Sisterly (Inter)Actions: Audre Lorde and the Development of Afro-German Women's Communities

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Abstract:
Audre Lorde and her work as writer-activist have had a strong influence on the development of Afro-German women's communities, especially with regard to fostering solidarity among these women and creating a distinct group identity. However, the interactions between the "warrior poet" and her "Black German sisters" have not been one-directionally influential. Rather, traces of her connection with and impressions of Germany and Afro-German women can be found in Lorde's work and call for a reading of her writings in this context. The women she connected with personally or via her (literary) work have been transformed or at least affected by their mutual exchange(s) with her. This essay analyzes these transatlantic dialogues and interactions which are primarily based on gender and black solidarity and outlines Lorde's seminal role for Afro-German women as individuals and as an identifiable and visible group in German society. In the first part of this article, I, therefore, put Audre Lorde's works in the context of her relationship to Germany and particularly Afro-German women. The second part primarily focuses on Lorde's influence on Afro-German women's communities and the final part of this paper works towards an understanding of the overall conditions and consequences of this mutual exchange as well as its meaning within the context of the African Diaspora.

1 Audre Lorde first came to Germany in 1984 as a guest professor at the Free University of Berlin, where she taught a poetry workshop, a course on Black American women poets as well as a seminar entitled "The Poet as Outsider." Dagmar Schultz, who was teaching at the Free University at that time, had met the self-proclaimed "Black, Lesbian, Mother, Warrior, Poet"[1] at the 1980 World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Denmark and had immediately invited Lorde to teach in Berlin (2000: 7). It took four years until Lorde finally arrived in Germany but during these years Schultz did not remain inactive in her efforts to introduce Lorde to German audiences. In 1981, she attended the annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association entitled "Women Respond to Racism" and listened to Lorde's as well as Adrienne Rich's keynote lectures and this experience finally led to the publication of *Macht und Sinnlichkeit*[2] - a selection/collection of Rich's and Lorde's work in German (Schultz 1986: 6).[3] Schultz describes her experience of and reaction to listening to

[1] As Marion Kraft states in her preface to Die Quelle unserer Macht, Audre Lorde usually introduced herself with the words "I am a Black, Lesbian, Mother, Warrior, Poet" to her international audiences (9).
[2] *Macht und Sinnlichkeit* was published in 1983 by sub rosa Verlag, Berlin and was not only the first German language publication of some of Lorde's writings but also, as Fatima El-Tayeb states, "the first German language publication on the US debate on racism within the feminist movement" (74).
[3] Alexis de Veaux's account of these events differs slightly from Schultz's description. Lorde's biographer claims that Lorde and Schultz first met at the 1981 NWSA convention. Schultz was highly impressed and deeply moved; she wrote a letter to Lorde in which she invited her to teach at the Free University and asked her for permission to translate some of her works into German. Lorde did not answer this letter but a second one was

these two lectures in the following words:

> I listened to their speeches with a renewed feeling of acuteness and own responsibility and decided to edit a book that would possibly stimulate discussions about racism and anti-Semitism more intensely among women. The problem of white racism in the USA, which is mentioned in some of these texts, might initially appear distant to German Women readers. However, if we turn towards our own field of experiences with anti-Seminitism and the increasing xenophobia in our country we will not be able to reject the feeling of being appealed. (1986: 10, my translation)

This personal account is indicative of some crucial aspects that have shaped Audre Lorde's reception in Germany. First, her works as well as the way they have been published and marketed in Germany explicitly address a female audience. In fact, as we will see, gender solidarity along with black solidarity has been crucial to Lorde's interactions with Germans and her influence is greatest on feminist and Afro-German discourses, particularly at the intersection of these two where Afro-German women's communities stand. Also, it is decisive that Lorde was first introduced to German audiences together with a *white* woman author grouped by their identities as outspoken lesbian women writers marginalized by their respective ethnic affiliation. Lorde's work and activism demonstrate that she can - though she certainly not always does - easily cross the racial boundary potentially separating her from white audiences by addressing women in general and promoting sisterhood 'across the color line,' which none the less acknowledges and appreciates differences among women. Additionally, Lorde entered German (feminist) discourses about racism through her work as well as her activism, and proved Schultz right in her initial impression that the "warrior poet" had something to say to German women. A close and detailed examination of her influence on and reception in Germany requires excavating the different discourses that were shaped by and dealt with her work and activism and building an archive - in Foucault's sense - as a necessary basis for further analysis. The scope of this article allows merely for a cursory and eclectic overview of the first findings in this regard and some initial analytical approaches.[4]

