From:

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Transatlantic Cultural Exchange

African American Women's Art and Activism in West Germany

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From Josephine Baker's performances in the 1920s to the 1970s solidarity campaigns for Angela Davis, from Audre Lorde as »mother« of the Afro-German movement in the 1980s to the literary stardom of 1993 Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, Germans have actively engaged with African American women's art and activism throughout the 20th century. The discursive strategies that have shaped the (West) German reactions to African American women's social activism and cultural work are examined in this study, which proposes not only a nuanced understanding of »African Americanizations« as a form of cultural exchange but also sheds new light on the role of African American culture for (West) German society, culture, and national identity.

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1 Introduction

This study explores the postwar reception, construction, and appropriation of African American women's culture, art and activism in (West) Germany in order to examine its discursive formations and repertoires as well as the specific conditions and forms of cultural transfer between African America and Germany. While this project focuses specifically on the period between the late 1960s and the early 1990s, as an introduction I would like to offer some recent examples from German newspapers and magazines which illustrate that African American culture and images of blackness figure in diverse contexts in contemporary German discourses (and my observations are indicative of the general approach taken in this study). The selected articles reveal how African American culture and its representatives are discursively positioned in the cultural field and are depicted in racialized and gendered terms. They also show that African American culture is negotiated in connection with a range of seemingly disparate but still interrelated topics including German identities, images of blackness, constructions of whiteness, and white (popular) American culture in and beyond Germany.

A feuilleton article by Andreas Kilb in the daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*) about the 2007 Berlin literature festival names many poets and writers, while only mentioning in passing "one African American female poet" who "presented anti-Bush slogans" as an additional example alongside poet Ulf Stolterfoht's performance (40, my translation);[1]

1 In the following, if not indicated otherwise, all translations of German texts and phrases are mine.

the African American poet remains nameless. More prominently placed is Josephine Baker in an issue of *Zeit Magazin* from 2009 which features a recipe for "Josephine Baker's asparagus omelet" in a series on the favorite food of famous men and women. The short article not only attests to the iconicity and popularity of the show diva herself but also of the powerful symbol most widely associated with her: The accompanying photograph displays the plate with the omelet on a tray of bananas, evoking her famous banana skirt (which is also mentioned in the text). The article opens with the line "Obama was not the beginning of it all" (46) and informs the reader that as early as the 1920s there had been an international black – and *female* – American superstar; it thereby reminds its readers that the 2008 German "Obamamania" has to be seen in the context of the African American show stars, athletes, singers, writers, and intellectuals who figured prominently in Germany throughout the 20th century and may be suggestive of a continuity of German projections on the African American presence. The very same issue of *Zeit Magazin* features an article dealing with a "German Obama:" Columnist Harald Martenstein uses this phrase to refer to German-Togolese Gerson Liebl who made headlines when he fought for his German citizenship but was deported to Togo in 2009 after living in Germany for 18 years. Not only does this article indicate the ubiquity of Barack Obama as a reference point whenever 'blackness' is evoked in contemporary popular German contexts but it also demonstrates that discourses on German whiteness and national identity cannot be separated from discourses on African American culture or 'blackness' in general. This is rendered even more evident by a 2009 article in the monthly magazine of *Deutsche Bahn* on Afro-German journalist and TV presenter Cherno Jobatey, in which Anja Dilk recounts the (in)famous anecdote of Jobatey's first appearance on German television: A viewer called the TV station to ask if there was something wrong with the broadcast because the "presenter appeared so dark" (22). While its substance is, of course, questionable, this anecdote exposes the still prevailing association of German national identity with whiteness, a perception which particularly the Afro-German movement has openly challenged since the 1980s. In contrast to the Afro-German movement, African American culture does not 'threaten' a white German identity because it remains an Other which can easily be located outside of the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson). That contemporary representations of the racially or ethnically Other still include instances of subtle or not so

subtle racism, racialism, and exoticization is disclosed in another newspaper article from 2008. Jonathan Fischer reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*) on the death of African American singer, dancer, and actress Eartha Kitt and uses the metaphor of the kitten and her claws in his subtitle; he, of course, refers to Kitt's own self-fashioning (e.g. her autobiography *I'm Still There: Confessions of a Sex Kitten*) and her role as Catwoman in the popular TV series *Batman*, but thereby also ascribes to the exoticization and animalistic stereotypes that frequently shape representations of African Americans.

