminar at the 1994 BHM. Campt, Grosse, and Lemke Muniz de Faria interrogated the concept of race in the German context and illustrated how it helped to define national identity, citizenship, and cultural norms. These workshops all sought to illuminate the historical legacy of Black Germans in the country, revealing Black Germans’ efforts at activism, survival, and resistance across multiple generations. Here, these BHM panels continued the work of *Farbe bekennen* by employing history as

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medium for diasporic consciousness-raising as well as encouraging critical exchanges about struggles against racism.

Besides exploring the history of Black Germans at these events, ISD activists organized seminars that emphasized Afro-Germans’ political, social, and international contributions. At the 1993 and 1994 Black History Month celebrations, Thomas Pforth provided an overview of the political development of Black Germans, discussing their objectives, experiences, and situation. Members from ISD also organized a three-hour panel entitled, “The Initiative of Black Germans,” at which they explained the history of the organization, its function, its projects, and aims in Berlin and other cities. Seeking to establish a secure space, ISD activists encouraged questions as well as critiques from the audience, particularly as they wanted “to dispel prejudices and misunderstandings.” During the second half of the panel, ISD panelists discussed the future projects and goals of the organization.

While ISD underscored the importance of Afro-German history and culture in the West, they also integrated panels at Black History Month celebrations that attended to the experiences of Black Germans in the East. During the 1991 BHM, one “N.N.” from Leipzig presented a workshop, “The Black Community in East Germany Before and After the Fall of the Wall,” which considered the development of the Afro-German


58 There were discrepancies within ISD about their collective goals.

movement in cities in the former East.\textsuperscript{60} The presentation, moreover, focused on the differences and similarities between East and West and how unification helped to encourage more collaborative work with individuals from the former West (\textit{Wessis}).\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, at the 1994 BHM, the panel, “Black Germans in the German Democratic Republic,” shed light on the experiences of Afro-Germans in the GDR and their connections to other African countries and African migrants. Reporting on the situation in the former East, Dede Malika Beer, Kerstin Eisner, Pierre Gualke, and Patrice Poutrus, ISD members from the former GDR, explicated the existence of “officially sanctioned anti-racism and tolerance to real xenophobia and racism.”\textsuperscript{62}

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, several of the panels at the BHMs also addressed the impact that heightened ethno-nationalism and racial violence had on individuals and the Afro-German community. It was against this backdrop that Ika Hügel’s lecture, “Afro-German identity,” attributed meaning to and acknowledged subtle distinctions between the concepts of Black German and Afro-German and addressed their meaning, especially during post-reunification. Hügel’s presentation detailed what the terms have done for her personally and the movement.\textsuperscript{63} Given the difficulties that many people of color faced after German unification, Katharina Oguntoye’s seminar, “Afro-Germans – Black Germans – Blacks in Germany,” at the 1993 BHM also attended to pressing issues

\textsuperscript{60} N.N., “Die Schwarze Community in der DDR vor und nach dem Fall der Mauer,” in “Programm Black History Month 1991,” p. 9. The workshop took place on Saturday, March 2 at 4 pm.


\textsuperscript{63} Hügel, “Afro-Deutsche Identität,” in “Programm Black History Month 1991,” p. 5. Hügel’s presentation occurred on Thursday, February 28th at 8 pm.
for several communities in Germany. She also explicated the concepts of Afro-German, Black, African, and German, underscoring how significant it was to maintain a strong sense of self and identity in spite of the blatant xenophobia and nationalistic fervor in the country.64

Moreover, ISD arranged a variety of workshops and seminars that recommended constructive forms of self-help and self-defense. Afro-German psychologist, Bärbel Kampmann, for instance, presented a panel entitled, “Psychological problems of Black Germans and therapy as support.”65 Kampmann stated that, “Black Germans live as minorities in a majority white society. Due to this fact [Black Germans] are particularly vulnerable to the contradictions, expectations of behavior, discrimination and isolation, which leave their effects. Traces that often manifest themselves from mental health problems to mental illness.”66 Kampmann also gave a similar presentation, “The Basic Problems of Black Germans” at the 1992 BHM, urging Afro-Germans to seek professional assistance when necessary.67 In addition to psychological and emotional support, ISD sponsored self-defense training at a few of the BHMs. During the 1993 BHM, for example, Mario Santiago offered a self-defense course to people of color only,

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64 Oguntoye, “Afro-deutsche – Schwarze Deutsche – Schwarze in Deutschland,” in “Black History Month ’93,” p. 6. The panel took place on Sunday, January 31 from 2-4 pm. There were also numerous BHM seminars that explored the persistence of racial attacks in Germany.


67 Kampmann, “Basisprobleme Schwarzer Deutscher,” in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 13. Kampmann’s seminar took place Saturday, February 22 from 5:30-7:30 pm. There was also a stress management workshop at the 1997 BHM. See also Dr. Lula Lewes, “Streßmanagement,” “Black History Month ‘97,” p. 20.
affording participants an opportunity to learn Karate, Judo, and Jujitsu techniques and to recognize dangerous situations.68

The annual Black History Month celebrations enabled Afro-Germans and other people of color to showcase their creative cultural productions such as art, music, theater, and literature that focused on their diverse experiences and backgrounds. For example, at the 1994 Black History Month, ISD sponsored an “Artist in Residence,” Dionne Sparks, a Black British artist, who worked with dyes, textiles, and multi-media, and whose work “dealt with the political and historical aspects of Black women’s identity.”69 Her exhibition at the Werkstatt der Kulturen was entitled “Conversations Across Seas.” Sparks also offered a series of workshops during the months of March and April that were entitled “Visual Connections.”70 As the editor of afro look and an ISD member, Ricky Reiser’s afro-centric black and white artwork was featured in several Black History Month programs.71 During the 1993 BHM, Reiser also had an exhibition entitled, “The language of the Media and Racism,” that remained a fixture throughout the BHM celebrations. In it, she collected and collaged numerous newspaper headlines about racial attacks and captured the racial discourses embedded in everyday culture towards


69 Sparks, “Black History Month-Artist in Residence,” in “Black History Month 94,” p. 33. The German text: “Ihre Arbeiten beschäftigen sich mit den politischen und geschichtlichen Aspekten der Identität Schwarzer Frauen.”

70 Sparks, “Black History Month-Artist in Residence,” p. 33.

71 In 1995, Reiser also created the Black Calendar (Schwarzer Kalendar) together with Vera Heyer and Pierre Gaulke, which included birth dates of significant individuals and political events throughout the African diaspora. See Reiser, Heyer, and Gaulke, Kalendar mit Daten Schwarzer Persönlichleiten aus Politik, Kunst, Literatur, Kultur 1995 (Berlin, 1995), The Author’s Private Collection.
Black Germans and other people of color.\textsuperscript{72} Throughout the 1996 BHM program, images of Reiser’s art design and borders appeared along with other afro-centric symbols and imagery.

Please refer to figures 5.1 and 5.2 for a few examples of Reiser’s artwork. In choosing these images, I wanted to simply emphasize how Afro-Germans, in this case Reiser, had a propensity for Afrocentric symbols, and her images remain similar to some of the images briefly discussed in chapter four. Reiser created new diasporic symbols and meanings, bringing them into the German context.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{Figure 5.1} Ricky Reiser’s artwork in “Black History 1996: Schwarze Visionen” \textsuperscript{74}

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\textsuperscript{72} See Ricky Reiser, “Mediensprache und Rassismus,” in “Black History Month ’93,” p. 5.

\textsuperscript{73} Reiser continues to work on her art and much of it maintains the similar focus of incorporating “Africa” in Germany.

\textsuperscript{74} Reiser, Artwork, in “Black History 1996,” p. 12.
Furthermore, on January 30, 1994, ISD organized an exhibition opening with Sherifa Abdul Khaliq, an artist and dancer, who performed modern jazz and lyrical choreographed pieces. The exhibition, entitled “Different Colours,” featured Babette Arnold, Danny Hafke, Katharina Oguntoye, Dieudonné Otenia, Ricky Reiser, and Henrietta Safo and was the “the first joint exhibition of black arts from both parts of the city.”

“Different Colours” included paintings and photography from Arnold; paintings from Hafke; photography from Oguntoye; paintings from Otenia, paintings, art design, collages from Reiser; and ethnically-inspired jewelry from Safo. Several of these artists drew from African diasporic and European traditions and their works ranged “from the rendering of landscapes and inner world of emotions to the artistic condemnation and reflection of racist incidents.”

The public display of these forms of art also provided the artists with recognition within the Afro-German community.

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77 Different Colours,” p. 11. The full German text: “Die Ausstellung reicht von traditioneller afrikanischer Malerei bis hin zur Moderne, aber auch bis zur von europäischem Einfluß geprägten Kunst. Die Aussagen
ISD organizers also included diverse groups (local, national, or transnational) at Black History Month events, and gave these acts an opportunity to share their art as a form of community-building, cultural education, and social cohesion. At the 1991 Black History Month, ISD and Harambe organized a Black Heritage Party in which the Mike Russell Band and the group Ubenjakuma performed. At the 1993 BHM, the Black Liberation Sound System performed a music concert along with an unspecified band from Ghana. During the Black History Month opening celebration in 1996, DJs from Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda spun records. With the 1994 BHM, ABATIGAYA sponsored a workshop on dancing and singing from Rwanda – which emphasized ISD’s transnational connections. At this same BHM, the African Women’s Theater group performed a staged piece entitled, “Recollection of one’s own Foreignness” at the Werkstatt der Kulturen. Seeking to dramatize the everyday experiences of some Black Germans and migrants, the production revolved around an older German woman’s argument with a foreign woman at the bus stop over something trivial. Yet in spite of the

78 Harambe and ISD, “Black Heritage Party,” in “Programm Black History Month 1991.” The party occurred on Saturday, March 2nd at 9 pm. There was also a Black Heritage Party at the 1992 BHM and other festivities at subsequent BHMs. The program does not indicate where they came from.

