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Tiffany N. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020). ISBN: 978-0-252-08541-3

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Introduction by Lauren Stokes, Northwestern University

Farbe Bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte, initially published in West Germany in 1986, was translated into English and published *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* in 1991.[1] This slight difference in the subtitle to the book—shifting the focus from historical research to speaking out—points to the way that Black German women's intellectual labor was received in both German and diasporic contexts.

The subtitle of the Anglophone edition—"Afro-German Women Speak Out"—situates the book within a broader diasporic tradition of personal testimonials and consciousness raising. Nigerian-British writer Amina Mama reviewed the book for the UK socialist feminist journal *Feminist Review* in 1992.[2] She compared the German collection to early publications by Black British women, finding that each group of women was at a different stage of community building when it authored these collective publications. She found the German book "a joyless set of testimonies," noting that "the strongest declaration of collectivity exists in the title," but also that the book pointed towards a future collective. She closed her review by suggesting that Black British women might productively turn their attention across the channel rather than the Atlantic as "Europe continues to close in on itself, locking Europe's minorities in together, for better or for worse."[3] The English translation pointed towards Black European identity at a moment when the future shape of the European continent was in question.

However, the original German subtitle can be translated as "Afro-German Women Following the Traces of Their Own History," a subtitle that frames the writers specifically as historians and that places their collection within the grassroots 'history boom' of the 1980s in West Germany. In communities across the country, amateur historians were discovering the evasions of their own recent past and pushing for the government to establish local and regional sites of commemoration to the victims of National Socialism. When Afro-German women engaged in this deeply collective German project, they inevitably uncovered the legacies of German empire alongside those of National Socialism. In her review of the work, German scholar of American literature Sabine Broeck explained that "one legacy of fascism is that colonialism and racism have sunk so deeply into white Germany's political unconscious as to be virtually non-existent in public discourse; even leftists and feminists like me have behaved for too long as if the Holocaust were the one and only cardinal sin that we could bear to atone for."[4]

Farbe Bekennen's collection of history and testimony explored the overlapping histories of colonialism and National Socialism. It is an early German example of what Michael Rothberg calls "multidirectional memory"[5] and a major historiographical intervention in its own right. These authors drew attention to the entangled legacies of colonialism, National Socialism, and white supremacy decades before most historians within the academy did the same.

[1] Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1986, and Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, translated by Anne V. Adams, foreword by Audre Lorde, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.

[2] Amina Mama, "Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out," *Feminist Review* No. 45 (Autumn 1993): 129-131.

[3] Mama, "Showing Our Colours," 130, 131.

[4] Sabine Broeck, "On the Edge of the Margin," *The Women's Review of Books,* Vol. 10, No. 2 (November 1992): 7-8, here 7.

[5] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Tiffany Florvil's book *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* places *Farbe bekennen* and its authors within their historical context, making it clear that this volume is but one example of a rich archive of Black German women's writing and activism. Florvil places that archive within both the history of Black internationalism—as activists drew on existing diasporic resources in order to produce their own—and within German history—as activists confronted persistent myths about German identity as homogeneous, such as the false belief that post-Nazi Germany was also post-racial.

Three historians of Germany and Europe contribute to this roundtable, reflecting on the book and its contributions for historians of Germany and beyond.

Paulette Reed-Anderson has previously written on the history of Black people in Berlin.[6] She analyzes the tensions between the legacies of colonialism and the repudiation of that history by white Germans, finding that "the expunged colonial history carried with it the denial that Black Germans had a place in German past or contemporary history." Black German activist-intellectuals contested this denial, writing the history of German empire, questioning the uncritical use of colonial symbols, and producing counternarratives in the face of official silence. They produced some of the first knowledge about the German colonial past while also positioning themselves within a Black international public.

Angela Zimmerman has written extensively on the history of German empire and on decolonizing approaches to history.[7] Her response to Florvil's book draws out the queer aspects of Black German mobilization, specifically ways in which the movement created community beyond the "reproductive futurism" of the parent and child. Black German activists refused to accept a vision of community grounded in blood and descent and instead struggled to create one based on chosen family and affective kinship. Zimmerman also identifies the "productive tension" around normative citizenship, as Black Germans simultaneously demanded inclusion within the German nation—insisting that Germany was not a white space—and challenged the nation as a desirable form—using their affective relationships in order to create queer kin across borders.