These examples showcase essential starting points for this study on the transatlantic cultural exchanges[2] between African American women and (West) Germany. They attest to the different degrees of relevance which African American culture in its various forms is assigned in German media discourses and representations (from the marginal position of the nameless African American female poet to the diva status of Baker or Kitt). In addition, they demonstrate that the images of popular African American women have to be viewed with regard to both self-fashioning and media representations, which is obvious in the cases of Kitt and Baker alike. Moreover, African American culture and (to a much lesser extent) theory have influenced (public) debates on blackness and Germany and the development of Afro-German communities and identities. They also figure prominently in discourses of political resistance, empowerment, and subversion. Whiteness is often implicitly and explicitly considered an essential element of German identity (cf. the Jobatey anecdote) but this notion has been challenged by ethnic communities and discourses on blackness. While there might be a general audience for an exoticized culturally distant (but not too distant) Other like Baker or Kitt particularly in the entertainment sector, a broad acceptance and recognition of black Germans encounters much more resistance as it threatens presumably stable categories that structure relations of difference between self and Other. The examples also point towards the proliferation of representations of African Americans and

2 Cultural exchange is understood here as "the circulation – the giving, receiving, and redisposition – of cultural materials among differentiated socio-cultural formations. The component parts of the cultural exchange process […] are immensely varied in incidence, form, and purpose" (O'Regan 501).

African American culture in contemporary German popular culture, in the cultural archive, and in the collective imaginary. African Americans and African American cultural products are not simply passively received but rather actively constructed, appropriated, and oftentimes invested with specific new meanings or adapted to particular domestic concerns (cf. Obama and the "German Obama").

Therefore, it is not sufficient to analyze cultural exchange between the United States and Germany along the lines of (white) American (popular) culture. African American culture constitutes a distinctive factor in transatlantic cultural traffic which requires to be explored in its own right. I use the terms *American culture* and *African American culture* fully aware of the problematics of this binary logic. My analyses will expose the workings of this logic in German discourses and reveal that this dichotomy does not hold up. While I stick to this terminology to put forth my larger argument, I neither understand American culture as a homogeneous entity nor as more universal than African American culture. The latter is understood here as designating a cultural formation of its own that is, however, often defined in and through its relations to a dominant and predominantly (and usually unmarked) *white* American culture. It can neither be neatly subsumed under the label American culture nor is it used here to denote African American culture as the particular and marked Other of American culture – even though both notions can be found in the discourses under scrutiny. I cannot completely avoid reproducing these notions as I critically interrogate them in my analyses. The cultural exchanges between Germany and the United States have to be seen as frameworks for African American culture traveling across the Atlantic, and while these two discourses often overlap they are far from being identical. The contemporary reference to Baker points towards a necessity to situate recent receptions and adaptations of African American culture in Germany in a historical perspective and to examine the pre-existing images, stereotypes, and notions of blackness and African Americanness as a background against which African American cultural products and producers come to be viewed. These images and notions need to be taken into account because, as Lothar Bredella states, "we cannot perceive without presuppositions" (6).

This study analyzes the reception of African American women's art and activism in postwar (West) Germany. Although it includes examples from before World War II, the immediate postwar years, and the time after

reunification, its main focus is West Germany. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a particular national setting and cultural and political framework for interactions with African American culture will not be covered in any depth or detail.[3] While a comparative (German-German) dimension is thereby deliberately excluded, a diachronic perspective is opened up; the first chapters sketch not only some prominent examples of African American culture in Germany before and during World War II but also examine the particular historical setting for cultural exchange during the occupation years. With regard to Americanization and the presence of American culture in Germany, World War II constitutes a caesura and 1945 marks the beginning of a new era of cultural exchange – as I argue, also between African America and Germany.[4] However, rather than establishing a precise chronological account of instances of cultural contacts and cross-overs, I follow the reverberations of specific moments of German interactions with African American culture and the resonances of particular African American women writer-activists and their works. I will therefore examine exemplary case studies that revolve around four prominent African American women: Angela Davis (born 1944), Audre Lorde (1934-1992), Alice Walker (born 1944), and Toni Morrison (born 1931). These women writers and activists are familiar to (West) German audiences and their (cultural) work has been relatively broadly received. Taking into account that "people can be cultural materials, too" (O'Regan 502), the four women have to be viewed as agents as well as objects of this cultural exchange. Their cultural productions, their writings and activism, have been

3 An exhaustive comparison of the reception of African American culture in the GDR and West Germany remains a desideratum at this point. Further in-depth studies of the respective socio-cultural and political settings and forms of reception still need to be conducted in order to provide a basis for a comparative approach.