79 “Concert & Party Black Liberation Sound System & Live Music from Ghana,” in “Black History Month ’93,” p. 8. The concert took place on Saturday, February 5th at 9 pm.

80 ISD, “‘Schwarze Musik’ in der ‘Weißer Rose’: Eröffnungsparty zum Black History Month,” in “Black History 1996,” p. 14. The party took place on Saturday, February 3rd at 9 pm with DJs Samba Dia from Senegal, Luyanda Mpahlwa from South Africa, and Martin from Uganda. There were also Ethiopian specialties at the event.

81 ABATIGAYA, “Tänze und Gesang aus Ruanda mit ABATIGAYA,” in “Black History Month 94,” p. 27. This session took place on Thursday, February 24th from 8:30-10 pm.

82 Afrikanisches Frauentheater, “Theateraufführung: Erinnerung an die eigene Fremdheit,” in “Black History Month 94,” p. 29. It occurred on Saturday, February 26th from 8-9:30 pm, and there was an encore performance on Sunday, February 27th from 8:30-10 pm.
disagreement the women continued to engage in conversation. Through their exchange, the older German woman began to realize that she shared some commonalities with the foreign woman, and she no longer felt indifferent to the plight of migrants in Germany.\(^8^3\) With their piece, the African Women’s Theater group portrayed an episode of acceptance and understanding in German society. In addition, the People’s Art Ensemble arranged a poetry session entitled, “Peoples’ Poets Theatre” that introduced jazz poetry as black art.\(^8^4\) These panels helped Afro-Germans and people of color cohere and cultivate their community.

During the 1992 BHM, Angela Alagiyawanna-Kadalie, Nisma Dux, Michael Küppers, Modupe Laja, Shelia Mysorekar, Magali Schmidt, and Eleonore Wiedenroth – Black Germans authors and activists – appeared at a reading entitled “Black German Literature.”\(^8^5\) Along with musical accompaniment, these authors presented their work to a black audience.\(^8^6\) Afro-German activist and author, Michael H. Küppers, also recited his poetry with musical accompaniment during the 1993 BHM.\(^8^7\) At the 1996 BHM, May Ayim delivered poetry from her 1995 volume, *Blues in Black and White* (*Blues in

\(^8^3\) Afrikanisches Frauentheater, “Theateraufführung,” in “Black History Month 94” p. 29.

\(^8^4\) People’s Art Ensemble, “People’s Poets Theatre,” in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 18. This session occurred on Wednesday, March 4 at 9:30 pm.

\(^8^5\) Many of these Black German authors such as Alaglyawanna-Kadalie, Küppers, Laja, Mysorekar, and Schmidt had published poems in *Macht der Nacht*. ISD-Munich, ed. *Macht der Nacht: eine Schwarze Deutsche Anthologie* (Munich: ISD, 1991-92).

\(^8^6\) “Schwarze Deutsche Literatur,” in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 13. This reading took place on Saturday, February 22, 1992 from 3:5:30 pm. The German text: “Die Veranstaltung will Schwarzen SchriftstellerInnen die Möglichkeit eröffnen, ihre Werke vor einem Schwarzen Publikum vorzutragen.”


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Ayim’s reading allowed her to perform poems that were autobiographical and about racism and everyday life in Germany. Unfortunately, this would be her last Black History Month celebration before her suicide in the fall of 1996. These performances gave Black Germans a forum to present work, but it also served as a welcoming space where their artwork would be appreciated.

ISD-Berlin also arranged panels at the Black History Months that were tailored to the parents of Black German children. At the 1991 BHM, white German Eva-Maria Schmidt, an active member of the organization “Interest Group for Women Married to Foreigners” (IAF), offered a presentation entitled “Parents of Black Children.” She shared her daily personal experiences as a mother of a black child and the inability of others to accept her child. Schmidt also attempted to help parents determine if their situation differed from parents with older black children. Eka Neumann, a member of ISD, gave a seminar, “Parents, Black Children and Racism in unified Germany,” where she discussed different approaches to anti-racist education and upbringing and provided guidance and recommended active support groups and initiatives.

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89 In the 1997 BHM program, an open letter to May Ayim from the Black Community Berlin appeared. ISD, “May Ayim Opitz von der Black Community Berlin,” in “Black History Month ’97,” pp. 6-7. During this BHM, ISD hosted a May Ayim Day with a variety of events celebrating and honoring Ayim’s life and work. See also “May Ayim Tag,” in “Black History Month ’97,” p. 34.

90 As detailed in chapter two, the IAF (Interessengemeinschaft der mit Ausländern verheirateten Frauen) involved a group of German women who were married to foreign men and who organized in order to campaign against German citizenship law. See Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan’” and Sephoclé, “Black Germans and Their Compatriots,” 17. Schmidt, “Eltern Schwarzer Kinder,” in “Black History Month 1991,” p. 10. The panel occurred on Sunday, March 3 at 23pm.

childcare for parents attending this panel; they also tried to offer childcare options throughout Black History Month. Neumann, moreover, presented a workshop at the 1993 BHM for children between the ages of four and fourteen that sought to help Black German children gain more self-confidence and communicate with one another through creative mediums such as arts and crafts. At the 1994 BHM, Virginia Mukwesha-Hetze, an artist from Zimbabwe, offered a children’s event entitled, “African Clothing, Music and Song,” which included traditional musical instruments and costumes for children to play and wear. In organizing these events for children, ISD and other sponsoring groups wanted to impart knowledge about the diaspora and Afro-German history that would promote self-esteem and to equip children with tools to combat racism; tools that many of ISD’s members had lacked growing up in Germany.

ISD also sponsored seminars about searching for lost family members, which reflected in part dislocations caused by World War II and post-war German policies. In Afro-German Gunda Brinkmann’s seminar, entitled “Find Your Roots,” she shared her personal stories about searching for her parents. In particular, she discussed her feelings and experiences with numerous offices and individuals during the search. For her, “the search for an American father was difficult because there was no obligatory registration in the USA,” like there was in Germany. At the 1992 BHM, Raffael Dernbach, from ISD-Munich, and Matthias Wagner, from ISD-Frankfurt, also presented a panel about

92 Neumann, “Schwarze Kinder gestalten miteinander,” in “Black History Month ’93,” p. 10. This session took place Sunday, February 7th from 2-4 pm.


Afro-Germans and their search for lost family members. Dernbach and Wagner sought to “inform the searchers about their rights, but also about the emotions that were connected to the planning and objectives.” As these panelists noted, such searches often had mixed results.

ISD’s annual Black History Month celebrations also served as a form of diasporic activism, particularly as Black Germans positioned Afro-diasporic culture and identity within Germany. As a result, Black German activists at the Black History Month events advocated for change and demonstrated that transnational dynamics helped to constitute the translocal space of Berlin. The translocal and the transnational were in fact relational networks that were not in opposition to one another. Afro-Germans’ translocal interventions helped to challenge transnational, hegemonic narratives and political systems, creating a convergence of local and global dynamics, but also reinforced transnational diasporic connections. In this way, Afro-Germans continued to reimagine their identity, reinvent their traditions in relation to other diasporic communities, and compare their struggles to those in other countries fighting against other regimes of oppression.


96 Some Afro-German children could not find their relatives, and in some cases, their relatives did not want to have any contact with them. See, for example, Michaela Krist, Brown Babies – Deutschlands vorlorene Kinder (Arte, 2011). This documentary aired in the fall of 2011 and uncovered the experiences of Black German children from the 1945 period.


Events in South Africa, for example, often garnered attention at the Black History Months celebrations because of the history of Apartheid and exclusion in the country. During the 1991 BHM, ISD expressed solidarity with individuals in South Africa and asked participants to provide a small donation for a South African themed project, the specifics of which were still to be determined.\(^99\) Engaging with topics concerning South Africa, Luyanda Mpahwa and Vusi Mchunu’s panel offered an abridged account of the political struggles in South Africa from the present to early the 1990s. Mpahwa and Mchunu, who presented in English and German, sought to correct public opinion in Europe that was often “strongly influenced by false partially racist or insufficient reports on current problems in South African.”\(^100\) These men, moreover, explained how “the current war in the Gulf continued to draw attention away from this issue and many people can forget that South Africa is still not free.”\(^101\) Following their seminar, Peggy Luswazi, an activist in NOZIZWE, gave another lecture on South Africa, focusing on the colonial history of the country. Luswazi also introduced the audience to a South African project entitled “People’s Education” along with its aims and initiatives.\(^102\) ISD continued to forge solidarity with individuals in South Africa at its 1992 BHM. I. Schuhmacher from


\(^100\) Luyanda Mpahwa and Vusi Mchunu, “Südafrika Heute und die Geschichte des politischen Kampfes,” in “Black History Month 1991,” p. 2. The lecture took place on Saturday, February 23 at 4 pm. The German text: “. . . stark von falschen teilweise rassistischen oder unzureichenden berichten über die aktuellen Probleme in Südafrika geprägt.” South Africa continued to remain a significant focal point at the BHMs.