2 Lorde herself generally defines a very broad audience for her work, when she states: "My audience is *every* single person who can use the work I do" (Kraft 1986: 152). However, Lorde also points out that women and above all black women are of particular importance for her and that she "[thinks] of [her] responsibility in terms of women because there are many

replied to in time and the author accepted the invitation and agreed to have some of her works published in German (265-66). Veaux also notes that financial considerations played a role in Lorde's and the University's decision about her guest professorship (327) - a fact that Schultz does not mention.

[4] Audre Lorde's work and activism in Germany will constitute a central chapter of my dissertation and this article presents the current state of my research, namely gathering material and building an archive. An in-depth and detailed analysis of the material will be provided by my thesis and the first thoughts on the topic, which I present in this paper, are to be understood as work in progress.

voices for men" (Tate 104). Though Lorde sought to empower herself by speaking out and breaking silences, she always expected people and particularly women not only to listen to but also to answer her call.[5] She did not address women as a passive audience but always sought the dialogue with her 'sisters' and tried to encourage them to raise their voices, which also bears witness to the fact that her art and social activism are inextricably intertwined. She decidedly speaks out against any notion of "art for art's sake." Her writings are not only strongly tied to her own experiences but also to her activist goals and visions. Believing in the power of language and the empowering potential of speaking out, she definitely wanted women to respond to her ideas and she had a "need to hear their reaction to her work" (J. Hall ix). Lorde was highly interested in meeting women of the African Diaspora and she claims that when she came to Berlin in 1984, it was decidedly "one of [her] aims […] to meet Black German women" (1991: 67). Meeting these women did not only "[serve] as a catalyst for events that would radically change Afro-German history" and the development of Afro-German women's communities (El-Tayeb 74), but also made a strong impression on Audre Lorde herself. As she explains in her journal which has been published as "A Burst of Light," she enjoyed her stay in Berlin,[6] was excited by meeting black German women and especially happy that her classes attracted a growing number of Black women. Lorde decisively mentions the pleasure she gained from working with Afro-German women and observing their development of self-awareness, collective identity, and group membership. This process of developing Afro-German women's communities had just begun in 1984 and, of course, took much longer than Lorde's first three-month visit to Berlin, but the connection between the writer-activist and Germany, (Afro-)German women, as well as other Afro-Europeans had already been well established. Her trip through Europe, meeting Afro-European, and especially Afro-German women was central to Lorde's appraisal and development of her own work and thinking. Her journal entry on June 10, 1984, when she was still in Berlin, reads: "For the first time I really feel that my writing has a substance and stature that will survive me. I have done good work" (61). Her connections with and interest in Afro-German women in general, personal friendships as well as the biological cancer treatment which she underwent in Berlin kept Lorde coming back to Germany every year until her death in 1992 and set up the framework for dialogues and mutual exchanges.

[5] For her, this might also entail proving her wrong. She states: "I really feel if what I have to say is wrong, then there will be some woman who will stand up and say Audre Lorde was in error. But my words will be there, something for her to bounce off, something to incite thought, activity" (Evans 263). This proposition also underlines the fact that women were her primary concern and audience.

[6] As Alexis de Veaux writes, the trip to Germany was also important for Lorde, who had been diagnosed with a liver tumor, on a very personal basis, since it helped her "to allay her depression," in which she feared to slide at that time (340).