4 The meaning of *Germany* of course changes throughout the 20th century not only with regard to its geographical boundaries but also its political and cultural identity. I first focus on the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich; after the caesura of World War II, my analyses will follow the main spheres of American influence on Germany: the American occupation zone, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and finally the reunited Germany.

adapted, appropriated, (re)negotiated, and received in (West) Germany and garnered different responses: from the solidarity movement for Davis to the significance of Lorde for Afro-Germans to the literary relevance of Nobel Laureate Morrison to the enthusiasm among German audiences for Walker's epistolary novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and its screen adaptation directed by Steven Spielberg. These four women roughly belong to the same generation of African American writer-activists. Not only have they shared a commitment to political activism (especially feminism), critical thinking, and their roles as (public) intellectuals, scholars, and cultural producers, but their individual careers and paths have also crossed at several points. For example, Morrison encouraged Davis to write her autobiography after she had been exonerated of all charges in 1972 (Meyer-Lenz 317). Davis explains in a 1995 interview with Lisa Lowe that she was at that time working together with Walker trying to "organize a campaign to 'Boycott the Blockade'" in order to support Cuban women who suffered from the economic embargo (318). She also knew Lorde (Guy-Sheftall, "Epilogue" 256) and praises her work, for example, on the back cover of the 2009 collection *I Am Your Sister* (ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall):

> "Audre Lorde's unpublished writings, combined with her now classic essays, reveal her to be as relevant today as during the latter twentieth century when she first spoke to us. This new collection should be read by all who understand justice to be indivisible, embracing race, gender, sexuality, class, and beyond, and who recognize, as she so succinctly put it, that 'there is no separate survival.'"

However, the individual agendas and different forms of cultural mobility provide for a heterogeneity covering instances of cultural exchange over three decades. Davis became known in East and West Germany for her political activism and as a (political) fugitive and prisoner in 1970. It was her (mediated) image which was turned into an icon of the generation of '68. Lorde spent much time in (West) Germany and her personal encounters with Afro-Germans were essential to her seminal role for the Afro-German movement emerging in the 1980s. For Walker's prominence in Germany, the 1985 Spielberg version of *The Color Purple* (released in West Germany in 1986) was crucial, but her literary works have also been (and continue to be) widely circulated. Morrison's status in German discourses was deter-

mined by her literary success, above all her being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. The literary and theoretical writings and the political activism of these four women differ with regard to their primary audiences, the media by which they traveled across the Atlantic, the ways they have been appropriated, understood, and represented in (West) Germany, and the cultural productions which established their status and popularity. Because they are often received as representative of African American women's culture, race/ethnicity and gender are included in my analysis and considered in their intersectionality. I critically focus on the racialized and gendered structures in German discourses on African American women as well as the significance of these structures for (imagined) solidarities.

Cultural exchange is always a reciprocal process (though generally unequal in terms of power) leaving none of the cultures involved unchallenged and unchanged. It is "a critical component of wider processes of cultural identity formation and cultural development" (O'Regan 500). Similarly, cultural transfer is "never a one-way street but always a story of constant circulation" (B. Davis et al., "Introduction" xi); it is "a cultural *exchange* in two directions" that works "according to *codes of selection* based on *presuppositions*" (Larsen 99, 95). Svend Erik Larsen's "logic of cultural exchange" is helpful in this regard. He emphasizes that receiving cultures always "tend to *select* elements which can be transformed and […] integrated into its own cultural structure" but also that cultural influence needs to be conceptualized as a process of translation in which the specific identity of elements may be changed (92). He further elaborates on a notion of dominant and expanding cultures as "offering" its values to other cultures which takes into account that a strong culture does not necessarily determine "in details what other cultures will absorb" (93). Elements already present in a culture are unlikely to be replaced, absent elements will only be adopted if they are perceived as filling a vacuum (in this context the cultural impact is "most influential"), and neutral elements which may be present or absent in a culture "without structural consequences" constitute the level of "most direct" cultural influence (93-94). The analysis of African American women's cultural impact on Germany needs to account for both self-representations and representations of African Americans within the framework of American culture (and cultural imperialism) as well as the German desires, needs, and interests served (or generated) by its reception.

Cultural exchange can be seen as constitutive of any (always already hybrid[5] and heterogeneous) culture and collective identity; yet, its appreciation or repulsion as well as the degrees of recognition or naturalization may vary widely. Culture is understood here as a "notoriously ambiguous concept" referring to both a process and a product (Hebdige 5), to an "active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasure within a social system" (Fiske 23). As John Fiske has pointed out, culture as "a living, active process […] can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above" (23). Therefore, the different cultures and subcultures central to this study (West German and African American as well as to a certain degree East German and American) are regarded not only as hybrid, heterogeneous, and fragmented in themselves but also always in the process or struggle of transformation, (re)definition and (re)negotiation of their own identities. My analyses include the perspectives of the four African American women on Germany and the role of Germany for and in their work but they are primarily based on West German (mass) media representing a range of public opinions, reactions, and resonances. As Dick Hebdige argues, "[i]t is primarily through the press, television, film, etc. that experience is organized, interpreted, and made to *cohere in contradiction* as it were" (85). While representations of African American culture in the mass media (particularly newspapers and magazines) provide the main body of my material, I do not relegate German audiences to a state of passivity. Rather, reception and consumption are understood as necessarily *active* processes. Following Michel de Certeau, I conceive of consumption as a form of "production" and "characterized by its ruses" and ask "what do [people] make of what they 'absorb,' receive, and pay for?" (31). Arjun Appadurai points out that "[t]here is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*" even though, as he continues,