Hamburg and E. Rodtman from Berlin, for instance, presented a slide seminar in 1992 about South Africa entitled “Out of the Ruins of Apartheid – The Situation of the Rural Population in South Africa.” In their seminar, Schuhmacher und Rodtman clarified that, “despite all of the reforms, the injustice of Apartheid has not yet ended, although Western politicians want to believe it has.”

Of particular interest to these men were the policies of the 1970s and the difficulties that South Africans encountered when returning to their expropriated land. They explained the mission of “Back-to-the-Land” – a campaign initiated by rural and dispossessed South Africans.

Luyanda Mpahwa’s 1992 lecture “Break the Chains of Apartheid – Change is pain!” discussed current developments in South Africa, again in English and German. Here, Mpahwa also re-examined the history of opposition to Apartheid, including the ANC and its most recent attempts to unify and democratize the country.

ISD’s connection to and support of anti-Apartheid activism mirrored their efforts to combat racist practices and legislation in Germany. Besides workshops and seminars, there were also many South African films at the Black History Months. In fact, at the first BHM in 1990, all the screenings were of South African


In addition to addressing issues in South Africa, ISD also offered panels at the BHMs on Mozambique, the southern Sahara, Nigeria, and Somali. ISD and other community organizers also used the film screenings at Black History Month as a practical medium to inform Afro-Germans and other communities of color about significant Afro-diasporic figures and their efforts at self-determination, their accomplishments, and their struggles against inequality. In this context, black filmmakers also garnered attention at some BHMs. In 1993, for example, F.R. Brownman held a workshop explaining that while black film was not often recognized in mainstream film history, it has had a long legacy that predated Spike Lee. The 1991 BHM included multiple films screenings, including a fifteen-minute preview of Litany of Survival by African-American filmmaker Ada Gay Griffin. Griffin shared her personal stories about travelling with Audre Lorde before her death. Afro-German ISD activists also organized the viewing of films directed by Michael Maynard, a director from the BBC. Covering themes such as black identity, Black British cultural productions, and the daily lives of the Black British throughout England, Hear Say, Ebony, and Black Britains provided the audience with a glimpse into the world of other Afro-Europeans. Similarly, at the 1992 BHM, EURAFRI sponsored a film screening of “Lumumba: The

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Death of a Prophet,” illuminating his rise in politics and tragic death.\textsuperscript{110} ISD, at the same BHM, also arranged two film screenings: a documentary about the life of Marcus Garvey and a tribute to Paul Robeson.\textsuperscript{111} Moreover, Black History Month screenings also included films about the Million Man March in the United States, the Black Panthers and Huey P. Newton, Le Pen’s National Front, Steve Biko, the history of reggae, and many other topics.\textsuperscript{112} As a matter of fact, ISD arranged films on Malcolm X to be screened at almost all the BHMs.\textsuperscript{113} Yet not all of the film screenings were explicitly political, as even comedy and action films featuring African-American directors and actors were viewed, including \textit{I am Gonna Git You Sucka} and \textit{Sweet Sweetback’s Badassss Song}.\textsuperscript{114} ISD continued to organize activities and events that spotlighted the lives of diverse individuals of African descent.

ISD also organized panels that elucidated the designation “black” and concepts of black consciousness and unity. Patricia Elcock at the 1990 BHM, also gave a presentation in English and German, entitled “Black Unity.” In it, she offered an

\textsuperscript{110} EURAFRI, Film Screening — “Lumumba: Tod eines Propheten,” in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 5. The film screening took place on Wednesday, Feb. 5 at 7 pm. Raoul Peck directed the film in Berlin in 1991. Patrice Lumumba was the first Congolese independence leader and the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo. He helped win independence from Belgium in June 1960.

\textsuperscript{111} ISD, \textit{Marcus Garvey and Paul Robeson – A Tribute to an Artist}, in “Black History Month ’92,” p. 9. Directed by Orville Benett, \textit{Marcus Garvey} was in English and aired on February 16 at 5:30-7:30 pm, and Saul J. Turell directed the film \textit{Paul Robeson} with narration from Sidney Poitier. Marcus Garvey was a Jamaican political leader who supported black nationalist and Pan-African movements; he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Paul Robeson was an African-American singer and actor and communist who was active in the Civil Rights Movement and Communist Party.


\textsuperscript{113} ISD, \textit{Malcolm X}, in “Black History 1996,” ISD, Berlin, p. 29. The screening took place on Wednesday, Feb. 21, 1996 from 7-10 pm.

\textsuperscript{114} “I’m Gonna [Git] You Sucka!” and “Film Sweet Sweetback’s Badasss Song,” in “Black History Month 94,” pp. 16 and 21.
overview of the differences among black people and their heritage, living situations, and political and social positions. She urged participants of African descent to recognize and tolerate their differences and to actively forge ties with one another.115 ISD member Nicola Laurè al-Samarai also gave a presentation, “Black as a Political Concept,” that defined “Black” as not limited to skin color, but rather connected to all individuals who experienced racism and oppression. She further explained that the popularization of the concept “Black” derived from Steve Biko, the South African activist, theorist, and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) who was killed in jail at the age of 31.116 At both the 1992 and 1996 BHMs, Mahoma Mwangulu from Malawi presented on aspects of Pan-Africanism, explaining its origins and development.117

Likewise, Themba Kadalie, an Afro-German activist of South African and German heritage, presented a panel entitled, “The African Diaspora and the Media - From the Subjugation of Consciousness to Self-determination.” Kadalie used an excerpt of a talkshow featuring Louis Farakhan to emphasize the role of the media in influencing the image of blacks in films. Kadalie also spoke about the future of the Black German community.118 Mahgoub Eltayeb gave a talk entitled, “The African diaspora in Arab


The BHM also served the Black German community by including discussions about public health. At the 1996 Black History Month celebration, Kadalie held a presentation, “AIDS in the Black community.” The lecture attempted to help Black Germans make informed decisions that would enable them to protect themselves, relationships, and their families, but also proposed to educate them about the plight of individuals in the United States and South Africa.\footnote{Dr. Themba Kadalie, “AIDS in the Black Community/AIDS und die Schwarze Gemeinschaft,” in “Black History 1996: Schwarze Visionen,” p. 35.}

Black German women also organized and moderated BHM panels that revolved around issues of feminism and gender, creating activist ties and intellectual communities with women of the diaspora. Afro-German women continued to pursue a variety of methods in their efforts at diasporic activism. For instance, in May Ayim’s lecture and discussion, “All the women are white, all the blacks are men - but some of us are brave: Racism from the Afro-Feminist Perspective” – which borrowed its title from an anthology by African-American feminists Barbara Smith, Gloria T. Hull, and Patricia Bell Scott – Ayim “investigated how racism and sexism manifests in the personal, professional and political field, and what strategies can evolve to produce individual and collective change.”\footnote{May Ayim, “Alle Frauen sind weiß, alle Schwarzen sind Männer - Aber manche von uns sind mutig: Rassismus aus afrofeministischer Perspetive,” in “Black History 1996,” p. 24. Ayim’s workshop took place on Friday, February 16\textsuperscript{th} from 6-8 pm. The full German text: “In Vortrag und Diskussion soll der Frage nachgegangen werden, wie sich Rassismus und Sexismus in persönlichen, beruflichen und politischen Handlungsfeldern manifestiert und welche Strategien sich entwickeln lassen, um individuelle und kollektive Veränderungen einzuleiten.” For other BHM events about black women of the diapora, refer to Charlotte Burrows, “Schwarze Frauenbewegung in den USA,” in “Black History Month ’93,” p. 10; Ilona Ivan, “Black Women in Jazz,” in “Black History Month 94,” p. 20; and ADEFRA and ISD, “Black Women Support Network,” in “Black History Month 94,” Berlin, p. 18.} Ayim clarified “that it was not just about white dominance and the
mechanisms of social exclusion, but we also needed to look at the weaknesses and promising prospects within the Black community.”122 Paulette Reed-Anderson, an African American historian living in Berlin, served as the moderator. At the 1993 BHM, there was a commemoration service to honor Audre Lorde, entitled “Celebration of Life,” at the Haus der Kulturen. Afro-German women from across Germany came to pay homage to Lorde.123 During the same Black History Month, ISD, in conjunction with ADEFRA, also sponsored “Black Women Days” (Schwarze Frauentage). This mini-symposium offered a range of seminars for Black German women, including “Creative and critical perceptions on internalized racism;” “Southern trees bear strange fruits;” “Racism in German children’s everyday lives;” Workshop for Parents of Black Children about the specific situation of raising children in this country;” and even a “Gynecological seminar.”124 These seminars foregrounded women’s issues and enabled Afro-German women to interact and learn from one another.

Throughout Black History Month celebrations, NOZIZWE, a migrant women’s organization, sponsored several panels, including “When and where I enter.” In their panel, Gladwell Otieno and Tsitsi Dangarembaga, two African migrants, remarked that:

A black woman is mostly described in literature not as a member contributing to changes in society, but rather as a supplementary person; sometimes useful, naturally erotic, but nevertheless a minor character.


Due to the insight into her imposed role, a black woman finds in literature a path to an alternative, self-defining, and liberating description of her social reality.125

For Otieno and Dangarembaga, black women’s literature had achieved an important position. Echoing Carol Boyce Davies analysis of Black women writers, these presenters viewed Black women’s literature as an empowering source that enabled women to renegotiate and reinterpret their subjectivities.126 By doing so, black women challenged their marginal status and shared their literature with others throughout the globe. Women of color authors and the intellectual communities that they cultivated, in particular, have allowed them to make critical interventions and confront hegemonic and exclusionary structures. In fact, this was the case with the organization Literature Women in Berlin. Afro-German, white German, Turkish German, and other female authors of color formed this literary association, opening up important discussions about women’s literature, research, creativity, and activism. The following examples show how Berlin once again became the site for an organization that helped to inspire Afro-German women’s feminist and intellectual activism.