3 Germany and Afro-German women remained a vital issue for Lorde and became part of her writing, activism, and thinking. Some of her poetry deals more or less explicitly with her personal experiences in and impressions of Germany, e.g. "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps," or the situation of Blacks in Germany, e.g. "Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls." In her poem "East Berlin," which is collected in the posthumously published book *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, the voice explicitly states that "[i]t feels dangerous now to be Black in Berlin" and mentions an "Afro-German woman stomped to death / by skinheads in Alexanderplatz" (50). The poem demonstrates not only the author's familiarity with the political and social developments in Germany, which experienced a growth of violent racist excesses after its reunification, but also her special concern with Afro-German women and their situation. Beyond her reflections on these issues in her poetry, she documented her experiences in Germany in "A Burst of Light" and several other lectures and publications and also actively got involved with German discourses and activism on racism and feminism. Two examples particularly attest to this involvement: First, Lorde immediately noticed the isolation in which most Afro-German women lived in the early 1980s and, in consequence, actively encouraged, supported, and mentored their growing communities. It was particularly important for Afro-German women who were not only isolated but hardly noticed in a country which repressed its colonial past and - at best - ignored the existence of a Black population. Audre Lorde was at that time older than most of the Afro-German women who became active in building a community and due to her political and activist experience Lorde could take on the role as mentor and guide. Second, while spending her last summer in Germany in 1992, Lorde together with her partner Gloria Joseph wrote a protest letter, which was published in several German newspapers, to Chancellor Helmut Kohl in response to the pogrom in Rostock. They explicitly question the meaning of these developments in Germany for the international community of "people of color" and point towards the damage that this incident might have inflicted on the public image of Germany (Schultz 1994: 172). Her concern for people of African descent in Germany (and the world) and her anger about this racist act proved to be more important to her in this situation than the fact that she had to continue her struggle against cancer (of which she died the same year).

4 Lorde tried not to allow her illness to interfere with her political activism, and this attitude certainly contributed to the respect and appreciation with which (Afro-German) women viewed her and her work as well as her crucial mentor position for Afro-German (women's) communities. However, just as the voice of her above-mentioned poem, Lorde

herself did no longer feel safe in Germany. In 1990, she wrote about a poetry reading in Dresden, where she also spoke out against racism: "For the first time in six years I am afraid as I read my poetry in Germany" (1991: 71). This shows her sensitivity to the political and social situation and attests once more to the fact that she was influenced by the political and social conditions and changes which she met in Germany. In her contribution to the 1992 edition of *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, Lorde explains her concern about these developments but also her vision of a "global feminism" and a changed German nation at the center of Europe, in which Afro-Germans play a central role:

> Geographically and politically, Germany stands at the center of Europe. Reunified, it will once again represent a powerful force in European affairs. Historically, this force has not always been a peaceful one. A new Germany's potential power, and their relative part in influencing its direction, are part of the destiny of African-Germans, as the political positions of the United States are part of the destiny of African-Americans (235).[7]

In this paragraph, she also draws a parallel between Afro-Americans and Afro-Germans indicating that there are issues to which both groups can relate and by which they are connected. Recognizing such global connections constitutes, for Lorde, the necessary prerequisite for the global feminism she envisions and she decidedly calls for American and Afro-American women alike to realize that "[they] are not alone in [their] world situation" (1991: 71). Lorde herself developed "deep bonds with Afro-German women and with other women's communities in Germany" and encouraged the transatlantic dialogue between women in general and women of African descent in particular (Hall xv). Her own connections with Afro-European women certainly played a crucial role for "the globalization of her consciousness of women of color" and contributed to her continuing role as an advocate for gender and black solidarity across national boundaries (Veaux 340). With regard to Afro-German women, their history, and situation, Lorde states that clearly "[their] war is the same" and positions them within an "international community of people of color" (1991: 68; 69).

5 By several strategies, Lorde's writing and activism reached out to German and Afro-German women and influenced German discourses on a variety of issues such as feminism, identity, ethnicity, sexuality, and racism. In order to exercise this influence, her cultural work had to cross language, cultural, national, and racial divides. Lorde's crossing of the Atlantic and actual presence in Germany certainly fostered this process and, according to testimonies by contemporary witnesses, meeting her personally constituted a significant and often fascinating event. Her students at the Free University were inspired to question their identity