Finally, Meredith Roman, a historian of the Soviet Union and especially the Black diaspora in the Soviet Union, has previously written about racial violence against non-Russians that escalated during the collapse of the Soviet Union.[8] Reading Florvil's book, she was struck by similar dynamics during German unification. Her essay ponders the role of the official socialist rhetoric of anti-racism in the end of the Cold War. Was it the case that the former East Germany became associated with race in the Western imagination? She asks how anti-Communism, Cold War triumphalism, and white supremacy were linked in the 1990s, and how these legacies are still with us today. Roman ends her essay on perhaps the most important question of the book: how can the intellectual legacy of these Black German activists point all of us to a more livable future?

[6] Her work includes: Paulette Reed-Anderson and John Röhe, *Eine Geschichte von mehr als 100 Jahren: die Anfänge der afrikanischen Diaspora in Berlin* (Berlin: Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, 1995), and Paulette Reed-Anderson, *Menschen, Orte, Themen zur Geschichte und Kultur der Afrikanischen Diaspora in Berlin* (Berlin: Joliba Interkulturelles Netzwerk in Berlin e.V., 2013).

[7] Her work includes: Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), and "Guinea Sam Nightingale and Magic Marx in Civil War Missouri: Provincializing Global History and Decolonizing Theory," *History of the Present* 8 (Fall 2018): 140-176.

[8] Her work includes: "Making Caucasians Black: Moscow Since the Fall of Communism and the Racialization of Non-Russians," Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics 18, No. 2 (June 2002): 1-27, and *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

Participants:

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Paulette Reed-Anderson is a historian, the founder and executive director of the Center for African Diaspora Research in Germany (CADRIG) located in Berlin. Her most recent publication, *Die Förderung des „kolonialen Gedankens" durch kulturelle Akteure: Die deutsche Behörde für koloniale Angelegenheiten in Berlin während der Weimarer Republik (1919 –1931),* is available at URL: http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/18452/23378.

Meredith L. Roman *is an Associate Professor of History at SUNY Brockport, and the author of Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012)

Angela Zimmerman is professor of history at George Washington University. She is currently writing a history of the Civil War as an international anti-slavery revolution with roots in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. She is also the author of *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, 2010) and the editor of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (International Publishers, 2016). Many of her publications can be found at https://gwu.academia.edu/AngelaZimmerman.

Review by Paulette Reed-Anderson, Center for African Diaspora Research in Germany, Berlin

Tiffany N. Florvil's *Mobilizing Black Germany* traces how the demands of Black Germans for recognition, the eradication of racism, and discrimination evolved into a movement in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Florvil argues that Black German women activist-intellectuals played a key role in creating the literary tradition, history, and identity that evolved and became the framework that advanced Black Germans repositioning themselves within the context of the German nation, gender identity, and the global Black diaspora.

This ground-breaking book draws from the expansive reservoir of published and unpublished sources uncovered by Florvil that encompass poetry, autobiographical writings, and community-based and event publications not held in the collections in German government historical archives. The sources used from the private collections of Black German activist-intellectuals enable a detailed analysis of the activist-intellectuals and their organizational practices, strategies and publications. While thematically organized, the chapters follow chronologically the journey of the Black women activist-intellectuals. The book begins with the ties between the group of Black German women and the Caribbean American feminist poet Audre Lorde in Berlin in the late 1980s. From there, it follows the building of transnational intersectional politics centered on Black international individuals and movements.

Florvil's book makes a significant contribution to exposing how elements of the colonial narrative persisted into the second half of the twentieth century and encroached upon the every-day life of Black Germans.[9] This narrative was cultivated by successive German imperial governments and into the Weimar Republic. The book examines Black German women's poems and autobiographical writings, which reveal the most crippling aspects of the colonial narrative. These aspects had become entrenched as part of West German cultural views and politics in the post-Second World War period after the formation of the two German States.

The book places the Black women activist-intellectuals in the German and transnational context they experienced. While many of the Afro-German activist-intellectuals are identified in the book, Florvil's portrait of May Ayim (1960-1996) reveals the pervasive grip of race, gender and class that engulfed the lives of Black Germans. Ayim was the out-of-wedlock daughter of a German mother and a Ghanaian father who was raised by German adoptive parents who held views that reflected German notions of the racial inferiority of Africans and African Americans.

Ayim's life mirrored the colonial narrative of embedded racism and cultural norms in Germany. Afro-Germans lived in a context in which they were invalidated as being neither German nor having the right to any positive identity. Florvil conveys Ayim's ability to express the range of lived experiences of racism, exclusion, and rejection.