A Band of Women Writers: Literatur Frauen, e.V.

Chapters one and three demonstrated how literature in both its written or spoken forms afforded Black Germans an opportunity to express their feelings, refashion their identities, and cultivate kinships and intellectual communities. Writing also remained


126 Refer to chapter three for a discussion on Davies.
popular in West German society at large, especially in the women’s and feminist movements of the 1960 and 1970s, with the Orlanda feminist press helping to position women’s topics within mainstream German culture.\textsuperscript{127} The emphasis on women’s writing and research continued to gain currency in the 1980s, resulting in the creation of The Advancement of Women’s Literature and Research Institute (\textit{Förderung der Literatur von Frauen und der Frauenforschung e.V.}), later also known as Literature Women (\textit{Literatur Frauen, e.V.}), as well as a number of institutes and centers throughout Germany.\textsuperscript{128} The emergence of this literary association in Berlin also served as an opportunity for intellectual and feminist activism for some Afro-German women, including May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoyé, and Ika Hügel.\textsuperscript{129} Here, writing, kinship, and feminism shaped their political perspectives and diasporic activism in German society.

The idea for the association originated among women in Berlin who realized that there was an insufficient amount of training, intellectual exchange, and presentation opportunities for women in the field of literature. Women authors, literary scholars, social scientists, journalists, and publishers founded the group and brought different fields into conversation with one another.\textsuperscript{130} Berlin, moreover, a city where national and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Please refer to Orlanda, Folder Orlanda Vorschauen ab 1987 bis 1994, OFV for an overview of their publications.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} The organization changed its name to Literature Frauen in the early 1990s.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Dagmar Schultz and Hildegard Günther, “Tagesordnung der Gründungsversammlung des Vereins zur Förderung der Frauenliteratur und –Forschung Berlin e.V.,” Berlin, no page number, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim. See also Dagmar Schultz letter to May Opitz, September 19, 1988, Berlin, no page number, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Opitz and Hildegard Günther letter to May Opitz, September 15, 1988, Berlin, no page number, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private of Collection of May Ayim.
\end{itemize}
international meetings, exchanges, and conferences on women’s studies and literature topics occurred, would prove to be a suitable place for the activities of the association.  

The first formal meeting for the association was held at the Orlanda press with West German feminist activists and writers Dagmar Schultz and Hildegard Günther convening the meeting on September 24, 1988. In a letter inviting May Ayim (Opitz) to attend the first meeting, Schultz wrote that:

This initiative hopes that in its current initial phase it can support engaged women in the field of literature. As it can be observed from our invitation’s list, the group understands itself to be an organization where women from the still too sharply divided areas of literary production, scholarly research, and the media can work together in a concrete way. Our common aim is to revive and encourage the discussion on women’s literature.

An additional aim of the organization was “to emphasize the multicultural aspect of contemporary female literature, in essence the German literature of immigrants and members of ethnic and cultural minorities such as Jews, Afro-Germans, Asian-, and Latin American- Germans, Gypsies, and other groups and to promote intercultural exchange among women.”

Encouraging “intercultural exchange” would, the founders of the

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132 At that time, the Orlanda press was located Pohlstrasse 64 in Berlin.


group believed, help promote and produce diverse forms of women’s literature. Multiple women were invited to the foundational meeting, including Dr. Christina Thürmer Rohr, Dr. Gertrud Pfister, Dr. Anke Bennold-Thomson, Deborah Fahrrend, Anjuli Gupta, Sarah Haffner, Medi Kemper, Wanjiru Kinyanjui, Andrea Morein, Ursula Nienhaus, Maria Neef-Uthoff, Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, Elsbeth de Roos, Gladwell Otieno, and Zehra Çirak. Other women on the membership list included Ellen Kuzwayo from South Africa; Adrienne Rich from Stanford University; Leila Heinrich from Brüssels; Prof. Florence Howe from CUNY; Dr. Sarah Lennox from UM-Amherst; Dr. Gloria Joseph from Hampshire College; and Audre Lorde from Hunter College.

At the first meeting, the members shared ideas about the conception of the group; determined and voted on the by-laws; appointed board members, an executive committee, manager, and accountant; planned events for the fall of 1988; and attempted to find

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135 Verein zur Förderung der Frauenliteratur und -Forschung Berlin e.V., “Antrag,” pp. 15-16. Drs. Christina Thürmer Rohr and Dr. Gertrud Pfister had already agreed to attend the meeting as noted by the list. Thürmer Rohr had published on feminism in West Germany and was a professor at the Technical University in Berlin. Pfister was a professor at the Free University in Berlin. Dr. Anke Bennold-Thomson was a professor at the Free University. Deborah Fahrrend was a translator and author based in Berlin. Anjuli Gupta was a lecturer at the Free University. Sarah Haffner was an author and artist of fine arts in Berlin. Medi Kemper worked at Radio Free Berlin (Sender Freies Berlin). Wanjiru Kinyanjui was an author, who was affiliated with The New Society for Literature (Neue Gesellschaft für Literatur), an organization for authors founded in 1973. Andrea Morein was an author, director, and actress in Berlin. Ursula Nienhaus was the archivist at the Women’s research, education, and information center (Frauenforschungs-, -bildungs- und –informationszentrum FFBIZ), who retired in the spring of 2012. Maria Neef-Uthoff was an editor in Berlin. Both Katharina Oguntoye and May Opitz were authors in Berlin; Ayim helped to found the group. Elsbeth de Roos helped to organize the association and was an author affiliated with The New Society for Literature. Gladwell Otieno was a Kenyan student studying political science at the Free University. Zehra Çirak was a published and well-known Turkish-German author in Berlin.

136 There were a number of other women writers and scholars listed on the membership roll.
options for office space. In the by-laws, these women clarified that, “The association will further the continuous communication and exchange among authors, scholars, and the public. In addition to the general promotion of women’s literature, the organization places special emphasis on the multicultural aspect of contemporary female literature.”

The association, moreover, would assist in organizing one- or multi-day public conferences; writing workshops (Schreibwerkstätten); writing groups; readings of established and unknown authors; research initiatives in the field of literary studies; and writing courses. The members also wanted to develop a series of networks and databases of women authors and researchers and collect and create an archive of women’s literature in consultation with other archives such as the Women’s research, education, and information center (Frauenforschungs-, -bildungs- und –informationszentrum FFBIZ).

Native-born and legal residents could seek membership to the club and would be required to pay an annual fee of 40 DM for native-born individuals, 100 DM for legal residents, and 20 DM for retirees, trainees, students, and university students. In addition to membership dues, financial support would be obtained through civic organizations and local and national government entities.


Hildegard Günther and Angela Geyer, a 40-year old South African who had been active in the anti-Apartheid movement and who lived in Germany since 1971, compiled information and drafted one of the group’s first funding applications. Günther and Geyer described the appeal of such an organization, writing: “Outside the field of academia in recent years, there has been increased literary events, readings, among other things concerning new women’s literature, which implies that there is a growing interest in the public at large.” Throughout the application, the members provided specifics about their objectives, structure, and activities related to women’s and feminist studies. The members also planned to create a women’s literature magazine that would appear three or four times a year. In addition to the magazine, the members of the group also wanted to initiate a major research project. The project would be under Günther’s direction and would focus on African and Arabic women writers who lived in Germany. Incorporating interdisciplinary methods and feminist theory into the project, Günther wanted to promote minority authors and bring them into discussions and scholarship in German Studies.

The members of the Advancement of Women’s Literature and Research Institute also expressed a desire to connect with other women writers throughout Europe and the world, specifically by developing a transnational network that would spotlight unknown Jewish, Afro-German, Asian German, and Turkish German writers. During its early

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141 It is unclear if they applied to the Berlin Senate for Cultural Affairs (Senatverwaltung für kulturelle Angelegenheiten) or the Berlin Commission of Women’s Research (Berliner Förderkommission Frauenforschung).


stages, the organization was able to accomplish this goal in three distinct ways. First, a presentation about the anthology *Farbe bekennen* occurred at the 1987 Women in German (WiG) conference in Portland, Oregon. Second, Afro-German authors gave a reading during the International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal, Canada in 1988 in which Marion Kraft participated. Finally, Afro-German and Indian-German authors and literary scholars, such as May Ayim and Anjuli Gupta, participated in the International Black Women’s Cultural Institute in New York in July 1988. These activities – which tapped into these women’s pre-existing social and professional connections with each other – built momentum for the formal founding of the group in September 1988. The organization also defined women’s literature broadly, supporting projects of non-fiction (essays, histories, documentaries, biographies, etc.), and encouraging the production of women’s research in Berlin and in other cities across Germany. These women forged multiple partnerships in Berlin and beyond, including with female scholars at the Free University’s German Studies Department and their “Letter Project;” “The women in literary studies” group at the University of Hamburg; and the organization Women in German, affiliated with the American German Association in the USA. They even sponsored a performance by the Jewish German

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144 Women in German is an organization that “provided a democratic forum for all people interested in feminist approaches to German literature and culture.” Please refer to the Women in German (WiG) website [http://www.womeningerman.org/](http://www.womeningerman.org/) [Accessed April 30, 2013].