[7] This translation is taken from Lorde 1991: 70

and their approach to poetry because Lorde strongly encouraged them to move beyond close readings and structural analyses and to take the emotional potential of the works as well as their own reactions towards the poems into account. Dagmar Schultz states that she personally learned a lot from Audre Lorde and further describes that thousands of people throughout Europe were fascinated by Lorde's lectures and readings through her charisma as well as her poetry and political thinking (2000: 10; 8). For some aspects of Lorde's impact on German culture and society, her actual presence in the country was fundamental because it allowed for a direct and relatively unmediated dialogue and added weight to her messages and concerns. This is particularly true for her role in the development of Afro-German women's communities and their sense of self and a collective identity. Schultz, in this context, speaks about the importance of Lorde's *presence* rather than her work or her mediated images (2000: 8) and Stefanie Kron highlights Lorde's active involvement by crediting her as a major *initiator* of this movement (114). Though Lorde's lectures, readings, and personal meetings with her German audience were a vital part of her work, the publication of her writings in German was necessary for addressing a larger German public. However, examining the publication history also shows the intended primary audience of her works and allows for speculations about the discourses she in fact influenced most. Of course, as Marion Kraft states in her preface to *Die Quelle unserer Macht*, translating her writings culturally and linguistically is not an easy task (1994:12). Renate Stendhal would certainly agree with this notion and *Macht und Sinnlichkeit* also includes her "Anmerkungen der Übersetzerin" in order to sensitize the German readership for the problematics of translation.[8] These processes of linguistic as well as cultural translation are difficult and there are several means by which the German publishers of Lorde's work tried to enhance its accessibility to a German audience and pave the way for a more general reception of Lorde's work in Germany. However, as West-Berlin author Traude Bührmann states:

> Female authors like Audre Lorde […] are, in fact, nominally known to many; however, it seems they are hardly ever read. That is they are virtually not sold at all over here. (qtd. in Morrien 10, my translation)

6 Focussing on gender solidarity was particularly important for marketing strategies of Lorde's works in Germany. Most of her writings were published by Orlanda (formerly sub rosa) Women's Press and primarily addressed a female audience. The publishing house not only perpetuated Lorde's focus on women and particularly Black women but also her

[8] Stendhal primarily discusses the terms power and anger, for which German equivalents are particularly hard to find. In her notes, she also thanks Lorde for her anger and her impatience with which she pursued her educational work informing white female 'ignoramuses' about racism (13).

activism. The first edition of *Auf Leben und Tod: Krebstagebuch*, the German version of Lorde's *Cancer Journals*, includes a contribution by a German woman who provides her personal record of dealing with breast cancer. Waltraut Ruf's essay supports the impression that Lorde's book is relevant for every woman regardless of nationality, sexuality, or ethnicity and she explicitly states that Lorde has found the words which speak to *every* woman (103). Also, the German edition includes a list of self-help and support groups and its readers are encouraged to contact the publishing house with the affirmation that every letter will be answered. Even those books by Lorde which have been taken up by a larger German publishing house (Fischer) have been marketed almost exclusively as women's literature. In Fischer's edition of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* the original subtitle has been substituted by *Ein Leben unter Frauen* ("A Life among Women"), emphasizing the aspect of women's communities over the personal account of Lorde. Moreover, the blurb asserts that "Audre Lordes Autobiographie ist ein kämpferisches Zeugnis für die Sache der Frauen" ("Audre Lorde's autobiography is a warrior testimony for women's cause"). Additionally, with her *Cancer Journals*, Lorde opened up a forum for discussing breast cancer, a topic which had been completely silenced before. Schultz claims in her preface to the German edition that a book like the *Cancer Journals*, which explicitly and openly deals with breast cancer, did not exist before in Germany. (2000: 5) Ruf confirms this notion by writing that the issue of cancer has generally been off-limits and continues to be silenced (104).

7 Marion Kraft expresses the hope that Blacks, white women, *and* men would use Lorde's oeuvre to better understand themselves and their life conditions as well as the power of language, but in Germany, Lorde's works mainly circulated within feminist and Black discourses (1994: 13).[9] She was most important where her work and activism could flow along lines of gender as well as black solidarity: especially putting racism on the feminist agenda was crucial for *Afro-German* women and their development of self-definitions, collective and individual identities, and communities as well as their position within and relation to feminist discourses. Together with Afro-German women, Lorde coined the term *Afro-German* in analogy to *Afro-American*. This moment was decisive, since though it "was not the birth of a black German consciousness," it "nevertheless symbolises the central role that US activism had for Afro-Germans" (El-Tayeb 66). The term was quickly established in different discourses and the editors of *Farbe bekennen* describe its meaning and their intention of employing it in the following words:

[9] Lorde herself describes one of her German audiences at a reading in Dresden as consisting mainly of "white women, and young Afro-German men and women" (1991: 70) and Felicitas Hoppe in her much disputed article about Lorde's commemoration in Berlin emphasizes the fact that, in the end, even one man showed up (15).