The book provides new insights into aspects of the inherent tension between the many silences about Germany's colonial history and the widespread presence of artifacts from Germany's colonial period. There is an "everyday presence of the colonial past in symbols such as monuments to German "explorers" of the African continent and colonial First World War military "heroes," as well as street names recalling former

[9] See May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye & Dagmar Schultz, *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag 1986). ((English translation) *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (The University of Massachusetts Press 1992). See also, Marion Kraft, ed., *Children of the Liberation: Transatlantic Experiences and Perspectives of Black Germans of the Post-War Generation* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2020).

colonial possessions."[10] These artifacts existed alongside the nearly complete absence of critical reflection on the period of German oversea hegemony in the late nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The expunged colonial history carried with it the denial that Black Germans had a place in German past or contemporary history.

Colonial officials and supporters of German colonial hegemony authored most of the studies of German colonial history written in the first half of the twentieth century. The authors of the early books express a non-critical view of the German colonial presence in the African territories.[11] They ignored the Africans and systematically excluded the written African legacy. Scholars researching German colonial history and the African Diaspora in Germany began examining petitions and letters written by African leaders in the occupied territories and their representatives in the metropolitan country. These documents span the thirty-five years of German occupation on the African continent. For twenty-first century contemporary scholars, the written African legacy constitutes a valuable primary source which is part of the extensive body of documents on German colonial history.[12]

Having a written history as well as a literary tradition was seen as one of the defining cultural markers of German identity. The Black German activist-intellectuals set about early on to counter the prevalent narrative that insisted there was no "German-African history." They shed light on how "German citizenship laws from 1884 to the present"[13] defined their lives. They engaged with German political entities and identified government partners who provided financial support for lecture series[14] and other events.

Black German activist-intellectuals promoted the development of a knowledge base with Black German and diaspora scholars leading the way as they and their German, European, and international counterparts followed the paths that led to the extensive holdings of colonial documents in government archives. A noticeable number of Germans scholars in the Social Sciences turned their attention to the colonial period and looked at "Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht" ("citizenship law"), "Reinhaltung der weissen Rasse" ("racial purity") and "rassische Durchmischung" ("racial mixing"),[15] while others examined the presence of "Africans in Germany and Germans in Africa" from the late nineteenth century until the end of the Second World

[10] Joshua Kwesi Aikins, "Die alltägliche Gegenwart der kolonialen Vergangenheit", in *The Black Book: Deutschlands Häutungen*, AntiDiskrimierungsBüro (ADB) Köln and cyberNomads (cbN), eds. (Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, (2004), 58-63.

[11] See, for example Otto Köbner, *Einführung in die Kolonialpolitik* (Jena: G. Fischer 1908). See also, Evans Lewin, *The Germans and Africa, Their Aims on the Dark Continent and How They Acquired Their Colonies* (London: Cassell and Company 1915), (Reprint, Forgotten Books 2012), 59-68.

[12] Collections of primary sources are held in Berlin in the Bundesarchiv (BArch), the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA-PK) and the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA).

[13] Theodor Wonja Michael, "Afro-Deutsche unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Staatsangehörigkeit von 1884 bis Heute", in *Dokumentation zur Veranstaltungsreihe "Deutsch-Afrikanische Geschichte oder das Ende eines Mythos"* 16. Dezember 1996, Initiative Schwarze Deutsche und Schwarze in Deutschland e.V. (ISD-NRW), ed. (Aachen: ENDFORMAT, (1996), 95-106.

[14] The Lecture Series "Deutsch-Afrikanische Geschichte oder das Ende eines Mythos" vom 3. bis zum 16. Dezember 1996, ("German-African History or the End of a Myth" from December 3rd to 16th, 1996) received financial support from the Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Soziales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia).

[15]See, for example Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 303-309.

War.[16] By the second decade of the twenty-first century Black Germans had created a literary tradition that contributed to narrating their place in German society, some of which comprised biographical works[17] written by the generation of Afro-Germans born before 1945.

The activist-intellectuals sought to created counternarratives to the colonial symbols—street names and historical persons—that were present in the capital Berlin and other German cities. Lecture series and *Black History Month* lectures featured Black German and diaspora scholars who shed light on the system of colonial hegemony imposed on the African continent after 1884 by the European colonial powers. This system excluded virtually all institutions of civil society and forms of protest and appeal.[18]

African immigrants residing in Berlin submitted petitions as part of resistance efforts at the time of the Versailles Peace Treaty Negotiations in 1919. The signatories to the June 1919 petition demanded independence, equal rights, and the adoption of institutions and instruments of civil society for people in the Cameroon territory. They demanded access and participation in civil society for African immigrants residing in Germany.[19] The petition and the African presence in pre-1930s Berlin was recognized in a memorial plaque[20] installed several years after the national election and formation of a center-left government in the city of Berlin.

