Corke on Florvil, 'Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement'

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Tiffany N. Florvil's book Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement stands at the intersection of questions regarding Black German activism, citizenship, anti-racism, and feminism in the post-1970 era. It is the first book to address the growth of the Initiative of Black Germans (Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, ISD) and Afro-German Women (Afrodeutsche Frauen, ADEFRA), founded in 1985 and 1986, respectively. It is groundbreaking not only in providing a highly accessible and well-evidenced account of community building and anti-racist action within the German context but also because it underscores the interconnectedness of activist intellectual networks on both sides of the Atlantic.

Centered on the lives, works, and initiatives of what Florvil terms "quotidian intellectuals" (p. 6), the book also complicates and expands our understanding of the (West) German public sphere, embedding it simultaneously in a domestic and international context. Colonialism, the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and the postwar occupation and division of the nation have all shaped the Black German experience, and a lack of contact with family members of African descent has led to a particularly atomized sense of identity compared to communities of color in other countries. In light of this, the public sphere created by activist intellectuals including May Ayim, Jasmin Eding, Helga Emde, Judy Gummich, and Katharina Oguntoye was based on far more than the abstract exchange of ideas. Florvil emphasizes the importance of "radical forms of affective kinship" (p. 2) between these activists, showing that this was a public sphere that was personally felt and experienced, and which consequently was key to building community, too.

This affective kinship extended across the Atlantic and resulted in a symbiotic relationship between Black women intellectuals in the United States and Germany. While the import of new political ideas from the United States to Europe is generally well known and accepted, Florvil demonstrates that this influence also flowed in the opposite direction. Audre Lorde experienced Berlin as a place of "hope, healing, energy, and growth" (p. 32) and her time in Germany also encouraged her to question and expand how she conceptualized Blackness.

The book focuses predominantly on developments in West Germany. It does, however, acknowledge East Germany. By focusing on activist intellectual networks, it achieves a more organic perspective on the GDR than would have been achieved with chapters that exclusively address one Germany after
the other. Reference is made to the 1970 solidarity campaigns on behalf of Angela Davis in both East and West, and to Raja Lubinetzki, who grew up in East Germany and described the particular nature of East German racism in the 1986 volume *Farbe bekennen*. ISD groups also emerged in both Germanies and maintained contact with each other, although the East German chapters faced greater challenges in terms of resources and organization compared to their counterparts in the West, a material reality that explains the predominant focus on the West German groups in chapter 2.

The public sphere detailed in the book is truly participatory. These quotidian intellectuals created community and the space for political action through reading, writing, and publishing as a collective endeavor that, most importantly, spanned both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. The political history of the Black German movement consists of these layers of personal contact, writing, collective publishing, and international points of reference. A case in point is *Farbe bekennen* (predominantly discussed in chapter 4). It emerged through the personal contact between Black German women brought together by May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz. Alongside Audre Lorde's presence and influence in Berlin as a guest professor at the Freie Universität in 1984, *Farbe bekennen* is remembered as having "catalyzed" the ADEFRA movement (p. 80). Although the book emerged from a specific section of the public sphere in West Germany and Berlin, it went on to have an impact far beyond its own circles. It was reviewed by numerous large newspapers in Germany and the translation of the book into English in 1992 extended its influence to Black activist intellectuals in the United States, too.

Florvil provides the reader with a more profound understanding of the Black German movement by emphasizing this transnational dimension. As an American Germanist, Florvil brings the necessary perspective through which the biographies of these intellectuals can finally be understood. The book mentions, for example, the rarely acknowledged yet profound detail that May Ayim was offered a guest professorship at the University of Minnesota just two days after she ended her life. It now seems impossible to return to narratives that confine the biographies of Black German intellectuals to the borders of Germany given that their networks have been shown to be so inextricably connected with those in the United States.

For Florvil, "the modern Black German movement redefined the boundaries of Blackness and Germanness" (p. 3). Her book performs a similar function in challenging prevailing notions of how history ought to be researched and written about, too. Florvil's methodology challenges standard forms of knowledge production and dissemination by necessity; going to the archives is a familiar part of any historian's work, but Florvil's work refutes the implicit assumption that writing history should depend only on sources that have been filed away in institutional archives, waiting to be rediscovered. Florvil has spoken about how the research process depended on feminist intellectuals opening up their homes to her in Berlin and, in the case of May Ayim's papers, their basements, too (her papers are now housed in the archives at the Freie Universität). The relationship of trust upon which this research is based demonstrates how *Mobilizing Black Germany* is itself a continuation of the transnational Black activist intellectual tradition.

*Mobilizing Black Germany* also performs an important function in complicating the popular association of (West) German social movements with the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Florvil cements the Black German movement’s position within the historiography of social movements during the 1980s in particular—the ISD was a contemporary of...
the Greens, Spontis, and squatters among others—and in doing so also demonstrates the continuity of these efforts into the present day. Throughout these decades, German social movements were internationalist in outlook and had a strong interest in expressing solidarity with people across the world, although they sometimes struggled to identify effective means of connecting local forms of resistance with global goals. The great sense of affective immediacy that groups such as the ISD had with both their local and international concerns makes it all the more concerning that they have historically been overlooked compared to initiatives led by their white German contemporaries.

The ISD addressed various forms of discrimination in Germany while also taking part in international efforts such as anti-apartheid initiatives. The ability to fuse local and global concerns persisted, as demonstrated by the final two chapters, which relate to the ISD's celebration of Black History Month beginning in 1990 and the participation of Black German feminists in the conferences of the Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Summer Institute. Its 1991 edition was held in Germany, having already taken place in the United Kingdom, the United States, Zimbabwe, and New Zealand in previous years. Florvil also leaves space for the difficulties that this type of transnational activism encountered, such as the tensions which emerged over the inability for some to listen to one another or to acknowledge their "connected differences" (p. 165). Nevertheless, the fifth institute refused "to decouple national and international issues" (p. 172) and its resolutions covered both domestic issues—calling on the government to do more to protect the rights of ethnic minorities and migrants in Germany—as well as global concerns such as wealth distribution, Māori sovereignty, and solidarity with Winnie Mandela.

Beginning with the biography of Audre Lorde before taking in the histories of ISD, ADEFRA, Black History Month, and the Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Institutes, and ending with a reflection on the response of Black Germans to the Black Lives Matter movement, Mobilizing Black Germany demonstrates how the individual biographies of quotidian intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic are bound up with collective endeavors within and beyond Germany. Florvil demonstrates that it is impossible to understand any of these aspects in isolation, laying the groundwork for future developments in German studies that should overcome the artificial boundaries imposed by work which limits itself to a single language or nation. Mobilizing Black Germany is essential reading. It underscores the diversity and transnationalism inherent to German historical studies and will belong to interdisciplinary university syllabi for decades to come.

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