5 Defining culture as necessarily hybrid as a premise for my argument, I still agree with Marwan Kraidy that hybridity is a "concept whose definition is maddeningly elastic, whose analytical value is easily questionable, and whose ideological implications are hotly contested" and that it requires an analysis which is situated in "a specific context where the conditions that shape hybridities are addressed" (3, vi).

"[t]his is not to suggest that consumers are *free* agents, living happily in a world of safe malls, free lunches, and quick fixes. […] consumption in the contemporary world is often a form of drudgery, part of the capitalist civilizing process. Nevertheless, where there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency. Freedom, on the other hand, is a rather more elusive commodity." (7)

Beyond its focus on media as "authorized channels of mass communication" which provide a certain structure and order in the process of generating meaning by disseminating "*preferred* meanings and interpretations" (Hebdige 86), this study draws on accounts by contemporary witnesses and unpublished archival documents. It seeks to unravel how (West) Germany and its diverse "interpretive communities" (Stanley Fish) have constructed African Americanness and blackness in general and African American womanhood in particular.

Overall, this project follows a double objective: First, it strives to re-examine processes of Americanization in West Germany and relate them to the cultural traffic between Germany and African America. The framework and parameters of cultural Americanization have at the same time provided channels and limitations for the transatlantic cultural transfer of African American women's culture. I argue in the following that among the numerous Americanizations in West Germany, it is possible to identify specific strands of *African Americanization* which are both part of mainstream cultural Americanization and potentially subversive to it. The term highlights the intricate connection between the postwar Americanization of West Germany and African American culture on the one hand and accounts for the fact that African American culture and the idea of America are elaborately intertwined in the German collective imaginary on the other. Second, this study attempts to contribute to German cultural history as it makes visible some specific instances and mechanisms of cultural exchange between Germany and African America. It focuses on German reactions to and negotiations of the black American (female) Other and illuminates how African American culture has influenced (West) German discourses and served as a projection screen for German anxieties and desires as well as a form of alterity constitutive for (West) German identities. Moreover, it examines some less known aspects of the circulations of Lorde's, Davis's, Walker's, and Morrison's "cultural work" (Jane Tompkins). While this book delves into specific moments in German cultural history, it intends

neither to produce a teleological narrative nor to gloss over the many gaps in this history. Rather, I scrutinize the resonances of specific phenomena in (West) German culture and society. The case studies also examine the circulation of ideas, cultural materials, and persons within and beyond the "Black Atlantic" (Paul Gilroy). They illuminate how cultural exchanges between (West) Germany and African America are shaped, enabled, and/or limited by racialized and gendered parameters; and they illustrate the workings of what Stephen Greenblatt defines as "cultural mobility" and follow the dicta which Greenblatt proposes in his "Mobility Studies Manifesto;" namely, that (cultural) mobility studies should (1) take mobility literally, (2) examine both hidden and conspicuous movements of "peoples, objects, images, texts, and ideas," (3) identify and analyze "contact zones," i.e. spaces where cultural goods are exchanged, (4) offer a new perspective on the "*tension between individual agency and structural constraint*," and (5) account for mobility in relation to rootedness (250-52).

Moreover, I take up impulses from critical Whiteness Studies and reflect on the positionality and situatedness of (West) German discourses on African Americans in general and African American women in particular. Therefore, I examine how the African American (female) Other has served to define, establish, uphold, and negotiate whiteness in (West) Germany or rather as (West) German property. Whiteness, as Ruth Frankenberg elaborates, "changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence. Rather […] it is a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present" (236). This backdrop is pertinent as I write this book as a white German woman for whom it has to be imperative to critically reflect her own privileged and (to some degree) powerful (discursive) position as well as the specific perspective that this position entails. Even though I do not strive to produce a neat historical narrative and reconstruct a "meaningful, progressive and developing series of changes," I, of course, "cannot simply step outside history" (Colebrook 4, 5). Engaging with history in a critical manner, I am well aware that "the writing of history is a form of power" (Colebrook 1) and that I cannot operate outside its structure and strictures.