Florvil's book traces the links between the individual activists and the main membership-based organizations, the *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche*, ISD (Initiative of Black Germans) and *Afrodeutsche Frauen*, ADEFRA (Afro-German Women). The chapters which examine the annual events, *Black History Month* and the *Bundestreffen* (annual national meeting) shed light on how the Afro-German organizations collaborated with African and immigrant organizations in reclaiming and writing the collective history of Black Germans and Africans in Germany. One wonders if in the course of the collaborations whether there may have been class, cultural or political tensions between the Black German nationals and organizations representing African immigrants.

The book offers a convincing analysis of how the ADEFRA activist-intellectuals addressed race and gender in demanding a place within the white German feminist movement, created a Black queer feminist project, and by their own writings became the voice of the Black German women's literary and political tradition. This supports the persuasiveness of Florvil's argument that the Afro-German women activists-intellectuals played a central role in the Black German movement that evolved.

[16] See, for example Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt, eds., *Die (koloniale) Begegnung: AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland 1880-1945, Deutsche in Afrika 1888-1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003). (The (Colonial) Encounter: Africans in Germany 1880-1945, Germans in Africa 1888-1918.)

[17] See, for example Theodor Michael, *Deutsch Sein und Schwarz Dazu: Erinnerungen eines Afro-Deutschen* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2013).

[18] See Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions: With Thoughts Upon A Healthy Imperial Policy For The Gold Coast And Ashanti* (London: Sweet & Maxwell 1903), 126-129, 166-167. See also, George Padmore, *Africa and World Peace* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, Ltd. 1937),190-192.

[19] See Albert Gouaffo, *Wissens- und Kulturtransfer im kolonialen Kontext: Das Beispiel Kamerun—Deutschland (1884–1919)* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2007), 63-75. See also, Stefan Gerbing, *Afrodeutscher Aktivismus: Interventionen von Kolonisierten am Wendepunkt der Dekolonisierung Deutschlands 1919* (Frankfurt / Main: Peter Lange 2010).

[20] *Infotafel erinnert an Übergabe der Dibobe-Petition 1919* (Memorial Plaque Remembering the Hand-over of the Dibobe-Petition 1919).
https://www.berlin.de/sen/kulteu/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2019/pressemitteilung.830824.php

While there have been numerous protest movements in Germany during the second half of the twentieth century,[21] the movement examined in *Mobilizing Black Germany* is unique among them. The book fills in the chapters of German social and cultural history left blank by decades of the white German majority denying the manifestations of everyday racism that negated Black Germans as German by birth and identity.

Florvil's book is a deeply illuminating and focused work that reveals the evolution over three decades of a movement whose intellectual, cultural and political contours were shaped by Afro-German women activist-intellectuals. Their activism laid the written and organizational framework for Black Germans to define themselves within the German nation and position themselves within the ranks of Black internationalism.

[21] https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/politics/the-most-important-protest-movements-in-germany

Review by Meredith L. Roman, SUNY Brockport

After the renowned scholar-activist Angela Davis delivered a lecture on revolution in 2017 in Catalonia, Spain, a Black female audience member asked Davis for advice: what could she and other Blacks in Spain do since they live in a society that renders them invisible and despises their children as undesirables? Responding with deep empathy, Davis explained that all her life she had resisted the violence of anti-Black racism by creating communities of struggle that affirm their human dignity. This emotionally-charged exchange reflects the continued salience of trans-Atlantic Black feminist connections and the struggle of Black Europeans for inclusion that Tiffany Florvil powerfully narrates with regard to the intellectual-activism of Afro-German women in in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The Black German female activists to whom Florvil introduces us emerged in the 1980s, fighting to eliminate their erasure, invisibility, and exclusion from the white supremacist, heteronormative societies of the two Germanys by building affective communities and forging discourses that centered Blackness, womanhood, queerness, and Black internationalism. In challenging the equation of whiteness with authentic Germanness, Afro-German feminists articulated a political definition of Blackness that allowed them to mobilize in solidarity with all those in German society who were not of African descent (including those of Asian, Turkic, and Arab heritage), but faced discrimination and exclusion. As Florvil's study suggests, these "'quotidian intellectuals'" (6) who produced knowledge about their histories and everyday experiences through regular publications, institutes, conferences, workshops, spoken word performances, films, and art exhibitions are among the unsung founders of Black German studies, and the field of Black European studies more broadly.[22]