> By the term 'Afro-German' we mean all those who wish to refer to themselves as such, regardless of whether they have one or two black parents. Just as with the similar name 'Black Germans,' our intent is not to exclude on the basis of origin or skin color. […] More important, we want to propose 'Afro-German' in opposition to more commonly used names like 'half-breed,' 'mulatto,' or 'colored,' as an attempt to define ourselves instead of being defined by others.[10] (10)

This paragraph displays that using *Black German* or *Afro-German* does not only mean substituting older and rather negatively connoted terms with new ones but also symbolizes the growing agency of Afro-Germans and their claim to self-determination and self-definition. It demonstrates the power of language and breaking silences that Lorde generally propagated. Additionally, it is decisive and certainly suites Lorde's purposes, that it is women who take these important steps towards a conscious Black German identity and community. By speaking out, they empower themselves within the Afro-German community and take the lead towards a new self-understanding.

8 The book *Farbe bekennen* is particularly "linked to feminism in general and US black feminists in particular" (El-Tayeb 76). Its publication can certainly count as a milestone in Afro-German history. Working on the book for the Afro-German editors meant beginning to build a network, to establish contacts with other Afro-German women, and to discuss their experiences.[11] Before, as they state in their preface, these women were largely isolated and used to dealing with their heritage and their identity on their own, without being in touch with other Afro-Germans (9). Its publication extended the development of a network between Afro-German women and also meant a first appearance before the public - drawing attention to a long-ignored part of German history and present as well as the continuing issue of racism. This can also be seen as a first approach towards rewriting German history from the perspective of Black Germans and towards understanding the - at best - marginalized situation of Afro-Germans through historical, theoretical, as well as personal reflections. The project was based in Berlin but, as Fatima El-Tayeb points out, its effects did reach "beyond the Berlin group of black women, influencing the first national meeting of black Germans, which took place in Wiesbaden in 1985" (75). Audre Lorde's contribution to this development is acknowledged by the greeting which she wrote for the volume addressing Afro-German women as part of the African Diaspora and recognizing their important work. However, throughout *Farbe bekennen* Afro-German women speak for themselves. The multiple effects

[10] This translation is taken from the 1992 English edition of *Farbe bekennen* which is entitled *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (see xxii-xxiii).

[11] As Afro-Germans, they share a common experience. Katharina Oguntoye and May Opitz very briefly delineate this experience in the following words: "Our essential commonality is that we are black and have experienced a major part of our socialization and in confrontation with West German society" (1992: xxii).

of the book can be seen on different discursive levels through the introduction of new terms, perspectives, and topics and through new participants (or discoursing subjects), namely Afro-German women entering public discourses. As part of the public debate about Afro-German identity it can also be read as part of a counter-discourse which challenges the dominant assumption that perceives of Afro-Germans as African despite their language and culture. Michelle Wright states: "As many authors in *Farbe bekennen* complain, too many white Germans are either resistant or incapable of imagining someone who is both Black and German" (2003: 298). The project *Farbe bekennen*, which was also Wrights first encounter with Afro-German history, had numerous, very practical effects for Afro-Germans. In the mid-1980s, the ISD (Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e.V.) as well as ADEFRA (Schwarze deutsche Frauen/Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland e.V.) were founded. They addressed a larger public through their respective publications *afro look* and *Afrekete* and established themselves in Germany. In 1992 several ISD-groups already existed in German cities (today, the ISD-Homepage lists more than ten active groups) and ADEFRA recently celebrated its 20th anniversary.[12]

9 The editors of *Farbe bekennen* retrospectively estimate the influence of their project as follows: May Opitz and Katharina Oguntoye point out that German social conditions have changed and *Farbe bekennen* has contributed to that change, however self-articulation and agency of Afro-Germans continue to be necessary (1992: 10;12) . In fact, Afro-Germans and particularly Afro-German women had become more visible and recognized in German society and Afro-German communities had already been developed. However, racism in its various open and subtle forms has continued and social recognition and integration still constitute major problems. Dagmar Schultz also addresses developments in the white women's movement because as Afro-German women confronted their white 'sisters' and dialogues across racial boundaries had been made possible, racism and anti-Semitism appeared on the feminist agenda (14). She additionally mentions the importance of Audre Lorde and her lectures and readings which white women could attend and thereby had the chance to discuss with the African-American author (14), who was and is perceived by the Afro-German communities as "one of their most inspiring leaders and organizers" (Wright 2004: 196). Lorde's input was definitely vital for the Afro-German movement and especially the development of Afro-German women's communities; however, Afro-German women's own