This study is situated in the context and research tradition of African American Studies in Germany[6] and it relies extensively on previous scholarly work on the cultural exchange between African America and (West) Germany and on related topics such as Africans in Europe/Germany, German colonialism, racism in Germany, or Afro-German history and culture. The cultural crossovers and transatlantic connections between Germans and African Americans have recently received heightened scholarly and public attention, as have critical Whiteness Studies in Germany and German 'blackness.' Maria Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs underscore in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany* (2010) that scholarly interest in Germany and the black diaspora has recently grown (particularly among historians), yet there are still many blind spots (12). Their volume features several essays which map uncharted territory by investigating these cultural crossings beyond a historical perspective. Similarly, Anke Ortlepp and Larry A. Greene's collection *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (2011) covers a broad scope of case studies that encompass both East and West Germany and, as the title promises, two centuries of transatlantic cultural exchange. These two volumes exemplarily attest to the increasing interest in German-African American cultural crossings as well as Afro-German history. Recent relevant publications also include the volume *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World* edited by David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay (1998), Heike Raphael-Hernandez's collection *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (2004), Moritz Ege's monograph *Schwarz werden: "Afro-Amerikanophilie" in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (2007), *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (2009) edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, and Fatima El-Tayeb's book *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (2011).

Yet, there have been a number of publications on the subject before the current proliferation of the field. Not surprisingly, they relate not only to blacks in Germany but also to images of Africans in the context of German colonial history. Sander Gilman's seminal *On Blackness without Blacks*

6 For an overview of the development of African American Studies in Germany see Boesenberg.

(1982) as well as other studies have shed light on the images of blackness constructed and circulated in Germany. For example, Rosemarie K. Lester's *Trivialneger* (1982) deals with serialized novels in West German magazines, Abduraman Maho Awes's *Die schwarze Gazelle* (1983) focuses on prejudices in sports coverage, and Gottfried Mergner and Ansgar Häfner's volume *Der Afrikaner im deutschen Kinderbuch* (1989) offers analyses of the portrayal of Africans in children's literature before the Third Reich. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand's *Blacks and German Culture* (1986) is one of the earliest volumes dealing with blacks in/and Germany specifically and focusing on diverse dimensions like Germany's colonial endeavors, German views on black culture, and German blackness.

Among the more recent publications on images of blackness and German colonial history are Michael Schubert's *Der schwarze Fremde* (2003), which examines the representations of Africans in German debates on colonialism from the 1870s into the 1930s, and *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy* edited by Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (1998), which has been a major contribution to the scholarship on German colonialism and constitutes a useful starting point for conceptualizing Germany as a 'postcolonial' and 'diasporic' space. As the editors point out in their introduction, after 1945, colonialism in German discourses "became a thing of the past, little studied and barely remembered" (18), and it has only recently come to the fore of scholarly and public debates. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt's *AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland und schwarze Deutsche* (2004) comprises contributions on encounters between Germany and Africa as well as German colonialism and its long-term consequences. Henrick Stahr's *Fotojournalismus zwischen Exotismus und Rassismus* (2004) analyzes the images of blacks and 'Indians' in German weekly magazines between 1919 and 1939 and Heike Paul's study *Kulturkontakt und 'Racial Presences'* (2005) examines African Americans in German literature on America and the discourses on the cultural contact between African Americans and Germans between 1815 and 1914. Peter Martin's book on Africans in German history and imagination captures already in its title *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren* (2001) the ambivalent image of black people including elements of both fear-provoking demonization as well as desire-generating exoticization. African Americans have to be viewed as a specific group but in the German imagination ideas of blackness as well as of Africans are significant for

their reception because identities are not always adequately differentiated and 'black' provides a vague but widely applied category. However, as the editors of *Crosscurrents* state, it is necessary to "go beyond the focus on 'images' and stereotypes" and to account for the interactions and exchanges between Africans, African Americans, and Germans (McBride, Hopkins, Blackshire-Belay ix).

Several collections, (scholarly and non-scholarly) books, and studies have drawn attention to the situation of blacks under the National Socialist regime. Most notably, Peter Martin and Christine Alonzo's volume *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt* (2004), journalist Serge Bilé's book *Noirs dans les camps Nazis* (2005), and the exhibition documented in Z. Nia Reynolds's *Black Victims of the Nazis* (2006), Clarence Lusane's *Hitler's Black Victims* (2002), Tina Campt's *Other Germans* (2004), Raffael Scheck's *Hitler's African Victims* (2006), and Peter Martin's essay "'…auf jeden Fall zu erschießen:' Schwarze Kriegsgefangene in den Lagern der Nazis" (1999). Additionally, there are a range of publications that address Afro-German history and culture beyond this specific period. Katharina Oguntoye's groundbreaking study *Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte* (1997) and the seminal volume *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (1986) have paved the way for further explorations of Afro-German history. These include *Not So Plain as Black and White* (2005) edited by Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver, a special section entitled "Reading the Black German Experience" in a 2003 issue of the journal *Callaloo* edited by Tina Campt and Michelle Wright, and Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay's volume *The African-German Experience* (1996). Black Germans and discourses on race and nation before the Third Reich are the topic of Fatima El-Tayeb's *Schwarze Deutsche* (2001). She highlights that there was a black presence in Germany well before the Afro-German movement and exposes 'false' assumptions about the non-existence of German racism and black Germans, about the separateness of race and racism, and about the 'naturalness' of race (7-8). Reiner Pommerin's *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde* (1979) addresses the case of the so-called "Schwarze Schmach am Rhein" [Black Horror on the Rhine], which came to bear on German notions of blackness and to some degree on German reactions to African American GIs after World War II.