Florvil's Black female activists drew on a wide range of diasporic resources in order to create a vibrant Black German community that transcended their local circumstances. It was not Angela Davis but the Caribbean American poet Audre Lorde who constituted the most important diasporic resource. While some Black German women spoke of Lorde as a friend and ally, Florvil analyzes provocative correspondence which reveals that many other Black German women conceived of Lorde as a treasured godmother or mother who instilled in them an unparalleled sense of confidence and dignity that their white German families could not provide. Lorde encouraged them to embrace their emotions, document their lives, and build networks of kinship and belonging that explored and celebrated their connected differences. Although knowledge production about their experiences and histories assumed visual, oral and written forms, Florvil emphasizes the particularly imperative role that writing played in enabling Afro-German women to channel their anger and trauma of marginalization and exclusion. For activists like the Black German writer-public intellectual Maya Ayim, travel, conference participation, and spoken word performances were essential to forging affective kinships domestically and internationally. To be sure, building communities of resistance enabled Afro-German women to cultivate feelings of self-worth, develop positive collective identities, and situate Black Germans as authentic subjects in both the German nation and worldwide Black diaspora.

[22] For leading works on Black German studies, see, for example, Tina M. Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Heidi Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Sara Lennox, ed., *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016); and Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken, eds. *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884-1960* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013. On Black Europe more broadly, see, for example, Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, eds. *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); and Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

Yet an impediment to real anti-racist change with which Afro-German activists constantly contended was (and remains) the persistent refusal on the part of white Germans to even acknowledge that racism was a fundamental problem of German society. Florvil insists that these dismissive attitudes and acts of categorical denial—what historian Ibram X. Kendi identifies as the life-force of racism—united white Germans across the East/West divide and endured in unified Germany of the 1990s.[23] As Florvil observes, white Germans independent of political ideology "espoused similar rhetoric about race, silencing their Black German compatriots" (109). While leaders of the German Democratic Republic condemned racism as a feature of the capitalist West, leaders of the Federal Republic insisted that racism had been eliminated with the downfall of the Nazi regime even as West German institutions equated the nation with whiteness. Florvil effectively conveys the pain and trauma that many Black German women experienced as a result of white Germans' routine dismissal of their experiences with racism in German society and frequent racist comments about Africa and Blackness which the aforementioned Black German activist Maya Ayim traced to G.W.F. Hegel's concept of Africa as a place without history.[24]

Afro-German feminists found particularly distressing the fact that their white feminist counterparts often protested state-sanctioned violence against famous Black women in the diaspora like Angela Davis and the South African anti-apartheid activist Winnie Mandela but simultaneously expressed apathy towards the oppression and violence that Black populations in Germany suffered. Florvil argues that "these Germans experienced a cognitive dissonance in which supporting antiracism in the United States allowed them to be ignorant about their own homegrown racism toward Black populations and other communities of color" (18). As she elucidates "though white Germans acknowledged the importance of social equality in Africa or the evils of colonialism in the Third World more generally, they never critically examined its colonial afterlives at home" (94). While Florvil's protagonists contended with white Germans' minimization of the existence of racism in German society in both the West and the East prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, instances of racial violence—both physical and discursive—proliferated after reunification, thus inspiring even greater mobilization on the part of Afro-German women. In this context, the Black History Month celebrations of the Initiative of Black Germans/Initiative of Black People in Germany (ISD) in February 1990 assumed a heightened significance in "provid(ing) Black Germans and other racialized communities with a common space to discuss, learn about, and critique the rise of ethno-nationalism in reunified Germany" (142). Likewise, in the summer of 1991, Afro-German activists hosted the Fifth Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Summer Institute "at a pivotal moment in German history, in which the reemergence of ethno-nationalist rhetoric and physical and discursive violence became more pronounced" (167). Despite internal tensions and external hostility, the institute's presence increased awareness of the problems plaguing reunified Germany. The institute's delegates for the first time issued a series of resolutions which "challenged hegemonic narratives of European colonialism and the policies of Fortress Europe that enforced a rigid border regime, detained immigrants, and harbored negative attitudes about immigrants and immigration" (170-1).