[12] For a more detailed account of the development of Afro-German communities in Germany see Part II in *TheBlackBook: Deutschlands Häutungen* published by AntiDiskriminierungsBüro Köln and cyberNomads.

initiative and the general zeitgeist were equally important factors.[13] Ekpenyong Ani states in her sketch of the development of ADEFRA that many women followed Audre Lorde's call in *Farbe bekennen* and began to build up communities and networks of which ADEFRA was one of its first highly visible effects (145). In my opinion, her statement aptly describes Lorde's role for this movement: Her call reached Germany at a time when Black consciousness and feminist concerns were emerging and made it possible for her voice to be heard and to resonate with such far-reaching effects. And, in fact, feminist issues were very important for the Afro-German movement at that time. As El-Tayeb writes:

> Lorde's reaching out to a black community that most African Americans assumed to be non-existent is indicative of the important role of women and feminist issues in the first decade of Afro-German activism. (66)

Audre Lorde's activism as well as the project *Farbe bekennen* have developed a continuing legacy in German and maybe even European discourses about ethnicity, race, and gender. For example, *TheBlackBook*, which assembles texts and essays dealing with the Afro-German past and present historically, theoretically, and practically, was published in 2004 and its editors explicitly locate it in the tradition of publications like *Farbe bekennen* (9). Also, Stefanie Kron claims that the book was her first encounter with Afro-German history and literature and influenced her view on and occupation with this topic, which resulted in the publication of her study on Afro-German women's writing (9). Her book as well as Jennifer Michels' essay "The Impact of Audre Lorde's Politics and Poetics on Afro-German Women Writers" point out that Afro-German women writers constitute a community which was especially influenced by Lorde's writings and activism. As Michels explains, Lorde "inspired May Ayim, Helga Emde, Ika Hügel-Marshall, and others to write" and her poetics "shaped the content and form chosen by Afro-German writers" (21; 30).

10 Lorde's impact on Afro-Germans and Afro-German women in particular has to be viewed against the background of her outspoken postulation of black and gender solidarity as well as her acknowledgment of "these women as part of a worldwide black Diaspora" (El-Tayeb 74). Marion Kraft even claims that Lorde's poetical oeuvre at large draws a picture of women of the African Diaspora, their oppression as well as their resistance and that Africa as a cultural center constitutes a major motif within her poems (1994: 12). Lorde's interactions with Afro-Germans have to be viewed within this larger context of the African Diaspora(s).

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[13] For example, in 1984, the year Lorde first visited Germany, Gisela Fremgen already published her book *...und wenn du dazu noch schwarz bist: Berichte schwarzer Frauen in der Bundesrepublik*. And even earlier, in 1973, Karin Thimm and Du Rell Echols had published *Schwarze in Deutschland: Protokolle*. This testifies to the fact that Lorde's influence met with an already emerging Black consciousness and was made possible largely by the surrounding conditions.

Lorde's vision of global sisterhood and black solidarity moves beyond national and nationalistic paradigms. Her relationship with Afro-German women constitutes one element of her work and activism and its circulation within the realm of the "black Atlantic," which, due to Germany's colonial past and its long-lasting repression of this history and continuing problems with racism, met with certain particular national and cultural circumstances but also exceeded them. In Paul Gilroy's words, "intermediate concepts" like the "idea of the diaspora" are important because "they break the dogmatic focus on discrete national dynamics which has characterised so much modern Euro-American cultural thought" (6). Lorde refers to her "Black German sisters" and thus acknowledges their nationality as a part of their identity and specificity within the African Diaspora. In turn, she also emphasizes their characteristics which allow for solidarity beyond national and cultural differences, namely gender and race/ethnicity. Her reaching out to and interacting with Black communities outside the United States also underlines that "the black Diaspora experience is not identical with the black presence in the Americas" and has to be viewed not only within the boundaries of one nation but also within at least the culture of the Black Atlantic (El-Tayeb 76). As Gilroy states, "[s]triving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (1). This statement reflects one aspect of Lorde's implicit understanding of the African Diaspora: The term *double consciousness* has been coined by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the problematic of being African-American but can equally be applied to Afro-Europeans without taking a homogenizing stand and assuming that their experiences necessarily resemble those of African-Americans.