There is also a recent tendency to make critical Whiteness Studies feasible for the German context; for example *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte*

(2005) edited by Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, and Susan Arndt offers an inventory of critical Whiteness Studies in Germany. Furthermore, there are advanced attempts to bring together Afro-German perspectives with other German minorities and to capture Germany as both a diasporic and postcolonial setting. Kien Nghi Ha, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, and Sheila Mysorekar's *re/visionen: Postkoloniale Perspektiven von People of Color auf Rassismus, Kulturpolitik und Widerstand in Deutschland* (2007) comprises voices and perspectives of Afro-Germans and other people of color in order to examine the history and realities of racism, cultural politics, and resistance in Germany. An earlier example is the 1999 volume *AufBrüche* which collects contributions on the cultural productions of migrant, black, and Jewish women in Germany (ed. Cathy S. Gelbin, Kader Konuk, and Peggy Piesche).

The growing public and political interest in the black diaspora is reflected, among others, in the brochure *Rewriting the Footnotes* (2000) by Paulette Reed-Anderson which was published by Berlin's Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs and focuses on the history of black Germans and African immigrants in Berlin.[7] In 2004, the House of World Cultures in Berlin staged *Der Black Atlantic: Travelling Cultures, Counter-Histories, Networked Identities* a "much-noted series of events featuring symposia, lectures, concerts, film screenings, and exhibitions on Black German culture, history, and politics" (Diedrich and Heinrichs 9). Diedrich and Heinrichs read the English/German hybrid which served as the title of this project as a reminder of "Germany's indirect geographic link to the Atlantic" as well as "the mediated German reception of African American and Black British theories of racial identity formation" (11).[8] The study of the

7 This brochure is an extended and revised version of *Eine Geschichte von mehr als 100 Jahren: Die Anfänge der Afrikanischen Diaspora in Berlin* published in 1995.

8 See also the related publication *Der Black Atlantic* (ed. Haus der Kulturen der Welt with Tina Campt and Paul Gilroy). It presents a diverse range of texts in German that deal with the black diaspora and the black Atlantic. Its structure repeats the English/German hybrid of the title; individual texts are in German but the chapters have English titles. Similarly, the brochure *Rewriting the Footnotes* includes texts in English as well as German and their respective translations.

black diaspora in Europe has in fact been shaped by "[r]esearch and writing on Blacks in the United States [which] has been tremendously useful" in this context (Small xxix). Yet, Stephen Small warns in a section of his introduction to *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* tellingly entitled "(Dubious!) Comparisons with the United States" that the "concepts from elsewhere will prevent the emergence of appropriate, location-specific concepts developing in Europe" (xxx).

The list of relevant publications could, of course, be further extended and is not at all meant to be exhaustive. It attests to the wide scope of topics related to cultural crossovers between African America and (West) Germany and to the current expansion of this interdisciplinary field. My focus on Germany (primarily West Germany) and its connections to African America (particularly African American women's culture) provides a very specific aspect within the context of research on Europe and African America or blacks in Europe. At the same time that the scholarly and public interest in German blackness, Germany's connection to the black Atlantic and African America, and transatlantic cultural mobility has grown, there have been similar developments with regard to other European countries, most prominently perhaps Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The research on African Americans and/in France offers a particularly useful context and to some degree serves as model and inspiration for my project on (West) Germany. To name just a few prominent examples: Patricia Archer-Straw's *Negrophilia* (2000) examines the white avant-garde's response to black people in 1920s Paris. Tyler Stovall's seminal study *Paris Noir* (1996) traces the steps of African Americans in France's capital. The collection *French Civilization and its Discontents* (2003) edited by Stovall and Georges van den Abbeele offers inroads into contemporary France, its national identity and colonial past, and the intersections of the African diaspora with the francophone world. Michel Fabre follows African American writers *From Harlem to Paris* (1991) and Iris Schmeisser draws attention to the *Transatlantic Crossings between Paris and New York* (2006) with regard to black culture and the arts in the interwar years. In his 2009 article "No Green Pastures: The African Americanization of France" Stovall has introduced the term African Americanization which I use to describe German interactions and interconnections with African American culture within and beyond (but in any case decisively shaped by) processes of Americanization. Stovall, among other things, compares the French and American black