Although activists were not able to sustain attention on the global scale, Florvil argues that the institute succeeded in marking Germany as a vibrant Black space and that Afro-German women used the resolutions to criticize liberal and conservative German politicians for their apathy in the face of escalating racial violence and instances of discrimination against citizens and migrants. As a historian who began her career trying to make sense of the escalation in racial violence directed at non-Russians in Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I found that reading about the experiences of these Black German feminists left me wanting to know more about the specific factors which contributed to both the escalation in violence against their communities and German authorities' relative apathy towards it. While Florvil effectively establishes that the insistence on whiteness and homogeneity was not entirely new, since it was consistent with the unspoken

[23] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

[24] May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, trans. by Anne Adams (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

racial politics of West Germany, to what degree was this emboldened insistence on whiteness and homogeneity asserted "at frightening costs" (20) an effort to shed and distance the resurgent German nation from the Communist East's nominal promotion of anti-racism, internationalism, and gender equality all of which were stigmatized as having harmed the nation? How did the triumphalist narrative of the capitalist West's victory in the Cold War fuel a rejection of everything that state socialist systems promoted as a failure from which democratic capitalist leaders could learn nothing? To what degree did former West German officials blame these increased acts of racist violence (when they did acknowledge them) on the behavior of allegedly backward East Germans who had been racialized as inferiors as a result of their association with the alleged Asiatic backwardness of Soviet communism? To what degree were such attacks a function of the accumulated resentment of the East German government's support for Third World liberation movements and anticolonial projects? How did skyrocketing rates of unemployment fuel physical and discursive violence against Black "others" who became the convenient scapegoats for white Germans' economic hardships and markers of German weakness and national victimhood? To be sure, Florvil's research reminds us that the experiences of Black Germans and Blacks in Germany after reunification can teach us a great deal about the powerful relationship between anti-communism and white supremacy.

Much like the case of post-communist Russia, many white Germans engaged in a classic form of white denial, namely they rejected the term racism to describe developments in reunified Germany and insisted on the applicability of the term xenophobia without acknowledging that not all foreigners were given the same treatment, that some were met with physical violence, and that Black Germans who were not foreigners were subjected to the same degradation and abuse.[25] Many white Germans, as Florvil argues, defined racism as a feature not of enlightened Europe but of the inferior, uncultured Americans or South Africans. Thus while Florvil's Afro-German protagonists made impressive strides in decolonizing the history of Europe and European identity, their efforts were also tragically limited in terms of transforming mainstream thinking and practice. In her epilogue, on "Black Lives Matter in Germany," Florvil argues that some white Germans' continued refusal to acknowledge and hence address the fundamental realities of anti-Black racism in German society sustains their investment in an exclusive notion of the German nation that excludes those with darker skin pigmentation as illegitimate Germans. Since whites' denial remains a real impediment to the establishment of genuinely inclusive, antiracist societies that affirm the human dignity of all members, we can learn important lessons from Florvil's Black German feminists about the types of communities and institutions that we need to build, about the policies and practices that we need to implement, and the knowledge that we need to create. To be sure, if European nations are ever to live up to the universalist, democratic ideals that leaders love to tout on the world stage, then it will be thanks to the tireless, transnational intellectual-activism and anti-racist diplomacy of Black Europeans like the Afro-German feminists whom we meet in the pages of Tiffany Florvil's critically important *Mobilizing Black Germany*.

[25] On post-Communist Russia, see, for example, Adriana N. Helbig, *Hip Hop Ukraine: Music, Race, and African migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Maxim Matusevich, "Black in the USSR," *Transition* 100 (2008): 56-75; Meredith L. Roman, "Making Caucasians Black: Moscow since the Fall of Communism and the Racialization of Non-Russians," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 18, no. 2 (June 2002): 1-27; Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants to Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Victor Shnirelman, "New Racism, 'Clash of Civilizations' and Russia," in Marlene Laruelle, ed. *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London: Routledge, 2009), 125-144; and Nikolay Zakharov, *Race and Racism in Russia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). On Germany, see, for example, Eddie Bruce-Jones, *Race in the Shadow of Violence: State Violence in Contemporary Europe* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2017); Tiffany Florvil and Vanessa Plumly, eds. *Rethinking Black German Studies: Approaches, Interventions and Histories* (London: Peter Lang, 2018); Leroy Hopkins, ed., *Who is a German? Historical and Modern Perspectives of Africans in Germany* (Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1999); and Panikos Panayi, "Racial Violence in the New Germany, 1990-1993," *Contemporary European History* 3, no. 3 (1994): 265-288.