145 Refer to chapter four for a few images from that event.


author and actress Andrea Morein in Paris at the Goethe Institute’s event “Witnesses of National Socialism” (Zeitzeugen des Nationalsozialismus) in April 1988.\textsuperscript{149}

Becoming an officially registered association on July 25, 1989, the Advancement of Women’s Literature and Research Institute continued to organize activities that offered wide-ranging perspectives and practices about women’s literature.\textsuperscript{150} In another letter, Schultz and Elsbeth de Roos, a member in the association, informed their members about previous events, including two writing workshops with accomplished authors. Elfriede Czurda, a well-known Austrian writer and art historian, who had won numerous literary prizes after publishing her first book in 1978, led a series of successful workshops from the months of April to July 1989.\textsuperscript{151} The association also hosted a seminar with Gisela Zies, a German playwright, essayist, and poet.\textsuperscript{152}

In the fall of 1989, the organization planned additional writing workshops that explored the themes of prose and journalistic writing that began in November with Monica Streit, a writer and psychotherapist, and Barbara Rosenberg, a journalist and freelancer.\textsuperscript{153} Streit’s workshop began on November 22nd, consisting of ten sessions at 20 DM per session.\textsuperscript{154} She covered different topics, including the impact of the author’s identity as a writer and the effect of texts on society. Rosenberg’s seminar began on

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{150} Schultz and de Roos letter and agenda, September 22, 1989, no page number.

\textsuperscript{151} Schultz and de Roos letter and agenda, no page number.

\textsuperscript{152} Dagmar Schultz letter to members, March 15, 1989, Berlin, no page number Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

\textsuperscript{153} Schultz and de Roos letter and agenda, no page number.

\textsuperscript{154} Verein zur Förderung der Frauenliteratur und -Forschung Berlin e.V. “Schreibwerkstatt - Prosa,” Berlin, no page numbers, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim. The writing workshops took place on Wednesdays from 6-8 pm.
November 15th with ten sessions at a similar cost. In the following spring, the association hosted two additional writing workshops. The first with Jutta Rosenkranz, a poet and lecturer of English, who offered a workshop, entitled “The Poetic Moment” (*Der poetische Augenblick*). It occurred from March 6th to April 15th at the Technical University with the cost of 90 DM. For the second series of workshops, they once again enlisted Barbara Rosenberg. Taking place from April 23rd to May 28th at the Technical University, Rosenberg’s sessions focused on different aspects of journalism, with a total admission fee of 200 DM. The association also sponsored writing workshops that catered to a small group of women, between ten to fifteen individuals per session.

In 1991, the association, now known as Literature Women, organized a month-long conference that included multiple parallel writing workshops, podium discussions, and readings from women authors with different cultural and national backgrounds that celebrated the diversity of women’s literature. Berlin provided a space for critical intellectual dialogue where these authors could cultivate personal relationships to diverse women writers, including several Afro-Germans. May Ayim, for example, along with Cornela Becker, Lisa Carnio, Maria Rakel, and Elsbeth de Roos, helped to plan the

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155 Verein zur Förderung der Frauenliteratur und -Forschung Berlin e.V. “Schreibwerkstatt - Journalismus,” Berlin, no page numbers, Folder Literatur e.V. Aktuelles, The Private Collection of May Ayim. The workshops took place on Wednesdays from 5-7 pm.


groups’ 1991 conference, entitled “Fatherland-Mother Tongue?” (Vaterland-Muttersprache?) The conference, like other events organized by the group, provided a diverse group of women opportunities to present, workshop ideas, and socialize. Dagmar Schultz and Traude Bührmann, the editor of the West German feminist journal Courage, participated in the conference. In addition to the countless readings, discussions, and seminars at the conference, these women also hosted a literary colloquium with small working groups that met on December 6th and 7th. These workshops occurred alongside the other events of the conference. Three working groups were entitled “Defining their position” (Standortbestimmung) with Renate Baum, an author; “‘Fatherland-Mother Tongue’: An Approach to Clustering” (‘Vaterland-Muttersprache?’ Annäherung an das Thema über “Clustering”) with Elsbeth de Roos and Maria Rakel, a writer and artist; and “The Significance of a foreign female author in German living and cultural areas” (Der Stellenwert der ausländischen Autorin im deutschen Lebens- und Kulturraum) with Turkish-German author Dudu Sönmezçicêk. The “Fatherland-Mother Tongue” conference underscored the important role that writing maintained in these women’s lives, and it also promoted original research in the field of

158 LiteraturFrauen, e.V., “Fatherland-Muttersprache?” November 11-December 8, 1991, The Private Collection of May Ayim. Dr. Dagmar Schultz, Cornelia Becker, and Ewa Boura conceptualized the conference. Becker was from Paderborn and had lived in Berlin since 1987. She began active with this organization in 1989. Carnio was born in Venice. Rakel was born in Cologne, but had been in Berlin since 1971. De Roos was born and raised in Rotterdam and has lived in Berlin since 1977.


161 Ibid.
women’s literature. It also showed how Afro-Germans’ engagement with writing was part of broader 1980 feminist concern.

Comparable to the Black History Month celebrations, “Fatherland-Mother Tongue,” and by extension Literature Women, drew attention to local dynamics and women’s achievements while attending to international currents. It also allowed Afro-German women to engage in feminist and intellectual activism, forging solidarity and writing communities in the process. In this way, Berlin helped some of the members of Literature Women mediate and occupy translocal and transnational spaces through their activities and writings. As Ayim stated in her “Fatherland-Mother Tongue” conference short biography, “My country is Ghana, my mother tongue is German and I carry my home in my shoes.”

Literature Women continued to cross boundaries with their intellectual activism and networks, especially with members from the Netherlands, Greece, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, and Poland. With diverse women of color members such as Ayim, Rosa-Lubia Falk Garcia, and Sonia Solarte Orejuela, the organization proved its interest in representing and promoting innovative multicultural and multiracial authors of all generations.

**Cementing Transnational Bonds in a Translocal Space: The 1993 Berlin Lesbian Week and the 1991 Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Summer Institute**

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Berlin had long been a refuge for lesbian and feminist activism as well as other subcultural movements, offering opportunities for coalition building and meaningful political action. From 1972 until 1975, for instance, the International Pentecost meetings (Internationales Pfingsttreffen) took place in Berlin. Organized by the women’s division of the organization Homosexual Action West Berlin (Homosexuellen Aktion Westberlin, HAW), the event offered lesbians an opportunity to socialize and share their experiences. These events were between three to five days long. The number of participants grew dramatically at each annual event, especially as organizers continued to invite women’s and feminist groups throughout Germany. At some events, HAW, in cooperation with gay men’s groups, sponsored seminars and film screenings. In 1975, the Lesbian Action Center (Lesbisches Aktionszentrum, LAZ) organized the Internationales Pfingsttreffen, which focused on lesbian politics, the experiences of lesbians in small towns, the challenges that arose with the establishment of lesbian groups and centers, and the “psycho-physical” situation of lesbians. From 1976 through 1978, the Lesbian Action Center assumed responsibility for organizing the Lesbian Pentecost meetings (Lesbenpfingsttreffen) and kept the event in West Berlin. Later, Lesbenpfingsttreffen occurred in other German cities, allowing lesbian women to unite and coordinate additional projects.


166 Ibid. The meetings have taken place in other cities in Germany such as Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main, Bremen, and Munster, and in 1992, the name changed to Lesbian spring meeting (Lesbenfrühlingstreffen). In 1981, the conference returned to Berlin.
In addition to _Lesbenpfingsttreffen_, there were also summer institutes for women (Sommeruniversitäten für Frauen) in West Berlin from 1976 through 1983 – also marking a second stage in the West German feminist movement. These summer institutes occurred over the course of four to five days, during which women and lesbians approached topics related to the conference theme.\(^{167}\) Attracting women from diverse countries, these events helped lesbians meet within the context of the international lesbian movement. Similarly, the Christopher Street Day (CSD) Parade, a gay- and lesbian-pride event, began in Berlin in 1979. The variety of lesbian and gay events that took place in Berlin revealed that the city continued to be a rich site for lesbian and feminist activism of the 1970s and early 1980s. Since 1985, the city had also hosted the Berlin Lesbian Week (Berliner Lesbenwochen, LW), with the final one taking place in 1997.\(^{168}\) While Berlin boasted a vibrant feminist and lesbian political culture, these groups had often neglected to attend to issues that remained pressing for women of color feminists and lesbians—a point mentioned in chapter two.