11 Audre Lorde's and Afro-German women's activism has helped to make the experience of Blacks in Germany visible and to publicly discuss racism and the history of Black presence in Germany. In this sense, it has contributed to a growing awareness that German culture and society are affected by the African Diaspora and its implications. Additionally, Lorde calls for the different communities of the African Diaspora to recognize each other and to show solidarity while at the same time respecting and appreciating differences. Black internationalism and Black solidarity movements across national borders are certainly not a new phenomenon and have been studied extensively as, for example, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* or Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora* demonstrate. However, Lorde's participation in the Atlantic cultural traffic and her seminal role for Afro-German women foregrounds an important aspect of the notion of the African Diaspora, which has received less theoretical and analytical attention: gender. As Sandra Gunning, Tera W. Hunter, and Michele Mitchell state in 2004:

> […] the use of gender as a category of analysis remains something of a challenge for African Diaspora studies. […] too many studies past and present have addressed the experience of black masculinity as a collective identity without a self-conscious assessment of the continual transformation of gender roles and sexuality within a black diasporic framework. (2-3)

Lorde's transatlantic cultural work as well as the Afro-German movement which emerged during the 1980s both attest to the fact that the category of gender has to be taken into account when theorizing and analyzing African Diasporas. The rise of Afro-German communities and Lorde's contribution to this development have initially been shaped by and linked to feminism and feminist concerns. Afro-Germans entered intellectual and public discourses and became a visible and active group within a larger African diasporic community through the (often feminist) activism of women. In this regard, the German community of the African Diaspora intrinsically resists being conceptualized along the parameters of Black masculinity. The diasporic path of Audre Lorde, the Afro-German movement, and their interactions cannot be generalized towards a theory of African Diasporas at large, but since, as Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur remark, "[t]heorizations of diaspora need not, and should not, be divorced from historical and cultural specificity" this particular diasporic community can strengthen the focus on gender within discourses about African Diasporas (3). Obviously, the interactions between Lorde and Afro-German women cannot be viewed outside their specific historic socio-cultural framework but they also remind us that dialogues between different groups within the African Diaspora, which is itself fractured by nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexuality etc., also require translation and mediation.

12 In this particular case, "[t]he interactive relations between black communities worldwide are reflected in the profound influence that African decolonisation struggles and the US black liberation movement had on the development of an Afro-German sense of identity" (El-Tayeb 66). In this quote, another important aspect is mentioned for the dialogue between Afro-America and Afro-Germany, namely that it is also related to Africa and African issues and, in fact, often involves Africa as a reference point. However, this dialogue seems to privilege the common experiences of oppression, marginalization, and resistance over a historical or mythical point of origin or return. And it is this common diasporic experience which is decidedly understood as being shaped by race/ethnicity and gender alike. This focus, though it certainly is important, should not obscure the numerous other aspects like religion, sexuality, or nationality, which make the African Diaspora or rather African Diasporas a multi-facetted and heterogeneous group. Including Germany and the Afro-German (women's) movement into notions of what Claire Alexander and Caroline Knowles put forward as the

"other archetypal diaspora" alongside the Jewish (8), does not only help to create a more differentiated picture of the African Diaspora but also to understand Germany as a diasporic nation. This can make the Diaspora experience as Stuart Hall defines it - and as it certainly suits Lorde's vision - become part of German history and experience; for Hall, the Diaspora experience "is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (244). In a sense, this also holds true for the understanding and solidarity between women as Lorde postulates it. The author herself struggled to claim every part of her identity without denying any one and to live with the differences within herself - along these lines, she encouraged women of the African Diaspora to consciously deal with every part of identity and to recognize each other not despite but through their differences. Joan Wylie Hall situates Lorde's interactions with Afro-German women within the context of Lorde's "sense of responsibility toward the Black Diaspora" which "extended to women of African descent in Germany" (ix). In return, Lorde's conception of the Black Diaspora was shaped decisively by her meeting and discussing with Afro-European women. However, considering Lorde's vision of global sisterhood, one could also invert Hall's causality and state that Lorde's sense of responsibility towards feminist or womanist concerns extended to Black and white women in Germany. Just as she perceived of her own identity as fractured but whole, Lorde's notion of the African Diaspora and a global community of women never assumes homogeneity but rather celebrates difference and hybridity. Her 'sisterly (inter)actions' with Afro-German women exemplarily attest to the diversity of African diasporic experiences and draw attention to the fact that these experiences are also necessarily gendered.

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