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Mobilizing Black Germany builds on Michelle M. Wright's call to study Black histories beyond "the Middle Passage epistemology" that seeks to "reconcile Blackness, in all its diversity" to the linear time of the forced displacement of Atlantic slavery. Though the Middle Passage narrative is historically unique, it also, Wright explains, functions as a "linear progress narrative" of the sort that are "crucial for all collectives that are part of Western discourses on identity." Taken by itself, the "Middle Passage epistemology," like other linear progress narratives, misrepresents the lived reality of the groups that rely on it for their self-understandings and self-assertions.[26] In *Mobilizing Black Germany*, Tiffany N. Florvil shows how a group of Black women in the late-twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Federal Republic of Germany worked together to construct a collective identity that connected them simultaneously to the "Middle Passage epistemology" of the African Diaspora and to Germany. *Mobilizing Black Germany* is an important book both for its presentation of this extraordinary group of intellectuals and activists and also as a model for studying the African Diaspora in its diversity and interconnection.

The Afro-German women who are the focus of Florvil's study grew up being told, and being made to feel, that they did not belong in Germany, despite the long history of people of African descent in the country. They experienced a similar distance from the African Diaspora, and even though well over half a million Black people live in Germany, the Afro-German activists who are the focus of Mobilizing Black Germany were often the only Black people they knew growing up (4). This group of Afro-German women struggled to validate themselves both as Black and as German and worked simultaneously for autonomy from hegemonic Germanness and for integration within Germany.

The *Bundestreffen* (national meetings) that were one the first collective efforts of these Afro-German women thus offered workshops not only on Black history and life in Germany and internationally, but also on Black hair care and makeup for a generation of people who had grown up without Black family members to impart this knowledge (135-36). This detail forcefully conveys the particular form of alienation and exclusion that these women grew up with, excluded both from Germany and from Blackness, as well as the creativity and determination with which these activists addressed this particular situation. Perhaps every community in the African Diaspora must address such anti-Blackness and exclusion, but each in their own particular way.

It is worth comparing the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Afro-German women portrayed by Florvil with the radically different case of the eighteenth-century African American women portrayed by Stephanie Smallwood in *Saltwater Slavery*. As Smallwood shows, these women created identities for themselves and their communities as a people—and not just as the 'property' of enslavers—through having children and honoring ancestors, by creating generations of family. It was "only by restoring kinship networks," Smallwood writes, that those enslaved Africans could "hope to escape the purgatory of their unprecedented social death." By raising generations of children, writes Smallwood, enslaved Africans "had begun to claim an American life: their experiments among new peoples, unfamiliar surroundings, and unknown metaphysical powers had born fruit."[27]

Yet the "Middle Passage epistemology" misrepresents even this case, which is so directly shaped by the Middle Passage itself, and Smallwood remains as attuned as Wright and Florvil to the impossibility of rendering the Black histories she studies as a "smooth, linear progression leading to a known end."[28] Smallwood thus does not naturalize what Queer theorist Lee Edelman call "reproductive futurity," a politics

[26] Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 17, 26.
[27] Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). 195-200.
[28] Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 207.

that can only imagine a future in the form of children, and therefore can only endorse a present based on the cisheteropatriarchal kinship forms that are commonly held to be the proper form for producing these children-as-future.[29]

Florvil, in an important analytic move, highlights how the Queer politics of the Afro-German activists she studies, many of whom were lesbians, provided powerful resources for creating politics and identities apart from reproductive futurism. Central to their project was their alliance with Audre Lorde, which began when she taught at the John F. Kennedy Institute of the Free University of Berlin for a semester in 1984. Lorde had come to Berlin in part to live her own Queer life more freely, not simply because of whatever sexual liberty existed in the German city, but also because it took her away from what she perceived as the disapproving gaze of family, colleagues, and certain masculinist varieties of Black nationalism (29-32).

Lorde's frank embrace of the Queer, of being out of place, resonated deeply with the two leading figures in *Mobilizing Black Germany*, the writers and activists May Ayim and Katharina Oguntoye, both of whom attended her seminar at the Free University. "[T]here is always some group of people who define me as wrong," Lorde offered during a seminar: "It is very encouraging...." (38). It was precisely this always being "wrong" that made Lorde so important for Afro-German women creating their unique form of diasporic politics. The cisheteropatriarchal forms of life that underlie reproductive futurism can at best only free some, as Erin Chapman has shown in her discussion of what she terms "race motherhood" in twentieth-century US Black politics.[30] Queer activists like Ayim and Oguntoye can conceive of politics otherwise.