Some of the previous Berlin Lesbian Weeks did, however, offer a few panels featuring Afro-Germans as well as discussions on race and discrimination. At the first annual Berlin Lesbian Week in 1985, the subject of racism among lesbians emerged, where Jewish, white, and Black German women met together and asked why differences among lesbian women were never fully tackled within the white German lesbian


movement. Several women urged for more cross-cultural dialogue and acceptance of differences within the lesbian movement.\textsuperscript{169} Afro-German women also presented before a mixed audience of approximately twelve women at the second annual Berlin Lesbian Week in 1986.\textsuperscript{170} Yet because it was so small, it allowed for a more intimate and frank discussion about Germanness and how deeply embedded racist structures were in society.\textsuperscript{171} Conflicts did arise in this panel, as one white German woman expressed perplexity over the appeal of the term Afro-German. Black German women in the panel, including Oguntoye, explained that as a white German she was already considered German because she constituted the norm, while Black Germans were constantly excluded and treated as foreign-born. Oguntoye, who read from \textit{Farbe bekennen} at the event, mentioned the development of ADEFRA and how Afro-German women’s participation in “the second Berlin Lesbian Week was a beginning and we promise that you will hear from us soon.”\textsuperscript{172} Members from ADEFRA also presented a seminar, entitled “Black is Beautiful?,” – representing an Afro-diasporic influence – at the 1987 Berlin Lesbian Week.\textsuperscript{173}

Indeed, at the 1991 Lesbian Week, debates and conversations called attention to the fact that more space was needed in order to critically examine and learn about these


\textsuperscript{171} Oguntoye, “Afro-deutsche Lesben lesen aus \textit{Farbe bekennen},” 34, Spinnboden.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{173} ADEFRA, “Black is beautiful ??,” 171-78, Spinnboden.
For the 1993 Berlin Lesbian Week, the LW working group sought to explore the topic of racism in the lesbian movement and in German society at large. Rather than have unresolved issues where arguments ensued and participants left feeling unsatisfied and frustrated, the Lesbian Week working group decided to devote an entire week to the subject of racism. For the 1993 Berlin Lesbian Week, entitled “Meeting the Challenge” (Herausforderung annehmen) from October 2nd to the 10th, the Lesbian Week working group organized numerous workshops and presentations that addressed the impact racism had on whites and offered panels that resonated with immigrants as well as Jewish and Black German lesbians. A working group, which included Afro-German activist Katharina Oguntoye, also arranged multiple political and cultural activities and seminars that represented a number of themes, including white women and colonialism, lesbians and AIDS, lesbians under National Socialism, lesbians and drug addiction, and much more.


176 Gammon, 7.

The 1993 “Meeting the Challenge” Berlin Lesbian Week enabled lesbians to cultivate connections to women across the globe, inspiring more political work in Berlin but also accentuating some tensions. Travelling to Berlin, for Melina Young, a woman from Ottawa, Canada, gave her opportunity to visit with old friends and meet new ones; she enjoyed the discussions and interactions with women. But it was also, Young later explained, “a difficult trip,” for her, “because [she] now had learned to feel.” Through her experiences at the Lesbian Week, Young learned to be open and trust individuals, and learned that we all have battles that we fight but we must determine which ones we want to invest our energy in. While she appreciated the efforts that the Lesbian Week working group made, Patrizia Tavomina believed that there were still a few problems with some of the panels. In a panel, entitled “Borderlander” (Grenzgängerinnen), a time conflict emerged with another workshop that was organized for black women only. As a result, not many black or immigrant women participated in “Borderlander.” This became striking as Tavomina, one of few women of color there, dealt with racist remarks. There were so many divergent experiences and perspectives with regards to the meaning of Black in the German context that it made it difficult to critically engage in a positive

179 Young, “Hallo, in Berlin!,” 127. The full German text: “Es war eine schwere Reise, weil ich nun gelernt hatte zu fühlen.”
and fruitful way.\textsuperscript{182} Regardless of these issues, both women were glad to attend Lesbian Week, as they interacted with lesbians in an open and relatively safe space.

Another series of meetings, the international Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institutes, also enabled Afro-German women to engage in feminist and diasporic activism. As discussed in chapter one, Lorde was instrumental in establishing the Cross-Cultural Initiative of Black Women for Minority Rights and Studies in Germany, urging Afro-German women to become involved.\textsuperscript{183} Several Afro-German women, including Marion Kraft, Helga Emde, and Judy Gummich, worked with the organization and the Cross-Cultural Institute. The 5\textsuperscript{th} Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute was most likely the first time that an entire conference dedicated to the topic of blacks in Europe had been hosted in Germany. As a sign of its significance, I point to the number of black women who traveled from numerous countries within and outside of Europe to attend it.

The Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute sponsored annual international conferences in different countries with host groups that attempted to “foster international cooperation to promote peace, human rights, and development by presenting an opportunity for women of diverse cultures to exchange information, share experiences, identify resources and build links.”\textsuperscript{184} The organization served as a clearinghouse for theoretical and practical information concerning “black” women’s experiences, and it

\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{183} The German title Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für Minoritätenrechte und –Studien in Deutschland e.V. (IISF). See Marion Kraft (IISF) letter, January 2, 1991, no page number, Folder Finanzanträge and entsprechende Infos Schriftverkehr mit GeldgeberInnen (ADEFRA), In the possession of Maria Cheatom.

\textsuperscript{184} Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute, “Applicant Information,” 1989, no page number, The Private Collection of May Ayim. See also International Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Institute, brochure, n.d., The Private Collection of May Ayim.
also helped to support research and mobilize around issues that were common to oppressed individuals.\textsuperscript{185} In transcending boundaries and building alliances at the Institutes, this international group of women also endorsed a diasporic feminism that focused on the global impact of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy.\textsuperscript{186} Through their activism, the women understood their differences and privileged inclusive feminist and diasporic identities that were tied to common experiences of oppression and exclusion rather than strictly linked to skin color or African descent. Here “black” was as much a transnational political designation as much as a cultural one – a point they repeatedly emphasized.\textsuperscript{187} More importantly, their efforts at transnational activism were not unlike ideas espoused by Lorde, who encouraged women to cultivate transnational solidarities throughout the diaspora. Lorde and her partner Gloria Joseph were also involved in the Institute.

Dr. Andree-Nicola McLaughlin from Medgar Evers College in New York served as the founding International Coordinator for the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Institute. The first Institute occurred on July 13 to August 7, 1987 at the University of London with a conference theme on “Women’s Conditions.”\textsuperscript{188} Taking place in New

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\textsuperscript{185} Lewis, “Africana Feminism,” 48.

\textsuperscript{186} Scholar Shelby Lewis has labeled the activism of the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute as a form of “Africana feminism,” “under which a variety of global ideas and strategies may be subsumed.” Lewis, 48. I see it as a form of “diasporic activism” that echoed ideas about black feminism as well as Alice Walker’s concept of womanism. Womanism was seen as an alternative to and expansion of second wave feminism, which often ignored issues of race, ethnicity, and class. It also recognized how Black men played an integral part in women’s lives. See Alice Walker, \textit{In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose} (New York: Harcourt Books, 1983) and bell hooks, \textit{Feminist Theory}.

\textsuperscript{187} Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für die Entwicklung von Minoritätenrechte und –Studien in Deutschland, “5. Interkulturelles Sommer Seminar für Schwarze Frauen-Studien” (flyer), 1990, no page number, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

\textsuperscript{188} Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für Minoritätenrechte und Studien in Deutschland, e.V. and Nozizwe: Projekt für multikulturelle feministisches Bildungsarbeit (Berlin), \textit{Fünftes Interkulturelles Sommer-Seminar Für Schwarze Frauen-Studien Information-Programm-Ausschreibung} (Berlin, Bielefeld, 298
York from July 11 to 30, 1988, the second Institute brought together women from over 30 different countries and focused on the topic of “Women & Communications.” Choosing Zvishavane, Zimbabwe as the site for the 1989 Institute, participants met from August 7 thru 26 to discuss “Women and the Politics of Food.” From March 16 to 23, 1990, the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Summer Studies Institute organized around the theme of “Human Rights & Indigenous Peoples in the ‘Information Age’” in Auckland, New Zealand. The delegates, one of whom was Audre Lorde, met with Maori women and produced a documentary on human rights and indigenous people. Additional meetings took place in Venezuela, Hawaii, Russia, and South Africa.

The 1991 Institute was particularly significant for Afro-German women because it took place in Frankfurt, Berlin, and Bielefeld with Marion Kraft, an Afro-German, serving as the Program Director, emphasizing a commitment to cooperation. The 5th Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Summer Institute had a thematic emphasis on “Black People and the European community” (Schwarze Menschen und die Europäische Gemeinschaft).

In a flyer, the organizers stated the aims of 1991 Institute:

The seminar includes an intercultural examination of the history, present and socio-economic situation of Black people in Europe and engages with issues of cultural identity and the campaign that blacks and other minorities wage against xenophobia, eurocentrism, neo-fascism, and


190 The organization celebrated its twenty-first anniversary in 2008.
A particular focus is the relationship between racism, sexism, and homophobia and its impact on the lives of black women.\textsuperscript{191} Kraft and other organizers, moreover, wanted to address the economic and political development of the European Community and its impact on immigrants from Africa, America, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific.\textsuperscript{192} With support and sponsorship from NOZIZWE, ISD, ADEFRA, and SOS Rassismus (in France and Germany),\textsuperscript{193} the three-week seminar would cost individuals 320 DM, including registration, and 160 DM for organizers, volunteers, moderators, and members of sponsoring associations; women ages 18 and over were allowed to attend.\textsuperscript{194}

Kraft along with Emde, who was the regional coordinator for the Cross-Cultural Institute, organized the three-week seminar into five sections: 1) “Ethnic minorities, sexism, racism, and xenophobia in Germany”; 2) “Women and Migration in Europe – the boundaries of patriarchy – feminist border crossings”; 3) “Migration and the European single market: Western Europe as the global market for labor – power a multicultural society?”; 4) “Minority women in Society, Politics, Science, and Culture: European and intercontinental Perspectives”; and 5) “Europe and the ‘Third World’ – International

\textsuperscript{191} Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für die Entwicklung von Minoritätenrechte und –Studien in Deutschland, “5. Interkulturelles Sommer Seminar für Schwarze Frauen-Studien” (flyer), 1990, no page number, The Private Collection of May Ayim.

\textsuperscript{192} Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für die Entwicklung von Minoritätenrechte und –Studien in Deutschland, “5. Interkulturelles Sommer Seminar für Schwarze Frauen-Studien.”

\textsuperscript{193} SOS Rassismus began in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1983 to fight against extreme right movements in Germany. SOS Racisme was a non-governmental organization in France that was founded in 1984 to combat racial discrimination.