diasporas and briefly explores how "contemporary France in general […] has manifested traits reminiscent of the Black American experience" (181). Yet, he does not provide any extensive reflection on the terminology (with its references to Africa and/or the African diaspora as well as to a more general Americanization) and prioritizes the comparison between the two 'black' cultures. In contrast, my usage of the term not only deliberately connects it to the framework of Americanization and examines the relationship between African American culture and the Americanizations of (West) Germany but also analyzes primarily the resonance of African American culture in (white) German mainstream culture and to a lesser degree its significance for a German black diaspora.

My different case studies inherently resist being fit into a single, clearly defined methodological and theoretical framework. I therefore draw on theoretical debates and methodological approaches as the analyses of the individual cases and cultural materials require. For example, a critical assessment of Lorde's significance for Afro-Germans and her interventions into (West) German discourses demands a thorough discussion of the conceptualization of diaspora, while an analysis of the West German reception of the film *Die Farbe Lila* [*The Color Purple*] cannot do without at least some basic theories of dubbing and adaptation. In all cases, however, I follow an intersectional approach. While I deal with individual categories of difference for the sake of analytical clarity, these also have to be viewed in their interplay. Of particular interest in this context are the intersections of race and gender, whereas some categories of differences (like sexuality) do not figure prominently in my analyses (even though they would provide further significant insights that, however, lie beyond the scope of this project). Despite the diversity of issues and texts covered, there are some common methodological premises on which the following chapters are based.

In its overall approach, this study is informed by new historicism and discourse analysis. New historicism has frequently been termed a "practice rather than a doctrine" (Greenblatt, "Towards" 146) and has "been reluctant to identify itself with any particular theorist or theory" (Colebrook 23). Similarly, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt emphasize that "new historicism is not a coherent, close-knit school" (2). Yet, Louis Montrose's famous statement about the "reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (20) captures a hallmark of new historicist projects, which often practice a "form of textual inductivism" as

they "deal directly with sources and particulars rather than pre-given totalities such as 'world-picture' or 'ideology'" (Colebrook 24). The anecdote is central to new historicism because it disrupts grand historical narratives and provides a means to access and create "counterhistories" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 52-53). H. Aram Veeser sums up the major presuppositions which to some degree unite new historicism as it

> "really does assume: 1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; 2) that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; 3) that literary and nonliterary 'texts' circulate inseparably; 4) that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature; and 5) that a critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe." (2)

These premises are foundational for my analyses which pay attention not only to the cultural products or "cultural artifacts" including people themselves (Geertz 51), but even more to their resonances as they are transferred into another culture and appropriated, received, and consumed. Resonance is understood here in Greenblatt's sense as

> "the power of [an] object […] to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer [or reader] the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which as metaphor or simply as metonymy it may be taken by a viewer to stand." ("Resonance" 170)

Greenblatt examines "resonance" together with what he calls "wonder," i.e. "the power of [an] object […] to stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention" ("Resonance" 170).[9] He regards it the task of new historicists "to continually renew the

9 Claire Colebrook explains that "wonder is considered to be part of a colonising strategy which seeks to contain the radical difference of the New World" and "is also the recognition of difference so radical that it will resist any attempt at complete comprehension" (214). She elaborates that "wonder is that which resists recuperation – however fleetingly" (219).

marvelous at the heart of the resonant" rather than to "supplant wonder with secure knowledge" ("Resonance" 181). My analyses, however, follow the resonances of specific cultural texts and examine how the cultural material "is transferred from one discursive sphere to another" and from one cultural context to another (Greenblatt, "Towards" 157). Meaning is in this approach not inherent in a (cultural) text but is "manufacture[d] […] through various procedures (including production, consumption and circulation)" (Colebrook 28). Therefore, I closely examine a diverse corpus of texts from accounts by contemporary witnesses to newspaper articles, reviews, and interviews to pamphlets, conference programs, and leaflets and subscribe to new historicism's "intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts" (Greenblatt, "Introduction" 14). My readings rely on the new historicist "commitment to particularity" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 19) and at times resort to microscopic "thick descriptions" in Clifford Geertz's sense. New historicism, according to Winfried Fluck, offers not only "new ways of relating a diversity of cultural material" but also makes "this material newly relevant" ("Activist" 40).