As Lorde explained, lesbianism provides a particularly powerful way of thinking and practicing the political. As she wrote in her famous "Master's Tools" essay: "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" (quoted 87). Though May and Ayim may have been the only ones who attended Lorde's 1984 seminar at the Free University, a generation of Afro-German women worked out their ongoing political and cultural efforts in an extensive correspondence with Lorde in the following years, as Florvil shows in her discussion of these letters, which are now held in the Audre Lorde papers (42-50). Thus, while Lorde spent only a semester in Germany she became a "foremother" for a generation of women who learned to understand themselves as Afro-German (13).

Florvil focuses on reconstructing the histories—some for the first time—of the organizations and initiatives of May, Ayim, and other Afro-German women. This means also that some of the fascinating internal contradictions of their efforts appear only peripherally in *Mobilizing Black Germany*. I want to conclude by pointing to the way, in particular, their location, not just in Germany, but in the Federal Republic of Germany, shaped both their anti-racism and their Queer feminism.

The Cold War tripartite division of the globe into First, Second, and Third Worlds divided Germany into the First-World-allied Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Second- and Third-World-allied German Democratic Republic (GDR).[31] These two Germanies were not, as is commonly claimed, reunited in 1990. Rather, the GDR was dissolved and its five dismembered states incorporated into the FRG, which then

[29] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[30] Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[31] See, among others, Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Marcia C. Schenck, "Constructing and Deconstructing the 'Black East'—a Helpful Research Agenda?," *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kritische Afrikastudien* 34, no. 18 (2018): 135–52; Katharine White, "East Germany's Red Woodstock: The 1973 Festival between the 'Carnivalesque' and the Everyday," *Central European History* 51 (2018): 585–610; Eric Burton, "Decolonization, the Cold War, and Africans' Routes to Higher Education Overseas, 1957–65," *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 1 (March 2020): 169–91;

treated them and the political projects they represented as abject, pathological, and worthless.[32] This is particularly relevant given how important the GDR in particular, and the Communist world more broadly, was for African American intellectuals and activists like Angela Davis, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, as well as for the global struggle against racism and imperialism more broadly.

The Afro-German activists Florvil portrays in *Mobilizing Black Germany* were, however, distinctly of the FRG. The limitations of this West-German perspective come across when one of them claims that the 1990 Munich meeting of the organization *Afrodeutsche Frauen* was, for "most of the black women [who attended] (many came from the former East and other European countries) ... the first time that they took part in a meeting exclusively for women" (89). That these particular women had never attended such a meeting is, of course, entirely possible, but it also betrays what Kristen Ghodsee has shown to be a common First-World tendency to obscure or belittle the leading roles that that Second- and Third-World feminists played in international women's activism.[33] They also seem unaware of the many ways that, as Samuel Clowes Huneke has shown, the GDR stood ahead of the FRG on Queer equality and inclusion, although the infamous anti-homosexuality paragraph 175 of the penal code remained in force in the FRG until 1994, in its Nazi-era version until 1969.[34]

Of course it should hardly be surprising that Black Queer feminists in the FRG worked within the FRG norms that they had necessarily also to work against. Perhaps this points to a tension common to both Queer and Black politics between striving for inclusion in the prevailing norm and fighting against all normativity. This tension appears even in Florvil's writing, for example in the following: "These women challenged German identity and normative citizenship by normalizing their Black Germanness and situating themselves within and against German discourses" (105). It is productively unclear here whether Ayim and others challenged "normative citizenship" or demanded that it be applied to them, whether they were demanding or rejecting "normalizing." Is the nation, however imagined, too bound up with cisheteropatriarchy, with "reproductive futurism" to include Queer politics? Too bound up with white supremacy to include Blackness?

Queer and Black survival often depends, in fact, on overlooking precisely those questions. This is the forced choice many if not all of us face: to be something for hegemony or to be dead.[35] But overlooking these questions, as the powerful demand, and identifying with whichever hegemonic categories seem least awful, by no means guarantees survival, as Ayim's early death, like too many others, makes all too plain. Yet Queerness also points to other strategies for survival. As Audre Lorde wrote: "survival...is learning how to ... make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish."[36] And perhaps that is why the Queer politics of the Afro-German activists in *Mobilizing Black Germany* also point beyond their particular locations in the Cold-War and Post-Cold War

[32] On the treatment of post-socialist Eastern Europe as abject, see especially Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007). On the case of the GDR, see, among others, Daphne Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*, New Anthropologies of Europe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany Since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); M. E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[33] Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity During the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
[34] Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men Between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany*, German and European Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).
[35] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan 11 (New York: Norton, 1981).
[36] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–13, 111-12.

Federal Republic of Germany—not to the "Middle Passage epistemology," though that also remains important, but to a future world "in which we can all flourish."