\textsuperscript{194} Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für Minoritätenrechte und Studien in Deutschland, e.V. and Nozizwe: Projekt für multikulturelle feministisches Bildungsarbeit (Berlin), \textit{Fünftes Interkulturelles Sommer-Seminar Für Schwarze Frauen-Studien} Information-Programm-Ausschreibung (Berlin, Bielefeld, and Frankfurt, August 1991), pp. 2 and 4, The Private Collection of Maria Cheatom. They also did not dissuade men of color from attending. Institute participants had to arrange their flights and some of their accommodations.
Perpectives.” With parallel workshops and activities that would be held in English and German, the Institute would also provide translators in panels for participants. Both sections one and two occurred in Frankfurt; sections three and four took place in Bielefeld; and section five concluded in Berlin. Members of ADEFRA and ISD attended, such as Gummich, Katharina Ogundo耶, May Ayim, Jasmin Eding, Eleonore Wiedenroth, and Ria Cheatom. Kraft, the sponsoring organizations, and volunteers organized the seminar so that there would be sufficient time for personal exchanges, international meetings, and recreation. The administrators of the conference organized excursions to historical and cultural sites during the free time. Here, the organizers sought to connect and inform their participants about the translocal developments in these cities; yet, they also continued to maintain their transnational focus on black women in Europe and the European community. As a result of the event, an idea developed into a book, entitled Schwarze Frauen der Welt: Europa und Migration (Black Women of the World: Europe and Migration). Edited by Kraft and her Pakistani friend Rukhsana Shamim Ashraf-Khan, the collection included articles from Institute participants who theorized about race and gender. Ayim, Philomena Essed, Shelia Mysorekar, Bärbel Kampmann, Beryl Gilroy, Paul Gilroy’s mother, among other participants, contributed articles to the edited collection. Kraft and Ashraf-Khan dedicated the volume to Lorde.

195 Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für Minoritätenrechte und Studien in Deutschland, e.V. and Nozizwe, Fünftes Interkulturelles Sommer-Seminar Für Schwarze Frauen-Studien, 7.


197 Interkulturelle Initiative Schwarzer Frauen für Minoritätenrechte und Studien in Deutschland, e.V. and Nozizwe, 6.

Afro-German women’s participation in the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute was one of many efforts that they made to cultivate a global feminist and diasporic solidarity, and it also corresponded to the more pronounced transnational stage of the Afro-German movement. In fact, Ayim, along with Nivedita Prasad, of Indian and German descent, organized another conference, *Wege zu Bündnissen*, in Bremen from June 8th to 10th, 1990. Both women also organized the second national congress for immigrants, Jewish and Black German women held on October 3rd thru 6th, 1991 in Berlin.\(^{199}\) There was an international women’s congress, entitled “Feminism between Racism, Ignorance, and Marginalization,” that took place from October 5th through 8th 1990 in Frankfurt.\(^{200}\) Afro-German women travelled to Amsterdam to meet Gloria Wekker, the co-founder of the Afro-Dutch lesbian group *Sister Outsider* in the 1980s. Afro-German women also attended the 1989 International Women’s Congress in Frankfurt, the 1988 International Black Lesbian and Gay conference in Toronto, and additional festivals and events. Campaigning against diverse forms of discrimination by attending and organizing international conferences, book fairs, and seminars helped Afro-German women establish coalitions with other marginalized communities. In this way, Afro-German women drew much inspiration from Lorde’s emphasis on “connected differences,” as they forged solidarity with others transnationally.

\(^{199}\) See Ayim and Prasad, eds. *Dokumentation Wege zu Bündnissen*. This book contained essays from both events. Currently, Prasad has been organizing a similarly themed conference, and the working group for the conference, which began meeting in the summer and fall of 2012, has tried to incorporate transgender issues into the conference planning.

Conclusion

From Black History Month celebrations to Literature Women and from Lesbian Week to the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Insitute, Afro-Germans organized a number of events and activities that enabled them to attend to translocal and transnational issues and engage in diverse forms of black politics (*Schwarze Politik*). Employing Berlin as a relatively safe and empowering space, Afro-Germans and other sponsors demanded recognition from and actively participated in anti-racist and feminist campaigns and projects that acknowledged the diversity of experiences of people of color in Germany and across the globe. Afro-German women and men, along with white Germans and other people of color, created empowering spaces that helped them constitute bonds, accentuating and positioning their transnational activism within their respective movements and communities. In this way, Black Germans cultivated transnational solidarity with individuals across Germany, the diaspora, and around the world.

Afro-Germans made diasporic and feminist activism culturally relevant within their community and German society at large. The annual Black History Months, Berlin Lesbian Week, and the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute, in particular, helped Afro-Germans confront exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination, as they continued to focus on issues that remained critical for them in the everyday. The rise of conservatism throughout “Fortress Europe,” South African Apartheid, the Somalian Civil Wars, the Rwandan genocide, neo-Nazi violence, and harsh immigration regulation impacted Afro-Germans and motivated their activism. These transnational
developments also informed their work on translocal issues, enabling them to highlight the persistence of racism in reunified German society.

Specifically, Afro-German women’s involvement in Literature Women and the Cross-Cultural Black Women’s Studies Summer Institute afforded them an opportunity to share their experiences with each other and promote and produce knowledge about their struggles. Confronting multiple forms of discrimination, Black German women’s sought feminist and intellectual connections to publicize translocal dynamics as well as women’s achievements in the city. Ultimately, these events and organizations had an instructive and socio-cultural purpose that attempted to transform local, national, and international practices, beliefs, and discourses about Afro-diasporic culture and identity, racial violence and stereotypes, lesbian identity, women’s literature, and women of color activists.
In the fall of 2011, I was returning to my apartment in Schöneberg-Berlin from a day of research when I noticed a peculiar poster at my Kleistpark underground station. At first glance, I thought that my eyes had deceived me, for the prominently displayed poster had someone in blackface – a form of theatrical make-up with negative connotations in the United States. As I approached the poster, I realized that it was a placard for “I’m not Rappaport,” a Tony award-winning play by American Herb Gardner. In it, he depicts the friendship between an elderly cantankerous Jewish man (Nat Moyer) and a spirited African American man (Midge Carter) on a bench in Central Park. Reading the poster, I learned that Berlin Schlosspark Theater planned a performance in January 2012, with the role of the African American character to be played by a prominent white German actor, Joachim Bliese, in blackface. White German comedian Dieter Hallervorden would play Nat Moyer, and was the owner of the theater company; Thomas Schendel served as the director of the play.

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1 The literature on blackface in the United States is rather extensive, but please refer to Spike Lee’s film *Bamboozled* (2000). Lee portrays the history of blackface in a satirical fashion in U.S. society.


In the months leading up to the performance, widespread debates and critiques emerged, especially from Black Germans, including Tahir Della and Peggy Piesche. Many of them condemned the theater company’s performance as racist, while some white Germans claimed either that minstrelsy was an American import or that blackface did not have the same history and connotations in Germany as it did in the United States. “We never intended to offend anyone,” Hallervorden remarked, adding that, “The play is against racism and so are we.” An article in the Deutsche Welle revealed that since its premiere in 1987, the play had been staged in approximately forty German theaters, with a black actor playing Midge Carter only twice. Perplexed, Hallervorden asked publicly, “why is [it] a problem in 2012 when it wasn’t before?” Later, Harald Lachnit, the theater’s spokesman, unapologetically explained that the performance would not be cancelled and that, “We simply couldn’t find a suitable black actor.” Ironically, Berlin is home to several Black German actors as well as a Black German theater ensemble entitled Label Noir.


5 Some white Germans also condemned this performance.

6 Breitenbach, “Berlin theater surprised by bitter dispute over blackface actor.”

7 Ibid.

8 Nele Obermueller, “Does German theatre have a race problem?,” Exberliner, May 30, 2012, [Accessed June 6, 2013]. Traditionally, German theater has been slow to welcome non-white actors.

9 Some male Black German actors include Theodor Wonja Micahel, Tyron Ricketts, Michael Klammer, Ernest Allan Hausmann, and Charles Huber. Black German actress, artist, and author Lara-Sophie Milagro has served as the director of the Label Noir theater group since 2008. The troupe’s play “Homeland, bittersweet Homeland” (Heimat, bittersüße Heimat) has received rave reviews and depicts Black Germans’ everyday experiences with racism. See Label Noir [Accessed June 6, 2013]. As a result of the uproar with Schlosspark, Stage Watch formed as a group of German activists of color and white Germans, working together with Label Noir, the Initiative of Black Germans, and The Brown Mob (Der Braune Mob), a media watch organization founded by Noah Sow. See
While Berlin Schlosspark Theater’s use of blackface appears to be unsettling (and even implausible), it is not surprising or exceptional within the European context. In fact, this example highlights several of the themes that I have examined in my dissertation about the Afro-German movement in late-twentieth-century Germany. Germany’s reluctance to come to terms with its history of anti-black racism – which did entail a much longer legacy of blackface that was not unlike its Anglophone counterparts – is striking. Most Germans’ inability to recognize this history and initiate discussions on race remains a serious problem. As a matter of fact, this year, when a German publishing house decided to purge some of the racist language from its children’s and