Fluck argues that Foucault's work "is used for special purposes" in new historicist thought which "offers a more moderate and compromising version of Foucault" ("Activist" 42, 43). In line with Foucault's dictum that "[d]iscourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but rather treated as and when it occurs" (28) and his insistence on questioning "teleologies and totalizations" in the field of history (17), new historicism emerges as a "history in the present," to adopt a phrase Foucault used to described his own work (Colebrook 67). It decidedly does not present a revival or re-affirmation of an 'old' historicism and, in this sense, is a label that is "misleading" (Greenblatt, "Resonance" 164).[10] Considering the general outline of my project, I cannot do away with all the unities Foucault

10 Greenblatt maintains that new historicism ascribes to none of the meanings of "historicism" as they are listed in *The American Heritage Dictionary*: "1. The belief that processes are at work in history that man can do little to alter. 2. The theory that the historian must avoid all value judgments in his study of past periods or former cultures. 3. Veneration of the past or of tradition" (cf. Greenblatt, "Resonance" 164).

submits to critical questioning and potential abandonment, including such "ready-made syntheses" as notions of tradition, influence, development and evolution, spirit, or the book and the oeuvre (23-25). While I engage in a discourse analytical approach that views (cultural) texts and statements, the "atom[s] of discourse," as embedded in discursive structures, in "a system of references" and not as autonomous units, I cannot completely dismiss notions of tradition or influence (Foucault 90, 25). My approach might only to some degree be able to hold "pre-existing forms of continuity" temporarily "in suspense" (Foucault 28). In line with Foucault's theory, my analyses pay attention to "discursive formations," which are regulated by "rules of formation" and which capture groups of statements together as "they refer to one and the same object," according to their "form or type of connexion," the "permanent and coherent concepts involved," or "the identity and persistence of themes" (35-42). Discursive formations, however, "operate by exclusion" and it is the "discursive event" which harbors the potential of "new relations of power" (Colebrook 43).

Additionally, my analyses seek to reveal what Frankenberg has called "discursive repertoires," i.e. "the clustering of discursive elements" that occur in (West) German discourses on African American culture in general and African American women in particular (16).[11] According to Nina Mackert and Johanna Meyer-Lenz, four aspects are constitutive of discourse analysis following Foucault: the position and site of discursive statements, the inscription of discourses, the limits of discourse and 'interdiscourses,' and the archive (263-64). What Foucault calls "strategies," the themes and theories of a particular discourse, are of particular relevance (71) as I zoom in on the ways in which German (media) discourses have constructed African American culture and the strategies that characterize these discursive formations. Also, Foucault's concept of the archive is crucial to my analyses. The archive is the "*general system of the formation and transformation of statements*;" it is never accessible and describable in its entirety

11 While I do not focus on race exclusively, Frankenberg's elaboration on her employment of 'repertoire' is indicative of my own usage of the term. She states that the term 'repertoire' captures "something of the way in which strategies for thinking through race were learned, drawn upon, and enacted, repetitively but not automatically or by rote, chosen but by no means freely so" (16).

but rather occurs "in fragments, regions, and levels" (Foucault 146, 147). Following Foucault – and the new historicist take on his work – this study is concerned with an "archaeological analysis" rather than a history of ideas. Archaeological analysis

> "individualizes and describes discursive formations. That is, it must compare them, oppose them to one another in the simultaneity in which they are presented, distinguish them from those that do not belong to the same time-scale, relate them […] to the non-discursive practices that surround them and serve as a general element for them. […] archaeological study is always in the plural; it operates in a great number of registers, it crosses interstices and gaps; it has its domain where unities are juxtaposed, separated, fix their crests, confront one another and accentuate the whitespaces between one another." (Foucault 174)

In Claire Colebrook's words, "Foucault's archaeology seeks to *describe* rather than interpret. A text itself is not the bearer of a meaning; it is an occurrence and an intervention within a field of forces" (46).

The following analyses of heterogeneous cultural texts and materials provide some tentative insights into the (West) German "cultural archive." They take up Edward Said's idea of "look[ing] back at the cultural archive" and the sense of "begin[ning] to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*" (*Culture* 59). They examine West German discourses on African American culture, and concentrate on the "description of the discursive and material domains in which a text is situated" (Colebrook 28). The exploration of West German discourses on African American women's culture in relation to Americanization, which offers a context but not necessarily limitation for my argument about African Americanization, already reveals that "processes of subversion and containment are mutual rather than mutually exclusive" (Colebrook 27). The case studies are arranged in a roughly chronological order but they are not intended to emerge as a coherent historical narrative or suggestive of sequentiality; rather, as the analyses follow resonances and reverberations of individual cultural texts, discontinuities, fissures, fault lines, and breaks emerge alongside (constructed) continuities, changes, and developments.