11 Irrespective of intent, Germany has had a long tradition of minstrelsy that has been no less offensive or racist. On additional examples of modern day blackface in Germany, please refer to the following: On Three Kings Day (January 6, 2013), Chancellor Merkel posed with a few blackfaced white German children dressed as magi. In September 2011, white German comedian Martin Sonneborn, dressed up as Obama with the words “I am an Obama” – a take on Kennedy’s “I am a Berliner.” The billboard ad for the political party, Die Partei, was prominently displayed in Berlin’s center square (Ernst Reuter Platz). In 2009, journalist and author Günter Wallraf appeared in blackface for his documentary film *In Black and White: A Journey through Germany* (Schwarz auf weiß: Eine Reise durch Deutschland). Trailers and images of the film can be found at this website: [http://www.schwarzaufweiss.x-verleih.de/](http://www.schwarzaufweiss.x-verleih.de/) [Accessed June 13, 2013]. In 2007, the German branch of UNICEF used blackfaced children in its ad for aid in Africa. For recent work on blackface in Germany, refer to Jonathan Wipplinger, “The Racial Ruse: On Blackness and Blackface Comedy in fin-de-siècle Germany,” German Quarterly 84:4 (Fall 2011): 457-76.
youth books, the public response was overwhelmingly negative. Many Germans debated preserving the (insensitive and outdated) language to maintain the integrity of the author’s literary expressions, and some even called to boycott the press.12 Responding to these debates in January 2013, prominent literary critic, Denis Scheck, dressed up in blackface on his weekly book-review show and explained why leaving the existing (often racist) language in children’s books was indeed a good idea. Scheck professed that his act served as a form of satire and not racism.13

These developments represent what the Afro-German movement has attempted to confront during the last twenty-eight years. They demonstrate, first, that racism remains a problem, at times, occupying the center of mainstream discussions among white and black Germans alike.14 Second, they illustrate the failure of white German theater directors, actors, journalists, and the general public to acknowledge Black Germans as compatriots and to listen to their analyses on and experiences with discrimination in German society.15 In doing so, a great many Germans have underwritten and continue to

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13 McGrane, “A Fight in Germany over Racist Language.” Yet, nineteenth-century German satirical journals such as *Kladderadatsch* and *Simplicissimus* were overtly racist and sexist in their humor. Using Ralph Ellison and Sigmund Freud, Wipplinger also discussed the function of humor, jokes, and blackface in “The Racial Ruse.”

14 See Eley, “How and Where is German History Centered?”

underwrite a project that ignores and positions Black Germans outside the boundaries of the nation, while rendering Afro-German complaints as a misunderstanding or oversensitivity. Lastly, the rationale behind blackface performances, even if they are not intended to be maliciously racist, perpetuates the myth that Germany lacks an Afro-diasporic population.

This is the climate that compelled Black Germans – under the influence of Audre Lorde – to form their diasporic and literary movement, including the organizations of ISD and ADEFRA in the 1980s. As a prominent black intellectual lesbian activist and writer, Lorde imparted knowledge about turning to emotions and writing as effective and edifying tools for change. Assuaging years of isolation, Afro-Germans cultivated connections to Lorde and one another while also creating new empowering designations that sought to counter the negative discourses that had plagued many of them throughout their childhood and adult lives.

Writing themselves into a postwar West German public culture, Afro-Germans helped to initiate discussions and produce intellectual work on racism. Black Germans explained how overt and covert forms of racism permeated everyday practices, beliefs, and institutions in society and defined who had a right to be German. Using diverse writings in *Farbe bekennen*, *Afrekete*, *afro look*, and several other publications, Afro-Germans also addressed the long history of blacks in Germany and how their presence informed ideas about German identity, citizenship, and the nation. By doing so, Afro-Germans actively engaged in intellectual and diasporic activism and challenged discrimination in Germany and elsewhere. Developments taking place in South Africa and Somalia, for example, were just as critical to Black Germans as their efforts to
challenge xenophobia and heightened ethno-nationalism in post-reunification Germany. Here, Black German politics remained enmeshed in the same translocal and transnational dynamics that had helped spark the early stages of the movement. Forging solidarity with other marginalized communities within and beyond Germany, Afro-Germans established transnational networks that would help them survive and advance collective feminist and anti-racist projects. Borrowing from diverse Afro-diasporic traditions, Afro-Germans also invented new cultural practices such as Black History Month and the Bundestreffen (BT) that helped them gain visibility; demand and retain social recognition as German citizens and subjects; and make manifest Germany’s multiracial reality. Black Germans promoted identities and politics that framed blackness and the African diaspora more generally within the German nation – pushing the margins to the center of the proverbial German stage.
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APPENDIX A: POEM FROM LORDE’S EULOGY IN ARCHÉ

Audre

I will miss your physical body,
though I have never seen you in person.
Just knowing that you were somewhere sharing
the lull of
humming bees on lazy
summer afternoons,
or watching sunsets and moon risings
with me
was comfort.

Your strong voice
will no longer be raised
in auditoriums to eager ears
but your words
continue to ring loud and pregnant
in lecture halls, at dinner, among friends and enemies alike.

I miss you.

You always tottered on precipices
thin as wire,
threatening to slice you

9/92
YK (Chapter 1)
APPENDIX B: POEMS AND LYRICS FROM AFREKETE

“Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun?”
Dies frage ich mich und nicht Du mich weiße Schwester.
Du fragst mich in der Regel, wenn Du mich unbekannterweise
Triffst, wo ich herkomme und erwartest einen dieser für
Dich exotisch klingenden Namen Afrikas, Lateinamerikas, der
Karibik oder auch der, hier in der BRD so geliebten, USA.
Enttäuschung und Unglauben sehe ich Deinem Gesicht, wenn
ich Dir sage Berlin.

Bin ich guter Stimmung, setze ich noch: “. . . aber mein Vater
kommt aus Haiti” dazu, damit Du weiße Schwester Dir die näch-
ste Frage, die Dir auf den Lippen liegt ersparen kannst.
Gewöhnlicherweise gibt es von dieser Folge-Frage drei
Versionen:
“Bist Du Besatzungskind (Kind wohlbemerkt)?”
oder
“Nein, ich meinte wo Du wirklich herkommst”
oder
Nein, ich meinte Dein Vater oder Mutter kommt doch aus. . . ?”
Fragender Blick.

Ich treffe eine schwarze Schwester, ich frage sie:
“Wo kommst Du her?” Sie antwortet: “Ich bin Afro-Deutsch.”
Sie erzählt mir ihre afro-deutsche Geschichte.
Ich erzahle meine nicht, denn es ist meine Geschichte,
auch wenn ich weiß wir sind verschieden.1

“weiß, schwarz – oder sind es nur Farben”
Ich gehe durch die Straßen
aufrecht, aber doch gebückt.
Stolz, aber doch unsicher.
Gleichgültig, aber doch betroffen
Ironisch, aber doch mit Ernst.
Ich habe es satt, ich habe es satt

1 Excerpt from von Pirch, “Was habe ich mit Afrika zu tun?,” in Afrekete (. . .über alles, was uns angeht),
pp. 19-20.
Theater zu spielen. Seht ihr denn nicht, - ihr macht mich kaputt.²

**Untitled Poem**

ist es nicht schön daß wir geschwister sind
ist es nicht schön daß wir potentiell liebende sind
ist es nicht schön daß wir . . . . . . .
ist es nicht schön daß wir immer immer, . . . daß
ist es nicht schön daß wir immer noch die chance haben
ist es nicht schön bitte sag nicht nein

bitte sag ja
bitte sag lieber nichts
laß uns die chance
die chance daß wir geschwister sind, daß wir liebende sind
Liebende ！！！ Geschwister ！！！

(Do)³

**“Für Dulcie September”**

Und da ich hebe nicht den ersten Stein
Erheben tausend toter schwarzer Frauen sich
Ein unendlich langer Zug
angeschafft von vielen –
Mmanthatisisi
Zora Neale Hurston
Rosa Parks
Und die Lebenden
Singen mit der Stimme Nomzamos
in meinen Herzen

“One People – One Cause” –
“There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women”
Marion Kraft⁴

**“She’s Got Her Ticket”**

She's got her ticket
I think she gonna use it
I think she going to fly away
No one should try and stop her
Persuade her with their power

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³ “Untitled Poem,” in Afrekete (..über alles, was uns angeht), p. 10.

⁴ Excerpt from Marion Kraft, “Für Dulcie September,” in Afrekete (..über alles, was uns angeht), p. 4.
She says that her mind is made
Up

Why not leave why not
Go away
Too much hatred
Corruption and greed
Give your life
And invariably they leave you with
Nothing

Young girl ain't got no chances
No roots to keep her strong
She's shed all pretenses
That someday she'll belong
Some folks call her a runaway
A failure in the race
But she knows where her ticket takes her
She will find her place in the sun

Why not leave why not
Go away
Too much hatred
Corruption and greed
Give your life
And invariably they leave you with
Nothing

She's got her ticket
I think she gonna use it
I think she going to fly away
No one should try and stop her
Persuade her with their power
She says that her mind is made
Up

And she'll fly, fly, fly...  

“Untitled Poem”
Meine Engel sind schwarz
sie sind Sklavinnen auf
den Märkten
Aber
ich kann ihre Schönheit fühlen:

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Saake⁶

“Schwarz-weiß-Monolog”

du siehst
mich hinter
deiner pocket kamera
erinnerungen aus ostafrika
und das
was du gelesen hast
darüber
bereit es auf mir abzuladen

“die massai bewunderswert
ihr lachen und trotz
der hungerbäuche
sind die kinder glücklich”

den letzten urlaub
hast du
dort verbracht
und willst
mich
tanzen sehen
damit die bilder wieder
greifbar werden

ich schau dich an und die ferne
in die vergangenheit
vor und zurück
suche
nach einem grund
dich
SCHWESTER
zu nennen
May Ayim⁷ (Chapter 4)